

REPORT ON 6-7 TRANSITION WITHIN THE NORTHERN SPIRIT LEARNING COMMUNITY

Jenny Parrett

RATIONALE

The development of the Northern Spirit LC is something that has been occurring gradually over the last five years. Its initial focus was on transition from Year 6 to Year 7. With my appointment, I started to seek out how to improve our transition program, as in my opinion, transition is retention in high schools. Additionally, the DET procedures and support have changed, activating transition evaluations and programs statewide.

Our LC is an active and positive organisation, led capably and proactively. With my fellowship, it is timely that we all consider what is happening within our schools, every stakeholder's perspective, and consider best practice for the future. As far as the reflection this evaluation has on the state, the LC we have is comprised of a wide range of school types and demographics, and is an excellent example of what would be the best ways to approach transition.

In July of 2009 Brian Ralph led a "big event" for our LC in middle school learning, which was a good starting point for many teachers to consider middle school initiatives and how they could improve learning outcomes for students.

The correlations with the research will be discussed at the end of my findings.

WHAT THE TRANSITION PROGRAM (TP) HAS BEEN:

The TP was in 2007:

1. One visit for interest activities in Term 1 per school in sport time
2. One orientation visit in Term 4 per school in sport time
3. Testing done by the school counsellor at the school
4. A parent information evening in November
5. Year Adviser appointed in Term 4
6. AEW work with Year 6 students
7. OASIS applications for enrolment and expressions of interest through primary schools, due in Term 2

FOCUS : ORIENTATION AND INDUCTION

The TP was in 2008:

1. A hastily arranged parent information evening in Term 1
2. One visit for interest activities in Term 1 per school in sport time
3. One orientation visit in Term 4 per school in sport time
4. Testing done by the school counsellor at the school
5. A parent information evening in November
6. Year Adviser appointed in Term 4 for 2009
7. AEW work with Year 6 students

8. ERN applications for enrolment and expressions of interest through primary schools, due Term 1 – some problems with this process, as 15 students were left unaccounted for by Term 4

FOCUS: INDUCTION

The TP was in 2009:

1. A well organised, advertised and attended parent information evening in Week 3, Term 1
2. One visit for interest activities in Term 1 per school in sport time
3. One orientation visit in Term 4 per school: whole day
4. Testing done by the school counsellor at the school
5. A parent information evening in November
6. Year Adviser appointed in Term 4 for 2010
7. AEW work done sporadically due to departure of Jenny Murray
8. ERN applications for enrolment and expressions of interest dealt with differently – EOI from Primary Schools, Enrolments directly to JFHS, with continual cross checks with ERN – worked better for JFHS but primary schools may have felt out of the loop.
9. Class meetings with all teachers in each class group for information and consistency of strategies

FOCUS: INDUCTION with some CONSOLIDATION

PRINCIPALS FEEDBACK

I have interviewed all principals on the transition program, which invariably became a discussion on what constitutes LC activities, and what these do for the transition program.

There is unanimous agreement that the program, by the sheer fact that it is being looked at and being talked about, is improving. One executive said “the fact that we are talking about transition means that it is an improvement.” The big difference is seen in the people – who are leading the LC, and the discussions they have frequently with JFHS and each other.

The clarification of LC and transition was made. The formal TP must include all students coming into our school. The LC activities support our transition program, but are a separate entity.

Getting on the “front foot” and improving our approach so that we are coordinating all aspects of the program were seen as the key to a better TP.

All stakeholders want the Year Adviser appointed early in Term 1. Ideally, this appointment should be in Term 4 Year 5. The Year Adviser should make an appointment in Term 1 (by Week 3) with the Principal to introduce themselves to the school, and have initial discussions on numbers and students that require particular support in transition. Formal letters in the post on any matter concerning transition need to become a part of the TP. Letters listing students who have EOled and enrolled at JFHS need to be sent in April and September for cross checking. Support and mentoring by the DP Curriculum is essential during this process.

Comparisons to another high school transition program were made. The six weeks of intense classes at this school were praised and so was the proactive contact with their Year Adviser 2010. Principals don't want to go the path of this school necessarily, but the organisation and preparation was evident at their level. In contrast, another high school in the area was seen has not having much, and that JFHS is moving away from what this school has been doing, but has done something akin to this school most years. The two middle terms seem to have nothing in them, and this needs addressing. One comment to note, however, is that one high school's programs are extremely difficult for the rural schools to attend, as they took parents out of work to drive their children in for different sessions, at different times of the day.

All Year 6 teachers should be a part of the information and evaluation of the TP. A group email should be circulated to keep all teachers in the loop of what is happening, as the flow on effect of communication is necessary. A suggestion to meet early Term 1 was made, to look at the program and give feedback, as the teachers, if they feel negative about the TP, will possibly be negative about JFHS.

Parents and families need to feel comfort in sending their child to JFHS, and this was seen as a very important part of the TP. Without the positive perception of parents, any work we do in transition will be fruitless.

The visits to the high school were seen as essential to the process, but with all schools vying for time and visits, keeping Year 6 in a connected group is very difficult. It also deters from the fact that Year 6 cannot celebrate their last term in primary school together. The high schools should talk with each other and have a week devoted to orientation in Term 4, after Week 5, so that assessments can be done. Any further transition could be the students of JFHS visiting the schools. Some leadership concepts have been discussed and will appear later in this report.

Access to high school for different cohorts was difficult for smaller schools with teaching principals. Travelling in to see a high school is very important for the small schools, and this can be organised as a separate excursion for students.

Counsellor intervention is an area for improvement. The counsellor, who places classes, needs to have conversations with teachers about their students, before the testing.

The testing concept was not communicated well enough this year. This is all the more reason for all of these dates being decided upon and discussed at the beginning of Year 6, with the Year 6 teachers.

TEACHER FEEDBACK

Teachers had mixed responses to the TP.

On the positive end, many teachers supported the improvements to the TP. The work done in the LC is definitely improving the comfort and support needed for high school transitioning. The fact that I am coming into contact with teachers and walking into classrooms is helping. Microstories, Premsport, carnivals, dance, SRC activities and the informal activities like ex students visiting makes the idea of going to high school the next natural step.

The amount of time devoted to TP differed greatly. Some teachers said lots of short bursts of activity was the best way, and praised the Premsport as a way of achieving this. Others said that too much familiarity might breed a little contempt, so keeping some mystery was useful. All teachers, particularly at this time of the year, were swamped by the myriad of activities that Year 6 were engaged in. Knowing well in advance, directly from the high school, and some coordination between high schools, was requested. Additionally, visits to the schools can also be a way of building connections rather than the other way around.

Having said this, the teachers all agreed that the visits need to occur; there was simply a difference of opinion as to when and how much.

For some years, some teachers have been asking for transition support for students with special needs. For example, one teacher has been asking about a student for three years. How Year 6 teachers get to communicate their concerns to the high school was raised a number of times. It appears not enough for principal contact, but teacher and counsellor contact or year adviser contact. This is a responsibility for all principals to follow up, particularly in the light of the changes to the Learning Support teachers.

At the most negative, it is clear that some of the communication that goes to schools does not always get to teachers, and if it does, the teacher is not supportive of the event. An example of this was when a teacher last year had to do all of the feedback sheets for Year 6 2009, when I sent an email to principals with a questionnaire for suggestions, and she was asked to fill it out in its entirety. One teacher did not agree with the Premsport being on in the morning. However, if teachers make these decisions as a group, the accountability must rest with them. Making sure that no teachers "are the last to know" is imperative in transition. If they roll their eyes at the mention of JFHS, this is detrimental to everyone.

I asked about the AEW position and its impact. The special visits were good for students, but the comment that the AEW program should not include special visits for Aboriginal students was mentioned. This practice could well lead to groups of Aboriginal students in high school when there might well be students who are non Aboriginal who could become closer friends if they knew them first. Having someone permanent helps enormously.

STUDENTS

This was the most diverse and engaging part of my work with the fellowship. I went into class groups and gained an understanding of some of the concerns and excitements of going to high school. I interviewed Years 4, 5, and 6. Year 4 and 5 asked a great deal more questions than in Year 6. It is clear that decisions about schooling choices have been made by Year 4.

One of the keys to transition is the relationship students have with their peers in their year group at primary school. If there is a long standing issue between two students, at least one student will not transition to JFHS, simply to avoid this person. They will see this as an answer to an ongoing problem at their primary school. Some students have fears about students they know from primary school days who have gone to JFHS. It is clear from conversations with these children that their focus is primarily through their school, and the information that they remember comes from siblings and stories passed on through the playground. They do not always remember the times they have been

with the other students in the enrichment days. Therefore, if the problems are dealt with at the primary school, they will have confidence in the high school.

At some schools, the greatest fear was that their friends were all going to different high schools, and they wanted to stay together. This was an interesting point. I think parents want this too – see parent feedback. What a strong reminder this is to keep our LC moving forward and being strong.

Added to that are the stories that they hear from high school students, or things they may have seen. Impressions are formed when they see a JFHS student doing something ridiculous or wonderful. One student explained that his friend's mother pulled the friend from JFHS because of the poor educational programs. He was in Year 4. One child said that we would not be going to JFHS if an ex principal of JFHS was still there, because his sister did not like him.

Impressions and perceptions are hard to change, but are vital to how students feel about high school, especially in a country town where there is choice.

Fears discussed:

- Teachers at high school are mean
- Students might be mean at high school
- Getting lost
- Operating a timetable
- The unknown
- Homework is heaps harder
- Subjects
- Meeting new, older people
- Harder work in class
- Bullying
- Being beaten up
- Having sisters and brothers who won't speak to you
- Being part of the in crowd
- Having to look perfect
- The playground – size and mixed students in Year 7 area.
- Stairs and two storeys
- Failing classes
- The size of the school
- Someone they knew who had reported something that had happened to them (I found out that students had jumped off the balcony one period 8, and that one student's brother had had his head flushed, before my time)

Therefore, there were lots of concerns about power plays, exclusion and violence at school. I had a lot of trouble convincing the students that high school was not a fight club, but quite possibly the siblings are only bringing home the hard news stories. Some students worried about appearance and makeup. I will make sure that our Year 7 students remain in the quad for the first year, and that our Year Adviser is on Year 7 for all playground duties. There was also the anxiety that students had in

high school teachers and their ability to help them with new types of learning. It appeared that there were challenges that some felt they were unable to meet.

Questions included:

- Uniform
- Bell times
- Hat policy
- Sports
- Head into toilet
- How the timetable works
- Lunch passes
- Bags and lockers
- Some subjects
- Punishments
- Rewards
- Everyone hating you
- Fruit break
- Sports carnivals
- Rock Eisteddfod
- Teachers
- DS games, mobiles, Ipods (permission)
- Lateness to class
- What a Year Adviser did

Therefore, lots of questions on routines and the things that we do at JFHS.

Suggestions for helping students transition included:

- Meeting students and getting to know them
- Having a buddy, from Year 4 onwards (an email buddy was suggested)
- Having time to look at the website
- Having photos of the uniform
- Meeting teachers
- Visiting the school (all students in Year 5 enjoyed their first week of premsport)
- Trying classes
- A coloured map of the school
- Meeting some teachers to stop people being scared of them
- Knowing the class placements early
- Practice carrying their bag around the school
- Having a timetable to practise with at home school

PARENTS

These have been a little harder to discuss matters with.

Those I did interview were in two groups: the long standing parents whose children had gone to JFHS and they were happy with the product; and those who were new to the experience of (public) high schools.

The former had few dilemmas. They knew the school, supported it, and were very happy with the school for their children. They have valued the changes to the program, and said their children were happy.

The latter explained that they did shop around, by looking at the parent information nights, asking questions, visiting websites, and asking their friends who had children at the school. They went to the high school parent evenings for Year 6 students when their child was in Year 5. They also knew students who attended JFHS. One parent stopped a student in the front of the school after a visit. The student was our vice captain, who explained that he changed from Xavier in Year 8, through necessity, and had found the change a revelation.

Parents who are outside the LC had a great deal of difficulty gaining access to the school, and the determination of how visits and contact is to be conducted is something that needs to be discussed and decided upon in Albury.

Parents showed concern that the nature of friendships change in Year 7, and often this means that they do not have good knowledge of their new friends. They feel that they want to know their friends and their families, but the size and the secretive nature of some of the friendships make that difficult.

Questions and concerns raised were about routine. Parents feel comfortable when they knew what they had to do and when. The knowledge of what went on gave them empowerment so that they could do something towards their child's high school life.

What came out clearly in this area of questioning is if the parents are feeling anxious about the chosen high school, the transition program is not as successful. The tension within the family can lead to a lack of confidence in the school, which is not a positive start to high school life.

YEAR 7 STUDENTS

I interviewed two mixed ability classes and one high performing class at James Fallon HS.

The overwhelming response to high school was that, really, it was not as bad as they had anticipated. The first week was one where there was considerable stress in organising themselves for high school, and almost all respondents complained that moving their bag around the school was a huge change. The first term was very tiring, and many put that down to having to think about all of the organisational aspects, including packing their bag.

The students were originally very worried about bullying, and violent behaviour from older students. They found that some of this behaviour existed on occasions, but to their surprise, most of the bullying incidents came from their own year, with some students trying to assert themselves over others. This may have had to do with the time of the year I interviewed them - September of Year 7 – and some students mentioned this – that they were comfortable with the organisation and the routines now, but were embarrassed and angry about this small group of students from their year.

Universally, they disagreed with the suggestion that the Year 7 students have a separate area in the playground, as they did not want to be involved with the small group of Year 7 students they disliked, siblings liked seeing each other, they had areas where they could pursue separate interests, and they liked meeting with older students.

The students believed that if they ever had a concern, if they went to a teacher, the teacher would help them. The mixed teacher allocation confused them at times – especially if their teacher was on sick leave, and alternative arrangements had been made for them. Split classes were a great source of confusion, and if this had to occur, being in the one room for each subject was something that Year 7 students appreciated. Of all the subject areas each group found difficult, it was Mathematics, as they needed to get used to the changes in the subject area. Initially, students also found that there was overlap in some of their work, and that each teacher assessed it differently. Projects all being due at the same time, when there had not been a great deal of homework at other times, was a source of stress.

Particularly, the high performing class really enjoyed high school. The level of maturity they were expected to demonstrate was appreciated. However, they did mention that they got a lot more work than other classes, and some mentioned that this made them stressed, and a bit annoyed that because they were interested, they got more work.

HOW DOES THE RESEARCH MATCH UP WITH THE CASE STUDY?

After reviewing current literature and examining the research published in the NSWDET Transition and Middle Years packages, it is clear that there are sources of concern for students transitioning to high school.

Some of the earlier literature (Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996; Evers, McCormick and Barratt, 1992; Measor and Woods, 1984; Blyth, Simmons and Carlton-Ford, 1983) go so far as to say the unchecked concerns of Year 6 students into Year 7 can lead to problems with truancy, non compliant behaviour, and school failure. Certainly, the data within our LC points to the fact that when transition is improved for students who are identified as being “at risk” there are higher success rates for students in these cohorts than for previous cohorts. However, there are students whose primary school behaviours have formed into habits, and these worsen in high school, rather than become new behaviours.

The anxieties of primary school students clearly correlate with the literature. Making friends, particularly when some of their primary school friends were going to different high schools, was a major factor for doing well. In all of the literature reviewed, the friendship aspect was the first point of concern for students. In the LC, where students from each school were involved in activities with each other, making friends was made easier. The biggest anxiety was making new friends when their “old” friends were going to other high schools.

In Albury, clearly community perceptions have a great deal of impact as to the parental choice of schools, and with some schools, there are divergent opinions on high school. Some of these perceptions are steeped in tradition, of James Fallon HS being the “old Albury North” a school with a poor reputation. This has been replaced with the perception that James Fallon High School is the “performing arts” and “relationships” high school, another high school is known as the “sports” high

school, and another being the “academic” high school. The push for students to go to the “academic” high school, and the private schools in the area, correlates with the literature – the idea of middle classes wanting what they perceived as structure in academic streaming and strong competition (Howard and Johnson, 2004). Working past this will be a continual challenge for a successful transition plan – selling a reputation and keeping it real for parents, so that they feel less anxiety about their choice of school for their children. There is also a real difference in opinion about the level of care and safety in high school. Some parents are happy to send their children to the local public primary school, but fear the negative influences that they believe exist in high schools.

Additional causes for anxiety in transitioning students involve physical organisation, moving around high school and achieving a level of comfort in the larger high school environment. The questions asked by the primary school students – about routine and expectations – correlate with the research.

The most pressing concern some literature brought out was the fact that the educational domain – of new learning styles, multiple teacher expectations, tests and examinations, and fluctuating homework routines – created stress in Year 7 students. (Marston,2007). Class conferences raised this issue in 2009, and discussion on what might be best for each class took place. Certainly this section of the transition program is something to explore in the future.

The transition of Aboriginal students has been a long term goal of the LC. The work of Perry (various) and Russell (2005 & 2006) shows that if there are strong programs for the transition of Aboriginal students there will be a reduction in disengagement and non attendance. The work of our Aboriginal Education Worker (Transition) has had significant results over the years in the LC. The interviews with the schools in our LC that have a significant student population demonstrated that if our teachers visit their school, and if there are times for them to visit and build relationships, a positive experience will be gained. In the interview with one principal, the visits of our Careers Adviser “Mr T” who came to the school every Friday to speak with the Year 5/6 students about high school, work and careers and their futures, became a high point for those students.

TRANSITION PROGRAM PROPOSED FOR 2010/11: A TIMEFRAME OF ACTIVITIES @ JFHS

Please note that some of these dates will need confirmation based on Swimming Carnivals, etc. The highlighted sections are those that should attract funds from the transition pool. The dates for 2010 transition from DET are yet to be released, so ERN deadlines, letters sent, and risk assessment requests are not in this timeframe yet.

Term 4, 2009.

- **Friday 13th November:** JFHS Leadership day for Prefects. Each prefect will be assigned a school within the LC. They will devise a plan for creating and maintaining relationships with Year 5 2009 to Year 7 2010. They will have to look at resources, and make a time to see the Principal.
- **Week 6 to 7:** Jenny to bring prefects to partner schools to talk to students about James Fallon HS. Website quiz.
- **Week 7:** Dates for transition events to be distributed to Year 6 teachers and group email established.
- **Letter informing parents of class placement** sent by Week 8.
- Year adviser 2011 recruited (by Week 8, 2009)

Term 1, 2010.

- **Week 2, 2010:** Year Adviser introductions to Principals
- **Wednesday, Week 3, 2010:** Parent Information Evening #1
- **Thursday, Weeks 5 & 6:** Student interest Activities #1, with a meeting time for Year 6 teachers in the afternoon to go through the dates and activities, with any feedback given. Also, an introduction of Year 6 teachers to each other.
- **Expressions of Interest due end of Term 1**

Term 2, 2010

- **Week 3, 2010:** English teachers from JFHS travel to partner schools to teach with Year 6 teachers, by negotiation and appointment. Release time given for a meeting afterward, to discuss:
 - Individual student progress in English/Literacy
 - The teaching and learning in both campuses of English/Literacy
- **Week 6, 2010:** Mathematics teachers from JFHS travel to partner schools to teach with Year 6 teachers, by negotiation and appointment. Release time given for a meeting afterward, to discuss:
 - Individual student progress in Mathematics/Numeracy
 - The teaching and learning in both campuses of Mathematics/Numeracy
- EOI s confirmed between schools by DET date.

- Letters of offer sent to families by May. Enrolment forms to come DIRECT to JFHS by June.
- Any risk assessments sent by fax by primary principals to JFHS DP Curriculum.
- **Week 8, 2010: Year 6 day** – Science in the Bush. Science teachers from JFHS, and Year 7/8 students to attend and support all Year 6 students at CSU. Lunch time meeting for conversations between Year 6 teachers and Science teachers regarding Science between campuses.

Term 3, 2010

- **Weeks 1-4:** Year Adviser visits to Partner schools (LC schools only). School Counsellor to attend, and students from JFHS. PDM movie activity: "A day in the life of JFHS". Discussion with Year 6 teachers regarding individual students.
- **Week 5:** Deadline for Integration support officer to have had a meeting with DP Curriculum to create individual transition plans. Any input from Year 6 teachers submitted to the meeting. Draft plan given to Year 6 teacher, any Support personnel and/or teachers.
- **AEW Visits** to Year 6 students, and timetabled classes with them. Done by negotiation and appointment.
- **Thursday, Week 8:** Test day. Students will come to JFHS, sit the assessments, have a BBQ and a tour. This will be done with the aspiring prefects for 2011. The letter for the assessment in literacy is a take home welcome letter that includes many positive features of JFHS.
- **1 September:** Letters of confirmation sent to individuals, with lists sent to all schools transitioning students to JFHS (bar the private schools).

Term 4, 2010

- **Weeks 1-5 free of activity:** This is to ensure testing for reports, HSC examinations and SC examinations are dealt with.
- **Week 4:** Prefect leadership training day.
- **Week 6:** Year Adviser visits to non partner schools. Parent information night.
- **Week 7:** Orientation days. Students from all schools to attend for two days – timetabled classes Wednesday, and half day Thursday with sports/aquatics in the afternoon. Year 6 teachers to attend sport afternoon. This is the week where Year 10 are at Harrierville, Year 9 in Tassie, Year 12 gone.
- **Week 8:** Counsellor to send class lists CONFIDENTIALLY to Year 6 teachers for any feedback.
- **Repetition of Year 5 activities.**
- **Letter informing parents of class placement** sent by Week 9.
- **Evaluation of TP.** This is to be done by all stakeholders via survey.

Term 1, 2011

- **Day 1:** Orientation day activities
- **Week 2/3:** STLA testing
- **Weeks 5/6:** Class teacher meetings for consistency between classes and discussion of cross curriculum content

- **Week 7:** Meet the teachers night and Year 7 Disco
- **Weeks 1-6:** Year 7 Aquatics each sport afternoon
- **Repetition of Year 6 activities**

LEARNING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES THAT WILL ASSIST TRANSITION @JFHS

- GAT program: one per semester – Year 5 2009 (first week in Dec proposed) and Year 6 2009 (June).
- Premsport
- Microstory competition
- SRC Colouring in Competition
- Students at sports carnivals
- Year 4 tour and picnic lunch – was John Lack organising this?
- Stage meetings – Term 4 @ James for NAPLAN sharing
- Leadership activities:
 - LIMS (Leadership in the Middle School) proposed in School Plan for 2010. Students to gain credit points towards their LIMS levels through Wednesday 2pm visits, mentoring GAT students, going to Science in the Bush.
 - Prefect Leadership Learning: as noted in the timeframe
 - Leadership breakfast: I have the chance to get some \$ from WEIL to fund a girls' breakfast but not for boys as yet.
- SRC Spectaculars
- Education Week showcase

Proposed schedule of Enrichment Activities: Some ideas

Semester 1

Year 5 – Race Around the High School World: team building activities with mixed groups, Year 7 mentors, and an orientation around high school – gaining stamps, answering questions, gaining points for the group. Must be a Thursday, and the teams must be organised well in advance. (KLA: PDHPE and Transition)

Year 6 – Northern Spirit Idol – teams of Year 6 students to organise an act, with Year 8 mentors; parents welcome to performance in the afternoon. Teams organised well in advance, and it may be possible to have students email each other with some ideas. Prizes given to best team work, best comedy, best musical act, parents choice, and we can have a panel of mixed staff and students. (KLA – CAPA)

Education Week extravaganza at Centro Lavington.

Semester 2

Year 5 & 6 – Science in the Bush: working with CSU to have mixed groups (again, could be the same group, could mix up again) Year 7 mentors for Year 5, Year 8 for Year 6. (KLA – Science)

Year 5 & 6 – Community Day (?) schools to consider the special groups that make up our community. This can have any sort of theme – Harmony day, where different community groups can show dances, food, and language (indigenous day included in this?); Grandparents day, where kids can ask their grandparents along; Progressive Community Day – students are bussed around our schools and are given an insight into each other’s schools. (KLA – HSIE and LOTE)

SO, HOW HAVE WE GONE IN IMPLEMENTING SOME OF THESE IDEAS?

- The story of the 2010 Rock Eisteddfod:

James Fallon HS was to celebrate its 21st birthday involvement in the Drug Offensive Rock Eisteddfod. Our school travels to Melbourne for the heats and the finals every year. The suspension of Rock Eisteddfod this year due to funding reasons was therefore cataclysmic for our students.

However, the loss of the Rock Eisteddfod has led to an Albury showcase of performing talent from the LC, called “Northern Spirit – Crucible”. The showcase brought all manner of people to the Civic Centre to watch the talents of the students within the LC, including parents and students from the other schools in Albury. The rehearsal time was also invaluable for students mixing together – in the name of creative and performing arts.

- Teachers talking with teachers:

The most important change to our transition program was the initiative within our LC for teachers to talk to teachers. From my findings, the sustained progress of transition could only be achieved if high school teachers visited primary school classrooms, and saw for themselves the type of learning that they conducted for Year 6 students. A conversation between teachers could see changes made to both context areas, with the idea of transition in mind. As teachers are more likely to stay and students are definitely moving campuses, this to me seemed the best way to promote sustained changes. Our “Helping Hand” funds were devoted to this, and my suggestions were heard in September 2009.

This program was initially started with great reluctance. Further explanation and support was required as this was new, and some teachers felt great reluctance at being “judged” by teachers from another campus. It was suggested that this was only beneficial to high school teachers, as once the Year 6 students moved on, they became the high school’s responsibility. It took a great deal of persuasion for our English teachers to be welcomed into primary school classrooms to conduct some specific learning on literacy. Maths and Science was held over to see how English proceeded. From this I learned that my communication had to be particularly clear and very specific – as most primary teachers are very clear and specific in their communication. Primary teachers were concerned that high school teachers would judge them, and were initially unwilling to participate.

The result was overwhelmingly positive. The next initiative will be for primary teachers to spend time in high school classrooms, which will be organised shortly. This planning needs time and a lot more coordination than simply teachers meeting with teachers – but it was

well worthwhile. The English teachers have discussed changes to their program, and are aware now of how each school treats their literacy learning, and are not starting “from scratch” with the Year 7 students. Professional dialogue on students making the transition from primary to high school with a specific context in mind was proven to be a strong activity for getting our LC teachers to work together for the learning outcomes of our students.

CONCLUSIONS

At an end of term function in July 2010, 70 teachers from all areas of the LC joined together for a little “celebration” of our large and vibrant team. It is clear to me that the most important and essential step for our LC is to promote trust and collegiality between our campuses. On the 24th August, the emails between our schools flowed freely in response to the resounding success of the Northern Spirit performance. The mood of our LC is very positive.

We have begun with student relationships, managed these through a positive executive, and the next journey we take will be through our teachers. We understand that this will be challenging, as teachers will move out of their comfort zones to spend time in different environments with different professional opinions and practices. However, clearly, it will be the most sustainable and productive of all the initiatives. The most important benefactors will be our students.

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