Connecting Through the Middle Years
Phase Two Evaluation Report
2003

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Executive Summary

Preamble

The Connecting Through the Middle Years Project has been derived from and is a variant of an earlier project entitled ‘Advocacy’. As the title Connecting Through the Middle Years is used repeatedly in the course of this report and because there is no established acronym to use in place, it has often been shortened to the single word ‘Connecting’, for simplicity and ease of reading. The word ‘Advocacy’ is at times used interchangeably with ‘Connecting’ because many people, involved with the Later Years project of that name, refer to the Middle Years project by that name as well. However, to avoid confusion, ‘Advocacy’ in this document mostly refers to the student-teacher interactions relating to ‘well-being’ while the word ‘Connecting’ refers to the Middle Years project.

The evaluation was designed and conducted by the Research Institute for Professional and Vocational Education and Training (RIPVET)—a joint partnership between Deakin University and the Gordon Institute of TAFE. Primary data sources for the evaluation include responses from questionnaires and interviews with principals, advocate teachers and co-ordinators, advocate students and parents. Four case-studies, presented in Volume 2 of the Evaluation Report, were also conducted and analysed for thematic issues. Documents relevant to the implementation of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project have also been used. The evaluation explores emerging issues that affect the success of the Project.

The ‘Connecting’ Schools

The outcomes of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project in the Phase Two schools have been largely positive. The main difficulty with the project seems to have been the establishment of the program in certain schools. A related problem, as far as the evaluation is concerned, has been that there were some enormous variations in the conduct of programs, making it unclear whether they could be genuinely considered part of the Connecting Through the Middle Years initiative. Although schools were given the freedom to develop ‘Connecting’ to suit their local circumstances, some schools had merged Advocacy with other student support schemes, making it difficult to estimate its effect. In cases where there was doubt, information was not included in the summary.

The information gathered from seventeen schools in the study can be condensed into the following key points:

- The study covered an ideal representative sample of Victorian Government schools.
- 216 students and 117 advocates took part.
- Advocates were largely teachers and school support staff who volunteered.
- Selection of students included targeting individuals, random selection of students and voluntary participation; targeting of students predominated.
- Advocacy sessions were mainly informal in nature.
- Participants enjoyed their interactions.
- Some students showed signs of overcoming difficulties after some months of ‘connecting’.
• Good advocates, enthusiasm and commitment underlie the success of ‘Connecting’ programs.
• Lack of time and support undermine the success of programs.
• Most schools plan to continue their programs in current form or to expand in 2003.
• Several schools are sceptical about the sustainability of their programs.
• There is a need for continued and expanded PD.

Advocates

It has been assumed that the 51 teachers and SSOs who provided information about their experience of ‘Connecting’ form a representative sample for this study: there were respondents from at least twelve schools, primary and secondary. While the sample is numerically substantial, almost half of 117 advocates, it could be that vital information has been lost from those who did not respond to the questionnaire. The results of the survey, however, do not suggest unrepresentative sampling. The nature of the questionnaire responses support the idea that the sample represents advocates of all kinds: not only does the profiling show this but also the range of comments to questions where individual answers were required rather than a choice from a list. There is no concern about balance in the sample.

The information obtained from advocates is summarised as follows:

• There is no classic profile of an advocate; people of all types have become involved in ‘Connecting’.
• Advocates vary in their level of confidence because some of the preparedness for the role comes from other life experiences.
• Many advocates want a chance to improve their counselling skills.
• There is a need to be better informed about and to form better links with professional services for young people.
• There was some variation in advocates’ expectations of what they could achieve through Advocacy: the most common intentions were to:
  o personalise the school experience;
  o develop student confidence and ensure progress;
  o give practical help to overcome problems.
• The majority of advocates felt they were achieving something worthwhile.
• There is high regard for Advocacy for its early intervention potential.
• There is confidence that Advocacy improves student support/welfare.
• ‘Connecting’ can be a learning experience/refresher for most teachers, raising their awareness of student problems and barriers to learning.
• Some teachers feel that principles of Advocacy can be (or already has been) integrated into classroom teaching.
• One-to-one interaction remains vital, even in an integrated situation.

Students

The student section of the report can be summarised as follows:
The responses of 121 students (including 53 females and 68 males) aged 11—14 years were considered.

Student involvement in Advocacy was generally based on voluntary and targeted participation.

Many felt that only those students who choose to be involved in Advocacy should participate. However, a substantial number of students indicated that the program should be made available to all students.

Advocacy sessions ranged from formal structured, timetabled approaches to informal encounters. Meetings often varied in length and generally were not scheduled for a regular time or were held either once a week or fortnightly.

A wide range of ‘business’ was taking place in Advocacy sessions including student-teacher relationship building, discussions about peer and family relationships, time management, goal setting and school-work related matters.

Prior to becoming involved in Advocacy, the students mainly talked about problems with their friends and parents. Very few students approached a teacher to discuss problems.

Advocate teachers were described as someone who takes an interest in progress at school and treats students with respect. The majority of students reflected that they appreciate having someone who takes a special interest to look after their needs.

Most students reported that their contact with their advocate was beneficial.

The home group approach to advocacy adopted by some schools in the trial was not viewed favourably by the students. Many home group students felt that contact with their advocate teacher had not been beneficial. They felt it a waste of time and could not see any point to having discussion with their advocate.

Parents

Overall, parents expressed a positive attitude towards Advocacy and were pleased with their child’s experience in the Project. The parents were mindful that the Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Project had been operating for only a short time in the trial schools, and were therefore reluctant to make grand statements concerning significant changes in their child’s behaviour or attitude towards school since being involved in Advocacy. They did, however, see the program as credible and held high hopes for the future of Advocacy and the potential benefits for student well-being.

The information obtained from 31 parents can be summarised as follows:

- Parent data collection was two-fold seeking information about their child and patterns of interaction at home prior to, and since, becoming involved in the Project.
- Many parents did not have specific expectations of the Advocacy Project and some confused Advocacy with a transition program.
- Most parents expressed a basic understanding of, and familiarity with the task of Advocacy.
- Parents were mindful of making grand statements regarding their child’s achievement or progress given the relatively short time in which the Project had been operating.
Many parents indicated that their child regularly interacted about school matters at home and this rate remained around the same when involved in Advocacy.

Parents reported that their child most commonly raised issues at home regarding upsets with classmates and concerns of particular teacher behaviour. School rules and routines, the dislike of lessons and difficulty with learning tasks were also raised.

Parents reported that their child generally refers to their advocacy session in positive terms.

Just under half of the parents indicated that their child had benefited from the advice and support provided by the advocate teacher.

Parents valued the (real and potential) impact of Advocacy on their child’s relationships with their teacher(s).

Concerns were raised in relation to:
- the loss of any teaching/learning time by being involved in Advocacy;
- if the child and advocate did not get along (particularly in a small school where there are fewer teachers to choose an advocate from);
- issues of confidentiality and privacy; and
- the professional expertise of teachers to deal with delicate or sensitive matters.

Case-studies

The four case-studies conducted by the Evaluation Team are collated in the accompanying Volume 2 of this Evaluation Report.

The themes emerging from across the four case-studies, and indeed supported by both the Phase Two questionnaire data and Phase One Pilot study findings, can be condensed to the following five common themes:

Theme 1: The professional development of teachers as advocates;
Theme 2: The establishment of Advocacy and facilitating cultural change;
Theme 3: Student selection and targeting Advocacy according to need;
Theme 4: The expanding teaching profession and integration of roles;
Theme 5: ‘Knowing me, knowing you’—advocates and students acquiring a shared knowledge of one another.

Recommendations

With reference to the recommendations emerging from the data, the Evaluation supports the continuation of an Advocacy Program informed by the themes and issues identified from the evaluative studies of both the Phase One Pilot Study and the Phase Two Trial.

Based on the Connecting Through The Middle Years Project Phase Two Trial evaluation data and case-studies, the following recommendations are made:

1. That ‘Connecting’ be more widely implemented in the Middle Years to:
   - raise teacher awareness of social and emotional issues underlying learning at school;
• enable teachers to gain better knowledge of individual students; and
• place a special focus on the role of the teacher and cultural change in schools as teaching/learning organisations.

2. That one-to-one or small group advocacy meetings continue to be modelled as the most effective means of ‘Connecting’ in the roll-out of ‘Connecting’ programs to more schools.

3. That an element of targeting be included in the selection of students for participation in ‘Connecting’ programs to ensure those in obvious need of personal skills development for self-understanding and well-being are not excluded.

4. That students’ immediate needs relevant to improved self-understanding and well-being be recognised and balanced against long term aims such as the improvement of attitudes to life-long learning.

5. That ‘Connecting’ programs involving the Middle Years be conceptualised as an integration of strategies aimed at improving both student emotional health and student learning capability.

6. That the Department Of Education and Training strengthen its links with health professionals to support the work of advocates in ‘Connecting’ programs.

7. That the Department of Education and Training develop further its existing policy on Privacy and Protecting Information (Practising Privacy) to include advice to teachers undertaking the role of advocate in ‘Connecting’ programs.

8. That the Department of Education and Training develop its existing policy advice and guidelines on the legal liabilities of schools and teachers to include the role of advocate in ‘Connecting’ programs.

9. That schools be encouraged to continue to acquire ‘indepth’ knowledge of their students using ‘Connecting’ programs within which advocacy practice is informed by the policy developments identified in Recommendations 7 and 8 above.

10. That professional development associated with ‘Connecting’ programs be expanded to accommodate the emerging needs of teachers in:
   • Counselling;
   • Understanding child and adolescent well-being health issues in relation to learning; and
   • Giving individual learning pathways advice for further study and employment.

Additional Recommendations

11. That consideration be given to assisting schools in the initial stages of establishing their ‘Connecting’ programs.

12. That the Department of Education and Training facilitate the development of teacher professional development networks through cluster school arrangements that build communities of ‘Connecting’ practice at the local level.
13. That schools implementing ‘connecting’ programs be encouraged to implement advocacy arrangements that involve teachers as advocates for students that they teach as a deliberate strategy aimed at integrating both professional roles.

Phase One Recommendations

14. That advocacy arrangements within ‘Connecting’ schools be informed by the following principles of better practice:

- Establish processes for recruiting advocates from within schools in the first instance. Based on this evaluation and the literature on Advocacy, schools are encouraged to identify the characteristics of ‘good advocates’ and then recruit according to these characteristics.
- Only those teachers who volunteer to be involved in the Advocacy Program of a school be recruited.
- Teachers and students be granted the opportunity to select whom they wish to work with in their advocacy set.
- Explore the possibility of drawing on non-teachers in the role of advocate in the school after exhausting the available within school ‘manpower’ resource.

15. That ‘Connecting’ schools create a time and space for locating their ‘Connecting’ program within the routine timetabling arrangements for the school, recognising the tension between the organisational need to satisfy both the dominant grouped arrangements of normal classes and the one-to-one arrangements of the preferred advocacy approach within ‘Connecting’.
PART ONE:  INTRODUCTION  

(i) The evaluation

Background

A model of student support, known as the Advocacy Model, was developed in 1997 by Brendan Schmidt, Senior Project Officer with the Department of Education and Training, to help students, some of whom were 'at risk', to become more engaged with their studies, improve their performance at school and complete their post-compulsory schooling. At the centre of this model was the idea that 'advocate' teachers take responsibility for students in their care and support them according to individual need. This approach was a clear departure from the type of student support, widespread in schools, where teachers take responsibility for a whole class, giving individual attention only at times of crisis.

The Advocacy Project was initiated at three Secondary Colleges in November 1998 with the support of the Major Projects Division of the Department of Education, Employment and Training. It involved students in the post-compulsory years throughout 1999 and was extended to year 10, 11 and 12 students in a further twelve secondary schools in the year 2000. An evaluation of the project, covering the period 1999-2000, was published in 2001 (Ocean 2001).

The evaluation found that there had been a range of benefits for most students and teachers involved in Advocacy and, most significantly, that it had resulted in gains such as a higher rate of retention of students at school and improved results in the Victorian Certificate of Education. Consequently the Advocacy Model was implemented more widely and became associated with the Managed Individual Pathways Initiative, a Later Years program established by the Student Support and Welfare Division. Teachers from approximately 160 schools undertook training in 2001 to incorporate Advocacy in their MIPs programs.

Following the apparent success of the Advocacy Model of student support it became attractive to the Middle Years Project and to VicHealth, which saw in it an opportunity to establish links between social, health and educational outcomes for students. The problem, that a significant number of students at school were not adequately engaged with their learning in Years 5 to 9, and the fact that a proportion of students up to 30% were at risk of leaving before completing their secondary education (1999, The Middle Years: A Guide for Strategic Action in Years 5-9, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria), led project officers to examine the Advocacy Model as one means, amongst others, of dealing with students’ well-being at school. It was part of wider efforts to address the issue of engagement with learning, targeted for improvement alongside literacy, numeracy and curriculum (www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys).

The Middle Years Project team trialled Advocacy in five schools during 2001-2002. This initiative became known as ’Phase One’ of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project and was followed by ‘Phase Two’, in which a further 20 schools participated. An evaluation of Phase One of the project was conducted by RIPVET in July/August 2002. The Evaluation Report (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002) indicated that a sense of positivism surrounded the introduction of Advocacy into the Middle Years of schooling and it provided recommendations to guide wider
implementation of *Connecting Through the Middle Years*. It recommended that one-to-one interaction between advocate and student be preserved as the essence of ‘connecting’ as a whole group approach seemed to be futile, though well-intentioned; it recommended that targeting of students in need of the program be undertaken alongside other approaches such as random selection and voluntary participation; it recommended a process for ‘recruiting’ advocates. The report suggested ways of improving implementation of the program in regard to time, managing teacher participation, developing resources and professional development.

The Phase Two Evaluation Report is a sequel to the Phase One study, giving a more broadly-based assessment of the value of the Advocacy Model and its potential as an early intervention strategy within the Framework for Student Support. The study confirms many of the earlier findings but brings to light new information regarding well-being, selection of students for program participation, the changing role of the teacher and cultural change.

**Middle Years Project Aims**

The aims of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* are:

- To improve the social connectedness of young people to schools through promotion of a direct relationship between a teacher and a young person.
- To increase personal skills relating to self-understanding and to develop more positive attitudes towards life-long learning.
- The promotion and development of individual learning and pathways plans, leading to individual learning programs and processes.
- Improved knowledge within the learning organization of individual students.
- The development and dissemination of support materials and approaches for teachers in working with young people.

**Evaluation Aims**

The Phase Two evaluation aims are:

- The establishment of a research process involving managers, students, principals, advocates, parents and academics associated with the project.
- The preparation of a clarificative evaluation, outlining and explaining schools’ efforts to improve students’ connectedness through the project.
- The presentation of case-studies which provide detailed information about ‘Connecting’.
- The production of a critical analysis of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* as carried out in Phase Two.
- The formulation of recommendations to guide implementation of *Connecting Through the Middle Years* as an effective student support program in the future.
The Research Design

Methodology
The methodology includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches, often in combination. The technique of using numerical indicators for analysis suited some aspects of the evaluation process but not others: the investigation into students’ and coordinators’ experiences of ‘Connecting’, for example, favoured the collection of information which could be quantified while the investigation into advocates’ and parents’ opinions favoured individual written responses. An eclectic approach, valued in educational research, has been adopted throughout the study but care has been taken to support findings with quantitative data, wherever possible.

Data collection
The data for the Phase Two study was obtained by questionnaires (see Appendices 1, 2, 3 & 4): telephone contact and school visitation.

Co-ordinators of Connecting Through the Middle Years programs were contacted as a first step. They were asked to:

- give numerical information about the participants in the program and how long it had operated
- indicate how participants were selected
- assess whether their program was succeeding
- indicate their intentions for 2003.

The second step of the data collection was activated by co-ordinators distributing an online version of the Advocate questionnaire to teachers and other staff acting as advocates. Teachers and School Support Officers were asked to:

- give personal details regarding their professional life
- explain their expectations of Advocacy
- reveal the kind of student problems they had dealt with
- comment on their competency in handling these problems
- reflect on the effect Advocacy had on their teaching.

The third stage of data collection involved printed questionnaires which were sent to co-ordinators to distribute to students and parents. Students were asked to:

- give information about their advocate
- indicate what kind of things were talked about in their sessions
- assess the benefits of ‘Connecting’.

Parents were asked to:

- compare their child’s behaviour before and after the ‘Connecting’ program was introduced
- assess whether it had been helpful for the child to have new opportunities for discussion and assistance at school
- comment on teachers taking on tasks which could overlap with parenting
- express any confidentiality concerns.
The questionnaire returns were of a satisfactory level. There was a return rate of 85% for coordinators, 44% for advocates and 56% for students. A total of 31 parents gave feedback.

Material for the four case-studies were collected by the researchers visiting the selected schools and speaking with principals and as many of the participants in the ‘Connecting’ program as was possible in a school day. The conversations were, mostly, recorded to ensure a high level of accuracy in recall of information. School documents relevant to the project were also collected. The four case-studies are collated in the accompanying Volume 2 of this Evaluation Report.

Data analysis and research reporting
All information from questionnaires was processed using Microsoft Excel, which produced both summary notes and graphic information. These were carefully analysed for patterns of responses which were, in turn, transformed into generalized statements as part of the report writing process. The precise number of people who answered one way or another to the various questions is not always especially useful in a study of this kind, whose purpose is to report on and explain the ‘big picture’ of ‘Connecting’. Therefore, instead of quoting figures in each case, the words ‘few’, ‘some’, ‘many’ and ‘most’ have been used where there are one, two or three, several, more than half or almost all the participants responding in a particular way.

The Case-studies were analysed for thematic issues: strong student, advocate or parent voice on particular issues affecting the conduct of ‘Connecting’ were recorded.

The components of the Connecting Through the Middle Years study may be summarised as follows:

20 Phase Two schools
- Coordinator responses to questionnaire → Advocate responses to questionnaire →
- Student responses to questionnaire → Parent responses to questionnaire →

4 Case-Studies
- Principal responses, interview → Advocate responses, interview →
- Coordinator responses, interview → Responses from questionnaires →

A commentary, recognising the values and principles of public schooling in Victoria, as outlined in Public Education: The Next Generation (Connors 2000) was developed and recommendations made.

Structure of the Phase Two Report

The structure of this Phase Two Report is as follows:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART ONE includes the background to the evaluation, its aims, methodology and reporting framework. It contains a Literature Review which identifies the reports, papers and other publications relevant to student support systems at school.
PART TWO presents the survey findings of the evaluation study, detailing the perspectives of coordinators, advocate teachers, students and parents concerning their experience of the 'Connecting' Project.

PART THREE directs the reader to Volume 2 of the Evaluation Report which provides narrative accounts of four case-studies undertaken by the Evaluation Team. Part Three also presents a thematic analysis of the issues that emerged across these four case-studies.

PART FOUR provides a commentary based on the themes identified in the survey findings and case-studies. It also contains policy advice and recommendations arising from the evaluation study.
Evaluation Reporting Framework

The evaluation Reporting Framework below identifies the components of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* Trial 2002 to be evaluated, and the associated sub-components linked to the reporting schedule of the evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Reporting Framework</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Sub-components</th>
</tr>
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| **Middle Years (Advocacy) Program** | Tasks of advocacy  
Capacity to meet student needs  
Relationship to other programs eg. MIPs  
Pathways  
Effect on Retention/ Attendance  
Effect on Achievement  
Extension of the program  
Larger scale implementation  
Short-term nature of innovations  
Professional Development | |
| **School** | School structure & program organisation  
Impact of the program across the school  
Imperative to lead/foster change  
Professional Development  
Support eg. Managers | |
| **Student** | Motives  
Attitude  
Learning styles  
Relationships: Teachers, advocates, peers, social connection, engagement  
Type(s) of assistance wanted  
Participation at school | |
| **Advocate** | Motives  
Attitude  
How they see their role  
Impact on teaching practice  
Barriers  
Planning & advice | |
| **Parent** | Role  
Attitude  
Noticed changes  
Relationship in the program  
Relationship in the school  
Stresses | |
| **Technology** | Archemeter  
Usefulness  
Usibility  
Access  
Training & Support | |
| **Administration/Funding Guidelines, Resourcing** | Budget initiatives | |
| **Professional Development** | PD Activities for teachers, advocates & managers | |
| **Case-studies** | Selected examples of projects currently in action. | |
The Victorian Department of Education’s efforts to deal with students and the ‘drop out’ syndrome have, in recent years, involved the notion of ‘connectedness’. The term ‘connectedness’ refers to the sense of belonging – to school, to friendship groups, to family—which results in a feeling of well-being. Emotional well-being is needed for young people to function positively at school and, in a more general sense, in society. The promotion of ‘connectedness’ at school involves the development of strategies to advance students, sometimes referred to as ‘at risk’, in the management of their personal and learning difficulties. The strategies include improvement of both school climate and curriculum and the development of positive student-teacher relationships. Connectedness is associated with prevention of and early intervention in students’ problems. The shift from dealing with ‘at risk’ students to prevention, early intervention, ‘connectedness’ and well-being is a significant one, formalised in 1998 through *The Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools*.

**Change through government policy**

*The Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools* (www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/welfare/welfare, 21/8/02) recommends a whole school approach for developing student well-being. The policy framework sets out the parameters for ensuring students are cared for adequately throughout their schooling: primary prevention, early intervention, intervention and postvention (restoring well-being). The first stage, primary prevention, includes a ‘one-to-one relationship with a caring adult’ as part of students’ development of a sense of belonging to a school community and their ability to deal with problems and stresses at school and at home. The second stage, early intervention, includes provision of support and counselling at school level for those who are vulnerable to harm while the third, intervention, is linked to specialist professional services.

The principles of early intervention and support networks to help ‘young people at risk of becoming disconnected’ (2001d) are also given prominence in the report from the Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce. The Taskforce recommended that every school establish policies, processes, protocols and practices that enable early recognition of disconnectedness and proposes, amongst other things, the ‘development of structured mentoring programmes for young people’ (p. 5) and a system which allocates responsibility for supporting each individual on their path through school and beyond, until they establish independence.

The key issues of quality relations between students and teachers, ‘connectedness’ and systematic prevention of ‘major impediments to learning’ are raised also in the Report of the Ministerial Working Party, *Public Education. The Next Generation* (Connors 2000). Contributors to the review of public education in Victoria emphasised the importance of identifying and responding to emerging problems before they could ‘fester’ and become acute, and they recommended ‘continuity of care’ and ‘ongoing and coordinated management’ (pp 47-48).

**Prevention and early intervention**

The search for effective ways of preventing young people from becoming disconnected from their school and, in some cases, their family and community has involved many projects and studies over the years. A major national project conducted by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs entitled *The Full Service Schools Program* (2001e) found a wide range of
preventative measures and interventions, some of which involved improving mainstream education and others which concentrated on strengthening student support. The report findings, in the same vein as an earlier study, *Under-age School Leaving* (Brooks, Milne et al. 1997), favour the notion of an integrated or holistic approach to keeping students engaged at school but draw attention to the importance of school culture, positive student-teacher relationships and effective links with community services as part of the overall approach. Both studies acknowledge the worth of mentoring and one-to-one interactions in the process of early intervention (p. 101).

The Gatehouse Project ([www.wchmelb.org/gatehouseproject](http://www.wchmelb.org/gatehouseproject)), conducted by the Centre for Adolescent Health at the Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne, was one of the first projects to move away from addressing ‘at risk’ behaviour to concentrating on prevention or early intervention strategies. It linked health and education and raised consciousness about the interplay between the two. The research team consistently found relationships between teachers and students to be of paramount importance as they searched for factors promoting the connectedness of students to school. They found that positive student-teacher relationships were directly associated with student progress and development and could, indirectly, avert undesirable behaviours such as substance abuse.

Positive student-teacher relationships and the need for these to be cultivated in school environments was a key finding of *Building Relationships. Making Education Work* (2001a) produced conjointly by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education and the Australian Youth Research Centre. It recommends that more time be made available in schools for teachers to cultivate relationships with students because ‘The most important factors connecting young people to school were linked to relationships — friendship with other students and relationships with teachers that involved mutual respect and responsibility’ (p. 7). The report stresses that the time it takes to develop trusting relationships which support the well-being of students must be regarded as an integral element of the workload of teachers. It forwards the idea that schools need to structure time for relationship building to take place.

The negative impact of student-teacher relations which do not reflect care and respect is demonstrated in Pomeroy’s study (Pomeroy 1999) in the United Kingdom. It shows how young people felt alienated by teachers who were abusive or treated them dismissively and that students’ decision to leave school prematurely was strongly affected by these experiences. Young people in Pomeroy’s study and elsewhere ([Holden and Dwyer 1992; Dwyer, Stokes et al. 1998; James, St Leger et al. 2001](#)) express a need for interaction with adults who display care and understanding; they need somebody to listen to them and treat them with respect.

Osterman (Osterman 2000), too, is critical of teachers. She argues that teachers do not give adequate attention to students’ need to belong to the school community, that lack of ‘belongingness’ is associated with mental and physical illness and behavioural problems (p. 327). These, in turn, lead to lack of success at school. She demonstrates, through extensive reference to studies conducted in the field of cognitive psychology, that positive involvement with others is associated with engagement (p. 336) and success (p. 331). According to Osterman, teachers are able to make a direct contribution to the well-being of students by satisfying their need for belonging and ensuring they experience neither alienation nor rejection in the context of schooling.

The *Report for the Victorian Full Service Schools Program* (Stokes 2000) produced similar findings, indicating that many students are unhappy with school because
they are not ‘being treated as people by teachers’ (p. 31). The report describes how early school leavers prospered when they were supported by a welfare worker who assisted them in all aspects of their lives. Whilst at school they had not experienced ‘positive interaction with any significant school-based personnel’ (p. 26) and the lack of support was a factor in their leaving school.

**Significant Projects**

There has been a wide range of reform efforts, in Australia and overseas, to improve educational outcomes for students not succeeding at school but, according to a major recent study, they have led to ‘no substantial and sustainable change’ (Mukherjee 1999). Title 1, a major US initiative, ‘failed to meet its potential’ (ibid, p. 24), while many Australian initiatives, such as the Students at Risk Program, have had no significant impact. The fact that most of the projects were short-term rather than sustained over time was given as a reason for poor results.

Fashola and Slavin, authors of *Effective and Replicable Programs for Students Placed at Risk in Elementary and Middle Schools*, (Fashola and Slavin 1997) present a more positive view of the value of reform models. They list a broad range of programs, some rigorously evaluated and widely implemented, as suitable to be replicated in other schools. Prominent on their list of programs are: Success for All ([www.successforall.net](http://www.successforall.net)), which concentrates on literacy and numeracy skills in the early years; Accelerated Schools ([www.acceleratedschools.net](http://www.acceleratedschools.net)), a philosophically based initiative in which students who traditionally receive remediation are ‘extended’, like gifted children; and The School Development Program ([www.med.yale.edu/comer](http://www.med.yale.edu/comer)), linking child psychology with academic success. Fashola and Slavin’s comprehensive review of special programs acknowledges that there is no ‘magic bullet’ to deal with students ‘at risk’ but they identify many strategies which may be helpful. A similar review of innovative programs, with a focus on the Middle Years of schooling and Australian education, conducted by Hill et al (Hill, Mackay et al. 2001) also concluded that there is no ‘one best way’ to achieve reform. The review emphasises the need for innovation and change in the middle years, suggesting alternative models of providing education, especially for year 9 students in alternative settings, negotiated curriculum and cooperative learning. They believe the multiple pathways by which schools can enhance their learning programs provide good choice for schools.

A collection of Australian case-studies, *Doing it Well* (2001c) shows the range of interventions taking place in four main categories: systemic change; community oriented approaches; school organisational change; student focused interventions. The publication indicates that valuable gains have been reported from schools working closely with community workers either by locating workers with special skills within a school or conducting activities for some students in settings outside school. Significant gains appear also to have been made through case management, an approach targeting the individual. Case management, often regarded as being beyond the capabilities of ordinary class teachers, involves matching young people with learning situations which suit them and has flourished when supported by people skilled in relationship building. The quality of relationship was regarded as a crucial factor.

Some researchers have looked at reform programs in the light of the characteristics they have in common (Fashola and Slavin 1997; Mukherjee 1999). The search for a common thread that runs through projects which, according to papers and reports on project websites, have been successful, places a spotlight on one-to-one relationships between a student and an adult. It is conspicuous that
many programs make use of relationships, some based on the concept of mentorship, others on counselling, case management or tutoring.

Mentoring is presented in a positive light in a number of projects (1999; MacCallum and Beltman 1999; Lunenburg 2000; Raffo 2000) as it has often been associated with improved participation in school and better performance in academic tasks. Mentoring, sometimes regarded as synonymous with Advocacy, has, according to the information on an American website (www.academic-answers.com), become a marketable commodity. The website advertises a service to help families sort out problems their children have at school. It extends the idea of tutoring, used widespready by families to provide additional support for their children. It is more effective, say some, to combine tutoring for literacy skills with tutoring for life skills as this approach is more effective than addressing learning difficulties in isolation (Edmondson and White 1998; Denti and Guerin 1999).

The Connecting Through the Middle Years Project
In the light of the literature review, the project undertaken by the Middle Years team of the Department of Education and Training is clearly a relevant program directed at satisfying the need for student support at school and prevention of and early intervention in student problems. According to the information obtained through the literature, the use of one-to-one relationships to build quality student-teacher relations is a credible strategy for creating student well-being and preventing emotional and other problems which interrupt learning for students during their Middle Years of school education. However, the long-term benefits of Advocacy in the Middle Years have not yet been recorded and at least one case-study, involving students in the Later Years, casts some doubt on its potential for modelling student support. Brown and Bowles’ study of Advocacy at Korumburra Secondary College showed that Advocacy had no effect on the self-esteem and self-efficacy of students or their perception of school life, academic performance and school attendance (Brown and Bowles 2002). In her explanation of the research results, which were unexpected, Brown mentioned that the school had a range of other programs in place to address the issues of ‘connectedness’ and that one additional program, based on a one-to-one student-teacher relationship, made no difference overall. Earlier evaluations of the Advocacy Project (Ocean and Caulley 2000; Ocean 2001) had indicated that Advocacy helped to raise students’ confidence, to improve their connectedness to school and assist them to complete their schooling and improve their marks.

This evaluation study endeavours to contribute information about the appropriateness, replicability and sustainability of ‘Connecting’ programs for Middle Years students and its effectiveness in terms of student support for students in Years 5 to 9.
(iii) **Issues emerging from the Literature and Phase One evaluation**

The issues that emerged from both the literature review and the Phase One evaluation were identified and developed into a ‘Key Issues Framework’ summarised below. This framework informed the Phase Two data collection process concerning the questionnaires and subsequent interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Years (Advocacy) Program</td>
<td>Welfare/Well being/Learning connectedness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy &amp; Numeracy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project Based Nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>School Culture change/shift</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organisational/Managed change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reciprocal changes eg. School/Teacher/Student.</td>
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<td>Accountability</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
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<td>Participation/engagement</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘At risk’ / Equity</td>
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<td>Advocate / Teacher</td>
<td>Teaching practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘At risk’ / Equity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relationships: students, teachers, parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expanding professional role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relationship in the program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School partnership</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
<td>System</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Usefulness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration/Funding Guidelines, Resourcing</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Replicability</td>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Foci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case-studies</td>
<td></td>
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PART TWO: THE SURVEY FINDINGS

(i) The ‘connecting’ schools 2002

At this stage we can see it has really been of benefit for some students (Co-ordinator, Primary School)

This section of the report provides an overview of how the twenty schools in Phase Two of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project adapted the Advocacy Model and the principles of Advocacy into functional student support programs. The twenty schools, including primary, secondary and P-12 colleges in city and rural locations provided an excellent sample of Victorian government schools. Each had created ‘Connecting’ programs to suit their local circumstances, some on a small scale, others large or on a whole school basis. Coordinators of ‘Connecting’ programs throughout the state contributed information for this section in response to a questionnaire (Appendix 1).

The section begins by specifying who the participants in Phase Two of ‘Connecting’ were and goes on to describe how the programs were designed in terms of participant selection, formal requirements and use of the Archemeter. It reveals a predominant feeling among coordinators that the implementation of ‘Connecting’ is progressing well and describes their plans for improvements and developments in 2003.

The participants

The Middle Years of schooling, defined as years 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, span both primary and secondary education. There were schools of all types involved: seven were primary schools, ten were secondary colleges and three were P-12 colleges. Some had small enrolments of between 100 and 250 students while most were in the range of 300 to 600 students: the largest of the schools had populations of 850 and 1060 students. They were located across all regions of the state with an equal number of schools in the country as in the city, if Geelong is considered to be an urban rather than rural environment. Some of the country schools could be described as isolated in a geographical sense and some were located in substantial towns supporting not only farming activities and rural industries but also tourism. The city schools were north, south, east and west of the CBD and two of these could be considered to be on the rural-urban fringe. The sample of schools is considered to be a balanced one, incorporating all types of communities.

In November 2002, when the data was collected, three of the schools in the study were still engaged in planning their ‘Connecting’ program. They were unable to provide information to contribute to the evaluation, making the actual sample seventeen schools, not twenty. One school had been ‘connecting’ for less than a month; three schools had done so for one month; two were into their second or third month; six schools had completed four months; others six or eight months. Three schools had student support programs not initiated by the ‘Connecting’ project of 2002. Each of these had programs conducted in the spirit of ‘Connecting’ but with significant differences: two involved home groups, in which teachers ‘connect’ with a group of students; the other involved mentorship conducted by community members.
The *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project*, Phase Two, involved 1384 students and 225 teachers/school support officers (SSOs) overall. If, however, the two schools taking a whole school approach are not included, because they do not fully represent the ‘Connecting’ program, these figures would be considerably smaller: 344 students and 126 teachers/SSOs. The exclusion of 100 students and two community members involved in mentorship reduces the participation figures to 244 students and 124 teachers/SSOs. A further exclusion, a primary school which targeted all students in Year 6, reduces those involved in a true ‘Connecting’ program to 216 students and 117 teachers/SSOs. The number of students for whom the teachers and support staff cared varied from school to school. Not including schools with alternative ‘Connecting’ programs, advocates took care of between one and six students each. The proportion of students and staff interacting has been determined by dividing the number of students by the number of staff and working out a ratio for each. The figures have been rounded.

Students in the ‘Connecting’ program were at all levels of the Middle Years. Using the ‘true’ sample of twelve schools, the distribution of ‘connecting’ activity across the year levels was as shown in Figure 1 below:

![Figure 1: Middle Years students involved in the 'Connecting' program.](image)

There were more than twice as many students from the secondary sector participating as from the primary sector, based on the information that 82 were in primary and 206 in secondary education. A small number (10) of students in P-12 colleges could not be sorted into year levels and included in this analysis.

**Program details**

**Selection of participants**

The *Connecting Through the Middle Years* programs in most of the schools in the Phase Two study were carried out by teachers and support staff who volunteered to take on the role of advocate in addition to their other duties at school. Taking into account anecdotal evidence obtained during fieldwork, the number of teachers volunteering to become advocates was substantial, sometimes outnumbering the students identified as needing additional support. However, some schools found
their reserves of volunteers had been depleted if they had Advocacy in their Later Years program. At least one of these schools used the incentive of time release for advocates to establish and maintain the program and, in some cases, promotion was used as a lever for involvement. Several schools indicated they had used invitation or persuasion to recruit some teachers into Advocacy but voluntary participation was, nonetheless, the predominant form of involvement. Six of the schools in the study augmented the number of advocates in the program by using school support staff such as integration aides, literacy support staff and Koorie educators.

The involvement of students in ‘Connecting’ programs was determined in various ways. Three main approaches were carried out: a random approach, a targeted approach, with teachers identifying individuals needing extra support and an approach based on voluntary participation. Five of the schools in the study used a combination of approaches rather than one alone. It was common, for example, for some students to be targeted but others selected at random to prevent negative associations being attached to Advocacy and its participants. Some schools augmented the targeted approach with voluntary participation for the same reason. Figure 2 below shows that the ‘Connecting’ program in most schools is based on a targeted approach, which enables the special needs of some of its students to be addressed.

Figure 2: Approaches to selecting students for ‘Connecting’.

The number of schools using voluntary participation alone as a basis for conducting their ‘Connecting’ program shows considerable support for this approach. Two schools reported an overwhelming response from students to participate: in one case all the students in Year 6 volunteered and in the other half of the Year 8 level volunteered. Random selection of students was only used by one school. Home groups, established in two of the schools in the study, involved compulsory participation.

Organisation and content of the program

The co-ordinators of the ‘Connecting’ programs were asked to indicate whether there were formal aspects to the student-advocate meetings in their school, whether the student-advocate interactions were entirely informal or whether there
was a combination of the two approaches. The response to this questioning showed that there was little formality, if any, in the way Advocacy was conducted. Nine of the respondents indicated that there were no formal requirements at all and eight replied that there were some. Those in the latter category placed emphasis on basic organisational requirements rather than program content. One coordinator said his only requirement was that advocates meet with their student(s) at least once a fortnight; another mentioned the need to update records in the school’s welfare register and to observe mandatory reporting of child abuse. By and large the main task of 'Connecting' programs was the development of student-teacher relationships and student well-being, a fact established not only by surveying coordinators but by teacher response as well (see following section). An informal approach, enabling advocates to respond to students’ needs, predominated in every school. Even those schools with home groups rather than one-to-one meetings gave teachers the freedom to do what they considered necessary in their sessions in addition to set tasks.

The Archemeter, created as a support for Advocacy in the Later Years, was seen by some school level coordinators of Connecting Through the Middle Years as useful for shaping or supporting the program, especially if it was used as a ‘starter’ to establish a student-advocate relationship. It has not, however, been reported as an important diagnostic and management system to support students in the Middle Years of schooling. The Archemeter remains of interest to many involved in Advocacy because of its potential to add substance to student-advocate relationships and keep Advocacy focussed on learning and personal achievement at school. However, informal feedback from teachers in Phase Two and research findings from Phase One suggest that it needs redevelopment to be of use to those working with Years 5 to 9. A recommendation for the redevelopment of the Archemeter was made in the Phase One Evaluation (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002).

Progress Report—November 2002

Eleven of the coordinators were able to make an assessment of the progress of their ‘Connecting’ programs in their schools at the start of November but five believed it was ‘too early to tell’ after a few months of operation: one did not comment on progress in any way. The assessments were all positive, reflecting the optimism that often goes with a new venture. The ‘students seem happier’ is a typical example of an early response to the ‘Connecting’ program; ‘the staff are happy’ is another. The fact that the participants were pleased about their involvement in ‘Connecting’ seemed an important factor. Elements of pleasure were captured in comments such as:

- ‘students were more than willing to see their advocates’;
- ‘student-advocate interaction is a means of making people feel special—I make them feel special’;
- ‘they enjoyed their meetings’.

Some responses to the question ‘What signs can you see that your ‘Connecting’ program is or is not achieving its goals ...’ went beyond reporting the good feelings generated among participants and described outcomes. They showed that even after a few months of involvement in ‘Connecting’ some coordinators could see ‘progress made by students in getting over their difficulties’ or they observed that students were ‘coping better’ as they learnt to use a network of people to support them. Generalised comments made about the program being ‘of benefit to some students’ were complemented by observations of a more specific nature. One school reported positive parent feedback and improved attendance, for example,
and another singled out the benefits of students analysing their learning styles. One school, whose student support program had been established some years before the Phase Two *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* started, reported a reduction in suspensions and detentions and an improvement in students’ grades. Other schools in the study could not identify outcomes of this magnitude after only a short involvement with the project.

**Program Development**

Co-ordinators were asked not only to reflect on the progress of Advocacy in their school’s Middle Years program but also to identify those factors which advanced their ‘Connecting’ programs or held them back. In the category of factors which contributed to the success of the program there was, not surprisingly, repeated mention of ‘good’ staff. Good advocates were associated with ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘commitment’: they were described as exhibiting qualities like trustworthiness and empathy; they could establish effective communication and impart encouragement to students. The other key factor associated with the success of ‘Connecting’ programs was time to conduct regular meetings.

Other factors which coordinators associated with success were:
- support from administration
- opportunity to discuss issues with staff
- promotion
- leadership
- targeting students who need guidance
- integrating Advocacy into classroom practice
- using set tasks to ‘connect’
- including social skills in the program.

Most factors which impeded ‘Connecting’ programs from being successful had a common element: they were associated with the ‘lack’ of something. Above all, lack of time was quoted as being detrimental to student-advocate interaction and this, inevitably, resulted in lack of continuity in the program. There was also lack of support, be it lack of support from staff or lack of support from home. Lack of support from staff included ‘unwilling’ teachers and those who had no understanding of the concept of Advocacy. Sometimes coordinators identified the problem as too few staff to cover the need for advocates—a lack of advocate teachers— but there was also reference to staff being overburdened in general. Two other factors were identified as inhibiting the success of the ‘Connecting’ program: lack of professional development and lack of funds.

**‘Connecting’ plans 2003**

*Commitment to Advocacy*

Almost all of the seventeen schools whose co-ordinators contributed information to the study saw a future for *Connecting Through the Middle Years*. Some coordinators felt comfortable to consolidate the work they had begun and keep the program comparatively small in size: others were keen to expand in the coming year. Only two schools felt that they may not be able to continue ‘Connecting’ as they were finding it difficult to sustain the program. It is a solid endorsement of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years* initiative that not one school planned to discontinue it for lack of confidence in its worth.
Confidence in the value of the ‘Connecting’ program is demonstrated by the substantial number of schools with plans to expand Advocacy in the Middle Years in 2003. Six schools, which commenced with a small group of advocates and students in 2002, were keen to develop their programs in the coming year. The perception, that Advocacy was something which should reach a greater number of Middle Years students, perhaps all students, was apparent in feedback from two of these schools. A primary school indicated it would like to move to a model involving all staff on a timetabled basis and said that it might engage in Advocacy on a group basis because ‘too few students are reached under the one-to-one model’. Group engagement in Advocacy was under consideration because ‘different students need support at different times’. A secondary college which began with a ‘Connecting’ program of only eight students and four teachers considered their experiences to be so positive that the idea of moving to a ‘whole school approach’ was already being considered as a long-term goal.

Two secondary schools in the study which used home groups as the basis for organised student support said that they were happy with their arrangement and would continue it in 2003. One of these, however, found the home group approach too restrictive for ‘connecting’ with some individuals and saw a need to supplement home groups with one-to-one meetings. Gains made for the whole school, by developing school culture through home groups, were possibly at the expense of support for students on an individual basis. This was a concern.

Those schools which had doubts about their capacity to sustain ‘Connecting’ in the Middle Years in the long term felt that they needed continued support or it would ‘drop by the wayside when funding ends’. The feeling amongst some teachers was that the ‘connecting’ effort had relied on ‘goodwill’ and that this was running out. The three schools voicing concerns about continuing next year each assessed their program very highly, indicating that it had ‘made a difference’ and was ‘a worthwhile program which can support students at risk’. It was judged to be so effective, in fact, that the feeling at one school was that they ‘would like to expand’. However, teachers wanted their advocacy commitments to be acknowledged as part of their work allotments and sought a reasonable time frame within which to carry out their ‘Connecting’ activities effectively. There was a resolve, at one school, to limit the number of students per advocate to two, in recognition of the difficulty of sustaining extra effort for Advocacy over time.

Continued Professional Development

There were two main areas in which coordinators sought to make improvements to their ‘Connecting’ programs: more professional development for advocates and better recording systems for information about students. Teachers need to learn listening skills that will make them better advocates and they need to develop their counselling skills to respond appropriately to situations which are outside normal teaching practice or, in the case of school support officers, outside the area of their training. The Professional Development sessions for the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project, as confirmed in the Phase One Evaluation report, have been excellent but not all advocates have had the chance to participate in them: there has usually been a limited number from each school who can attend. Timing of professional development was of concern as well as access: PD in Semester 2 was considered better than in Semester 1 for administrative reasons.

The issue of recording information about students was of interest to a few coordinators. Although the transactions between a student and their advocate are considered a private affair and information is confidential, there seems a need for some records. Firstly, to build knowledge of certain students for use by the wider
school community; secondly, to establish a quality check on Advocacy and whether or not it is achieving results.

Section summary

The outcomes of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* in the Phase Two schools have been largely positive. The main difficulty with the project seems to have been the establishment of the program in certain schools. A related problem, as far as the evaluation is concerned, has been that there were some enormous variations in the conduct of programs, making it unclear whether they could be genuinely considered part of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years* initiative. Although schools were given the freedom to develop ‘Connecting’ to suit their local circumstances, some schools had merged Advocacy with other student support schemes, making it difficult to identify it and estimate its effect. In cases where there was doubt, information was not included in the summary.

The information gathered from seventeen schools responding to the questionnaire can be condensed into the following key points:

- The study covered an ideal representative sample of Victorian Government schools.
- 216 students and 117 advocates took part.
- Advocates were largely teachers and school support staff who volunteered.
- Students were mostly targeted but inclusion in the program also involved random selection and voluntary participation.
- Advocacy sessions were mainly informal in nature.
- Participants enjoyed their interactions.
- Some students showed signs of overcoming difficulties after some months of ‘connecting’.
- Good advocates, enthusiasm and commitment underlie the success of ‘Connecting’ programs.
- Lack of time and support undermine the success of programs.
- Most schools plan to continue their programs in current form or to expand in 2003.
- Several schools are sceptical about the sustainability of their programs.
- There is a need for continued and expanded PD.
I wanted to make a difference to the student's day at school, to create a feeling that the student belongs and that someone cares (Advocate)

This section of the report provides an overview of how teachers and SSOs involved in Phase Two of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project responded to the experience of interacting with students in the context of Advocacy. As indicated in the previous section, 117 teachers were recognised as having participated in Phase Two of the ‘Connecting’ program: of this number 51 sent in responses to an online questionnaire (Appendix 2). The teacher responses were anonymous. There was, as a consequence, no way of identifying the schools from which they originated and yet, by deduction, it is likely that there were returns from at least twelve schools. The questionnaire sought to capture the essence of what teachers and SSOs were doing as advocates and to identify any problems that may have been encountered. There was special interest in finding out whether ‘Connecting’ was an effective way of initiating early intervention in student problems and whether it could, indirectly, influence school culture or teaching practice as well as give support to individual students.

The ‘Advocate’ section begins with a profile of the adults involved in the ‘Connecting’ program. It goes on to describe their preparation for becoming advocates, their expectations of what they could achieve by ‘connecting’ with students and their estimations of what they actually managed to achieve. It shows that well-being was the ‘main business’ of Connecting Through the Middle Years and reveals the range of student problems encountered. The section finishes with a discussion of the types of support some advocates may need to overcome uncertainty and feelings of inadequacy when confronted with difficult situations.

Advocates in profile

The experience of being an advocate was, for the vast majority of staff, an enjoyable one. This feeling, not directly elicited by the questioning, was expressed at the end of the questionnaire in the section ‘further comments’. The sense of enjoyment can, presumably, be linked to the fact that nearly all advocates volunteered to participate in ‘Connecting’: it was something they wanted to do. No other factor appeared as important in profiling advocates as their sense of commitment. It seemed not to matter whether an advocate was man or woman, a younger or older person: the essential characteristic of the advocate was commitment.

Looking at the age of advocates it is certainly true that there were more teachers over than under 40 years of age but, in view of the fact that the teaching profession has an ageing workforce (2001b), this is not remarkable. Younger teachers have not been underrepresented, proportionally, considering the ageing workforce factor. Similarly, when the years of experience in teaching or support services are considered, there does not seem to be an imbalance. There were sixteen advocates with ten or less years experience, fifteen with between eleven and twenty years’ experience and twenty with more than twenty years’ experience.
Looking at gender issues in Advocacy it is evident that there were more women than men involved but this, also, need not be regarded as significant since eighty percent of teachers in the primary sector are women (2001b): men, therefore, were not underrepresented, proportionally, considering that more than one third of advocates in the study were men.

The analysis of the disciplines in which advocates teach shows no special trends either. As well as primary school teachers who, generally speaking, cover all Key Learning Areas, there were secondary teachers from every KLA: musicians, Information Technology people, teachers of Psychology, Physical Education, Home Economics, Textiles, Languages Other than English and librarians. There was a good representation from the ‘core’ subject areas of English, Maths and Science but none of these predominated. About half of the teachers/SSOs in the sample had major responsibilities such as junior or middle school management, KLA coordination, timetabling, student welfare or house leadership. Some were leading teachers and assistant principals but there were, at the other end of the scale, teachers in their first year of practice: six advocates had been teaching for less than a year.

Contrary to suggestions in an earlier study of Advocacy, that advocates had some characteristics in common (Ocean, 2001), the ‘Connecting’ study, based on a larger sample and an ideal representation of school communities, found that there was no typical profile of an advocate. The teachers and SSOs in Connecting Through the Middle Years Phase Two schools had varied backgrounds, talents and experience and were distinguished only by their common interest in increasing support for students. Many of them, 29 in the sample of 51, taught the students for whom they were advocates, without signalling a conflict of roles.

The situation where teachers have students for whom they are advocates in their classes has been described as undesirable in earlier reports (Ocean & Caulley 2000; Ocean, 2001; Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002). The finding, that being friend and advisor for a child conflicts with being disciplinarian, had been more or less accepted in the education community because strong teacher feedback indicated this was the case. The conflict of roles theory, however, is subject to challenge by the fact that a large number of advocates in the Phase Two study were in this very situation, without ‘conflict of roles’ emerging. The idea, of integrating Advocacy into classroom teaching, is seen, by some, as not only desirable but possible (see end of this section).

**Preparation and Preparedness for ‘Connecting’**

The questionnaire responses showed that most advocates had spent one day or less in preparation for involvement in the ‘Connecting’ approach to student support in their school. Nineteen of the sample had completed a full day of organised professional development but eleven had no formal introduction to Advocacy at all and three had only scant introductions of an hour or so. Those teachers who had prominent roles in developing Advocacy in their school had generally undertaken two or more days of professional development. One respondent mentioned that (s)he had engaged in fifty or more days of related professional development, all of which contributed to understanding student support and Advocacy. Figure 3 shows the pattern of preparation and preparedness:
When asked ‘Did you feel adequately prepared?’ 21 teachers and SSOs responded with a clear ‘no’ and 30 responded ‘yes’ or something similar like ‘OK’. Those who had two or more days to devote to professional development indicated that they felt secure though a few said they would have liked more. The others, who had had less than two days’ PD, were divided on the issue of time spent in preparation. Many of them considered the day-long conference or workshop they had attended as adequate preparation but almost as many felt it was inadequate. Similarly, fourteen teachers and SSOs who had had no formal professional development for Advocacy proved to be divided on the question of preparedness. Some of the group, understandably, declared that they felt poorly prepared and yet six of them did not. The data was searched for some explanation of this unusual outcome. It implied that many advocates got their sense of security in dealing with young people’s difficulties from life experiences in general and that formal education did not contribute significantly to their sense of preparedness. Some had gained experience through related professional development or their regular work in welfare. The variation in the sense of preparedness for Advocacy may also be explained by data collected in the Phase One study: some teachers were considered natural advocates, ‘skilled in relationship building’ (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002), ready and willing to ‘have a personal impact on children’s lives’ (ibid, p.26), while others were not. The divided responses to the question of preparedness may indicate variance in peoples’ natural aptitude for the caring, nurturing aspects of teaching and variance in their skills in personal communication, both of which are essential for advocate-student interaction.

The issue of preparedness for Advocacy, however, has further dimensions, going beyond that of being ‘the right person for the role’. Advocacy has led some teachers into situations where their existing professional skills have not been adequate to handle certain situations: they have not known what to do, how to respond. The questionnaire revealed a range of circumstances, mostly those centred around students’ personal and family lives, in which advocates felt discomfort: they described a need to be more competent in their counselling skills and many wanted to be more effective in giving career advice. Only twelve of the respondents, about a quarter of them, did not have concerns about their capacity to be effective advocates and help students attain well-being.
Advocates were sometimes called upon to help out students experiencing family problems. Notes written by advocates in their questionnaire responses indicated that it had been difficult when they knew family members and were exposed to personal information about them or when they became indirectly involved in disputes between families. They have sometimes not known how to respond appropriately. One teacher remarked, ‘I have felt like stepping back and referring the matter to someone more qualified in that area’, a feeling echoed by others. One said that (s)he did not feel qualified to take on welfare counselling; another referred to ‘emotional issues’ as being problematic; another mentioned ‘psychological disorders’ as difficult to handle. The most direct response to feeling unqualified or unprepared was the comment ‘sometimes problems are over my head’.

Some of the advocates who felt confident in their roles may have derived some of their sense of confidence from not getting too deeply involved in students’ problems. One of the teachers who responded ‘no’, there were no aspects of ‘Connecting’ where (s)he did not feel prepared or qualified to help, extended the answer by saying it was ‘because I would use referral when the need for it is evident’. Another respondent saw the need to define the parameters of Advocacy in some way when (s)he wrote, ‘I would like to know options for referral if problems needing specialist consultation arise’. This is clearly an area in which work can be done to support teachers and SSO advocates in the future. The case for integrating support services to make them more readily available for students at school has been strongly argued (2001e; Brooks, Milne et al. 1997; McDonald & Hayes 2001; Kowalenko, Wignall et al. 2002), and teachers have expressed a need for better access to services as well.

Although there were some feelings of poor preparedness for specific situations such as abuse, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, there was, for some advocates, a sense of inadequacy about counselling in general. Not all adults in the program felt comfortable about relying on their life experiences or teaching qualifications to carry out the task of Advocacy, as the following comments reveal: ‘I need to learn basic counselling skills to be effective’; ‘I could use better questioning technique’; ‘I feel I can make an improvement’. Discussion about a student's schooling, their long-term goals and career plans also left some advocates wondering if they were qualified to give advice in that area. One teacher felt (s)he did not know enough about post-secondary pathways to help students and a number of others listed ‘career choices’ as a problematic aspect of Advocacy. The issue of professional development is an important one for the development of the project and this is discussed more fully in the Commentary section of the report.

**Expectations of ‘Connecting’**

The adult participants in ‘Connecting’ were asked the question, ‘What were your expectations of what you could achieve as an advocate when you commenced the ‘Connecting’ program? The answers to this were multi-fold. Each teacher/SSO had a different way of expressing their expectations and in synthesising the responses, some loss of detail has inevitably occurred. The expectations of teachers/SSOs could be summarised as being:

- to personalise the school experience;
- to raise students’ confidence in schooling;
- to offer practical help leading to well-being and achievement.
Three advocates conceded that they were unsure about what they could achieve. It seemed the uncertainty of commencing Advocacy led to one being ‘not sure of where I was going’ and another adopting a low-key role to ‘keep in contact and be there if needed’. Nobody expressed scepticism.

**Personalising the school experience**

The word ‘relationship’ was a key word used by teachers/SSOs to describe what they were expecting to achieve. Some referred to developing a relationship or ‘rapport’ with students; others referred to a ‘closer’ relationship with their student(s) or a level of friendship; some simply identified the aim as having a ‘good’ relationship. There was mention of forming ‘a closer relationship based on trust’, becoming ‘a trusted, approachable member of staff’ and ‘being regarded as a trusting adult’. Sometimes the closer relationship was for the benefit of the teacher as well as the student because, through Advocacy, they could ‘get to know students better’ and develop a ‘better understanding of children and their behaviour’. Teachers said that when there was the opportunity for ‘engagement with students at a different level’ they became ‘more aware of their academic and welfare needs’ and increased their ability to ‘understand their lives’. One advocate saw herself as a ‘mother/grandmother figure’ to those in her care while several others simply wanted to ‘give students someone to talk to outside their family contact’. The emphasis on relationships was strong.

**Raising students’ confidence in schooling**

While some advocates concentrated on personal relationships, others extended the concept of relationships to include the whole school community, a subtle but significant difference. There was one comment about ‘promoting ‘comfortableness’ with school’, another about providing ‘an opportunity for students to feel included and happy’. Another set of comments was centred around academic achievement, where advocates gave encouragement to ‘help boost student morale and desire to do well at school’ or ‘help a student feel more confident about school and their potential for achievement’. Occasionally comments covered a range of issues rather than one alone: (my expectation was) ‘engaging in dialogue that assists the social, emotional and educational progress of students; (I had) ‘high expectations of developing a link between the student, school and home without being a ‘welfare officer’’. The words ‘engagement’ and ‘connect’ or ‘connection’ were used repeatedly in responses: one advocate wrote notes about ‘connecting’ being essential to keep a student (s)he was seeing from dropping out of school.

**Offering practical help**

A frequently expressed expectation of advocates was that they could ‘make a difference’ and they sought to do this in a number of ways. One way was to listen to students’ concerns, ‘listen and talk through situations’, and ‘tackle problems raised by the student’ in a manner that could not take place in normal classes. Another way advocates expected to offer practical help was to ‘provide support for students to assist their progress and development’ at a level which transcended normal helpfulness and entailed being ‘available at any time of need’. Some advocates wanted to ‘make a difference’ by providing their student(s) with special advice to help them learn to be in control of their (bad) behaviour. Other advocates envisaged themselves as offering help in an indirect form such as acting as mentor or providing a positive role model.

**Expectations and fulfilment**

When asked whether their expectations of ‘Connecting’ were being fulfilled all but five advocates responded in the affirmative. While some felt it was too early to tell or could only respond with ‘I hope so’, the vast majority gave a positive response. About 40 percent of the teachers and SSOs gave an unqualified ‘yes’ in answer to
the question 'Are your expectations being fulfilled in this point of time?' and an equivalent proportion offered a 'yes, but...' answer. The qualifications included:

- partially;
- big change;
- evolutionary process;
- time restricted;
- time has prevented me doing as much as I wanted to;
- slowly;
- progress limited through absences;
- to a small degree;
- with some students but not others;
- sort of;
- the student is difficult.

The impression given was that some teachers and SSOs have not made substantial progress with Advocacy because of a lack of time, or, because it takes more than a few months to make progress. There is also a suggestion that it is not possible to succeed with all students in the program, although the number of responses in this category make it a minor issue.

**Outcomes of 'Connecting'**

*Emphasis on well-being*

The idea of student well-being has been strong in the Advocacy Model from its beginnings in 1998 but the adaptation of Advocacy for Middle Years students in 2001-2002 has resulted in greater concentration on well-being issues. When asked to reflect on their experiences of Advocacy and to estimate where their efforts had been concentrated, teachers/SSOs in the Middle Years study tended to list well-being higher than the other options in the list. The task in the questionnaire was to rank four areas of support according to the priority they had given them:

- enhancing the well-being of students;
- strengthening student-teacher relationships;
- supporting the learning process;
- enhancing student achievement.

The ranking activity, which involved placing numbers 1 to 4 next to the choices on the questionnaire, showed the following results as shown in Figure 4 below:
The emphasis on well-being in the Middle Years is of interest when compared with Advocacy in the Later Years of schooling. In the Later Years advocates have been principally involved in advancing students’ academic work: they have engaged in analysing learning styles, setting goals, helping with organisational skills or study skills and a range of things set out on the Archemeter: (www.advocacy.gsat.edu.au/Archemeter/Login.asp). The imperative was to build up students’ skills and support them so that they could pass their VCE examinations. Student well-being, although important, was a background issue. Since the Advocacy Model has been adopted into Middle Years programs, where there is no major educational milestone comparable with VCE, there seems to have been a significant shift towards student well-being.

The ‘Connecting’ study revealed that there were significant well-being issues in the lives of Year 5-9 students. When asked to indicate whether they had come across cases of students with conditions which could adversely affect their learning and performance at school every teacher/SSO, except a few who said it was too early to tell, marked some of the items in question 12:

- low self-esteem;
- social isolation within the school;
- family problems;
- conflict with teachers;
- intimidation/bullying by peers;
- depression.

A space was provided to record other categories of problems. Figure 5 shows the number of responses (not necessarily number of students) in these categories:
As Figure 5 shows, family problems and low self-esteem were the most common type of well-being issue uncovered through 'Connecting'. A sense of social isolation, experienced by students unable to mix with others in the school community, was also quite prevalent. Young people in conflict with their teachers or their peers was also a significant factor, especially if teachers and peers are combined into one ‘conflict’ category rather than being regarded separately. A relatively small number of cases of depression was encountered. Not shown on the graph are the problems mentioned by teachers in the ‘other’ category on the question sheet: there were two reports of having discovered ‘risk taking behaviour’, there was one case of compulsive behaviour and one of anger management.

Early Intervention

The framework for early intervention into student problems, established by the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project, has been, by and large, effective. Advocates themselves regarded the ‘Connecting’ initiative as successful: the questionnaire responses to Question 13, ‘Is the ‘Connecting’ program an effective way of establishing early intervention for students with problems at school?’ produced 43 ‘yes’ answers from 51 respondents. The small number, eight to be precise, who were unsure about ‘Connecting’s worth, did not discredit it directly. There was a feeling among them that Advocacy was just one effective way of screening and helping students, not the only way or the best way. The overall finding is that there was high regard for Advocacy as an approach for improving student support and welfare. ‘Connecting' had the capacity to ‘bring to light problems which staff did not know existed’, according to a respondent in one school, and there was even a comment suggesting that 'Connecting' should start before year 5 as many students required early intervention before the Middle Years.

Another strong endorsement of the ‘Connecting’ program was the view, taken by a large number of respondents, that all students should be participants in a ‘Connecting’ program. Question 15 of the questionnaire asked ‘Who, do you believe, is in need of a ‘Connecting’ program at your school?’ and 22 felt it was ‘all students’. For another 28 advocates, however, a form of targeting of individual
students seemed the best, so that those in greatest need could be reached, as Figure 6 below shows:

Figure 6: Teachers’ perceptions of students in need of ‘Connecting’.

Students ‘disconnected’ from school, suffering a lack of well-being or needing additional support to succeed at school were identified as needing an advocate to look after their needs. The survey found that some advocates obtained help for their students to augment the work they were doing themselves: most commonly they sought assistance from a trained welfare teacher or career adviser. Occasionally there was involvement of a professional counsellor, youth worker or community services worker. About half of all advocates had referred students to specialists for extra support at the start of November.

The effect on school culture and teaching practice
At a hypothetical level it would seem that the knowledge and experience gained by advocates in ‘connecting’ could have an effect on their teaching practice in some way. However, there was not a strong feeling amongst advocates that this had happened. There was some uncertainty surrounding the responses to the question, ‘Has your experience as an advocate influenced your classroom teaching in any way?’ possibly because of the shortness of teachers’ involvement and because they did not know how to assess whether they had changed or not. The identifiable effect that the ‘Connecting’ program and involvement with Advocacy had on many participants, even after a few months, was an increased awareness of some aspects of school life.

Twenty-one responses, almost half the total number, indicated that involvement in ‘Connecting’ had made a difference in their teaching because it had ‘raised awareness of problems facing students’. It had the effect of making one teacher, at least, ‘more conscious of looking for reasons for student non-compliance’, when faced with uncooperativeness. The expressions ‘reinforce’ and ‘raise consciousness’, used repeatedly in answering the question about the link between ‘connecting’ and everyday teaching practice, suggest that Advocacy had not necessarily introduced teachers to something new but had reminded them of something already known: ‘it has raised my consciousness of relating positively to students’; it ‘reinforces formation of positive relationships with children’. There
was greater awareness of ‘what affects students, how they react’, that social isolation seriously affects some students and that ‘education is about the whole person’. As well as gains in level of awareness there were gains in interpersonal relationships. A significant number of teachers remarked that, by participating in ‘Connecting’, they felt ‘more in tune with how students feel’ and ‘able to more effectively communicate with students’. The benefits gained from having learnt better listening skills, through professional development activities at La Trobe University, influenced some teachers to ‘strive to be more compassionate, to listen to students’. For more than twenty teachers there was a sense of having developed ‘better relationships with students’ as a result of ‘Connecting’.

There were, nonetheless, nineteen respondents who felt that Advocacy had not influenced them significantly: they gave a straight ‘no’ answer in response to question 18 regarding Advocacy’s influence on teaching. Many of the teachers who answered this way felt they were already highly aware of the interconnectedness between students’ backgrounds and well-being and that they had not learnt anything new. The principals of ‘Connecting’ had been known to some for years: ‘I already do it, daily’; ‘it is done everyday, as a matter of course’; ‘this is achievable in a primary classroom—it already exists’. The primary school, where the class teacher is with the same group almost all the time, is a school setting which facilitates the integration of Advocacy into daily teaching practice more than the secondary school setting does. The case study of Thomastown Meadows Primary School illustrates how ‘Connecting’ has become integrated into Year 5-6 class management with relative ease.

Integrating Advocacy into classroom management seemed an attractive proposition to some teachers, who regarded it as an ideal situation. Their view was, that integration of Advocacy is ‘a good long term goal’: they considered it ‘desirable in today’s society’ and, in the evolution of school culture, ultimately, ‘the only way to go’. However, while there was support for the idea, it was judged as impractical to integrate many aspects of Advocacy into classroom teaching. Although it was ‘a good idea’, it inevitably would result in a diminished program because ‘some aspects of Advocacy can be transferred to the classroom but not all’. There was a very strong body of opinion that one-to-one contact with students was the strength of the whole ‘Connecting’ program, that ‘one-to-one works best’.

What did seem desirable, and possible, to a number of teachers was a co-existence of the two approaches: that is, that ‘the notion of connection should underpin what we do as teachers’ but Advocacy should remain as a one-to-one interaction. It is possible, according to one teacher, to ‘integrate the manner in which we deal with students’ into daily practice but the benefits of one-to-one contact are ‘large’ and should not be let go. One reason given to keep one-to-one interaction was that ‘it can be very private’, another was the ‘conflict of roles’ argument, that you could not be disciplinarian and advocate at the same time but this belief did not appear to be strong overall. It is possible that this is an indication of a shift away from established beliefs about a teacher’s role and that teachers are, in varying degrees, comfortable about broadening their role.

Section Summary

It has been assumed that the 51 teachers and SSOs who provided information about their experience of ‘Connecting’ form a representative sample for this study: there were respondents from at least twelve schools, primary and secondary. While the sample is numerically substantial, almost half of 117 advocates, it could be that vital information has been lost from those who did not respond to the questionnaire. The results of the survey, however, do not suggest unrepresentative sampling. The nature of the questionnaire responses support the
idea that the sample includes advocates of all kinds: not only does the profiling show this but also the range of comments offered where individual answers were required rather than a choice from a list. There is no concern about imbalance in the sample.

The information obtained from advocates is summarised as follows:

- There is no classic profile of an advocate; people of all types have become involved in ‘Connecting’.
- Advocates vary in their level of confidence because some of the preparedness for the role comes from other life experiences.
- Many advocates want a chance to improve their counselling skills.
- There is a need to be better informed about and to form better links with professional services for young people.
- There was some variation in advocates’ expectations of what they could achieve through Advocacy: the most common intentions were to:
  - personalise the school experience;
  - develop student confidence and ensure progress;
  - give practical help to overcome problems.
- The majority of advocates felt they were achieving something worthwhile.
- There is high regard for Advocacy for its early intervention potential.
- There is confidence that Advocacy improves student support/welfare.
- ‘Connecting’ can be a learning experience/refresher for most teachers, raising their awareness of student problems and barriers to learning.
- Some teachers feel that principles of Advocacy can be (or already have been) integrated into classroom teaching.
- One-to-one interaction remains vital, even in an integrated situation.
Students

The things we talk about really helps get them off my chest. I’m really glad I have been chosen for this program. We talk about things that help me through the day (Secondary school student)

This section of the report provides details of the Phase Two students’ responses concerning their experience of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Project. As outlined in Section (i), three schools conducted support programs not initiated by the ‘Connecting’ Project. While the programs were run in the spirit of ‘Connecting’, their particular home group or mentorship approach did not represent the Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Project. To avoid significant weighting of the data, these schools have been excluded from the main body of data presented below. The responses of 121 students are considered in this part of the report including 53 females and 68 males with the majority being aged between 11 and 14 years and studying Years 5 to 9. Only a small number of students fell out of this range. In the interest of comparison and contrast, the student results obtained from one secondary school adopting the home group model as a basis for student support are addressed separately, later in this section.

Advocacy Program organisation

Student involvement in advocacy

As discussed previously, the Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Project schools determined student involvement using a variety of methods, including random selection, voluntary participation and targeted approaches where teachers would identify individual students they believed to be in need of further support. Often a combination of these selection approaches were employed by the schools to avoid negative associations being attached to Advocacy as a program only for ‘students at risk’. Most commonly, however, the trial schools employed a targeted approach to selection.

In the first instance, students were asked to indicate who, in their opinion, was in need of an Advocacy program at school. As shown in Figure 7 below, the majority of students responded that voluntary participation was the preferred option of involvement by saying, ‘Those students who choose to be involved’ should be in the program. However, the students demonstrated a confident and positive attitude towards Advocacy as a substantial number (38) commented that such a program should be made available for every student. Thirty-five responded that ‘students with special problems with being at school’ are in need of an Advocacy program at school.
Figure 7: Students’ perceptions of those in need of an Advocacy program.

Patterns of interaction
Meetings between students and their advocates enveloped a variety of schedules and formats. While the format for interaction ranged from an organised, scheduled approach to more adhoc encounters, in the main, there was little formality to the arrangement or conduct of sessions in the Phase Two trial. Most commonly the students indicated that their meetings with advocates were not scheduled at a regular time and that the length of the meeting often varied depending on the amount of time available and the severity of issues to be discussed. However, while a number of students were unsure of their particular meeting duration, many indicated a time frame of 10–20 minutes was usual. Other students generally met with their advocate teacher either once a week or fortnightly, and a small number were involved in advocacy sessions up to four times a week (as shown in Figures 8 and 9 below).

Figure 8: Frequency of scheduled meetings with advocate teacher.
For the most part, students involved in the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Program* willingly gave up their ‘free-time’, usually lunchtime, to meet with their advocate teacher. As the meetings were generally relatively short and considered to be of some benefit and/or an enjoyable experience, relinquishing a small amount of free time did not appear to create any ill will towards the Advocacy Program. Only a small number of students missed out on class time to participate in an advocacy session.

### The work of Advocacy

Students identified a wide range of ‘business’ that was taking place in their advocacy sessions. Discussion during the meetings could cover a range of areas—from the academic to the personal—including student-teacher relationship building, peer and family relationships, time management, goal setting and school-work related matters. The following list (in rank order from most common to least) outlines the main types of ‘business’ advocates helped students deal with:

- Problems understanding school work;
- Problems with friends;
- Problems getting work in on time;
- Getting myself organised and being on time
- Feeling unhappy & anxious;
- Having a plan for the term and/or school year;
- Problems with teachers;
- Problems with family;
- Not wanting to do any work.

Most predominantly, the students reported that their advocate teacher helps them deal with problems understanding school. Advocate teachers also both offered strategies and assisted students in a bid to resolve any problems that may have arisen with friends or in some cases, other class teachers. Matters or difficulties
associated with time management and organisational skills also featured strongly with advocates assisting their students to hand school work requirements in on time and encourage the development of both personal organisational skills and improved punctuality. For these students, there was a clear mix of both well-being/welfare and school oriented tasks taking place during their advocacy sessions.

**Student perceptions of Advocacy**

*The advocate teacher*

In response to the question, ‘Whom did you talk to, if you had a need, before you had an advocate?’ the students reported overwhelmingly that they generally talked matters of concern over with friends prior to being involved in the advocacy program. Parents also rated highly among those the students approached to gain advice or guidance or just simply talk things over. Disappointingly, the number of students who indicated they did not discuss their problems with anyone prior to having an advocate, was higher than the number of students who chose to talk to a teacher. That is previously, in some cases, students would rather talk to no one at all than approach a teacher with their problems. The students clearly recognised and accepted that not all teachers were suited to the role of advocate. Not surprisingly the student’s ideal of not only a ‘good’ teacher, but also of a ‘good’ advocate, was associated with qualities of a caring, kind, helpful, understanding and friendly nature; and someone who is both a good listener and an effective communicator with young people.

The students described their current advocate teacher most predominantly as someone who takes an interest in their progress at school and as someone who treats them with respect. Many students also commented that their advocate teacher provides an important opportunity for them to discuss particular learning difficulties. As evidenced by this participant, of equal importance to the students, was the teacher’s perceived level of trustworthiness... ‘I have someone to talk to that I can really trust because [I know] what I say to them doesn’t go any further.’ Clearly, the development of a sense of trust between the students and their advocates and similarly, the teacher’s perceived ability to treat the student’s problems or grievances seriously, were seen as essential characteristics of the advocate teacher—and indeed of the Advocacy Program. One student even suggested that the inclusion of non-teachers (that is, people from outside the immediate school environment) in the role of advocate could also offer potentially added benefits to the program.

Not surprisingly, as indicated in Table 1 below, an overwhelming majority of the students involved in the Advocacy Program reflected that they appreciate having somebody (the advocate) who makes a special effort to look after their needs at school. As commented by this student, ‘My advocate teacher is really nice and makes me feel special’. A considerable number of students commented that while they value having somebody they can approach for advice, they felt they did not require regular one-to-one contact with an advocate. Such students indicated that they would be happy to have contact with their advocate on an as-needs basis. ‘Every person should have one special teacher they can talk to about things that they don’t feel comfortable telling anyone else. Just someone to talk to every now and then.’ Some students commented further that while they did not feel they had any specific problems that needed addressing in a separate advocacy session, they enjoyed the experience of talking to their advocate all the same. For example, such comments included: ‘I just enjoyed having a chat, I didn’t have any problems that I needed to talk about’; and similarly, ‘I don’t have any problems but I like talking to my advocate’. 
A significantly smaller number of students in the sample indicated that they were happy to receive special attention from their advocate teacher but at this early stage in the Advocacy Program, had not noticed any difference to their performance at school or in their general sense of well-being. A small number of students commented that they could not see the point of engaging in discussion with their advocate teacher.

Table 1: How students feel about having an advocate teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT FEELING</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I appreciate having somebody who makes a special effort to look after my needs at school</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value having somebody I can approach for advice but I do not need to have contact with them regularly</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy to have special attention from my advocate teacher(s) but I don't think it makes a difference to my performance at school</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy to have to have special attention from my advocate teacher(s) but I don't think it makes a difference to how I feel within myself</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot see the point of having discussion with my advocate teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits & satisfaction of advocacy sessions**

Although a small number of students expressed that they had not had a worthwhile experience of advocacy, the majority of students could identify a number of benefits—both potential and real—from their advocacy encounters. The following is a brief list of some of the most commonly perceived and experienced benefits mentioned by students in the ‘Further Comments’ section of the distributed questionnaire:

- Someone to turn to
- Opportunity to get things off my chest
- Helps me deal with people who annoy me
- Helps me manage my anger & excitement
- Makes me feel special
- Spoils me
- Helps with peer group problems
- Advocate does not take sides
- Time management & organisation
- Helps me think about my work & planning
- Goal setting
- Assistance resolving problems
- Helps me through the day

As shown in Figure 10 below, a total of 107 students indicated that contact with their advocate had been beneficial in some way either ‘sometimes’, ‘most of the time’, ‘always or nearly always’. As noted positively by these students, ‘It was a great thing to do as it helped me in some ways’; and ‘It was really good and I feel that it has helped me.’ The positive questionnaire results showing how often students feel contact with their advocate is beneficial clearly outweigh negative experiences. While it is not disputed that an Advocacy Program such as this generates a good feeling among its participants, an evaluation so early in the Phase Two schools’ program implementation means the long-term, overall goal of
connecting students convincingly with their school and their learning program remains unclear at this stage.

Figure 10: How often students feel that contact with their advocate has been beneficial.

As summed up by this student, ‘This program has helped me with problems I have had so I think it would be good to keep it going at our school.’

The ‘home group’ model

*The home group is a waste of time, effort and space because we have to do work—we don’t discuss anything (Home group secondary school student)*

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, schools adapting the Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Program to a home group model were not considered in the main body of student data. However, in the interest of comparison and contrast, the student results obtained from one secondary school adopting the home group approach are briefly presented here. The responses of 60 students are considered in this part of the report comprising 28 females and 32 males with the majority being aged between 12 and 15 years and studying Years 7 to 9. As is the nature of the home group approach to student support, participation was compulsory and the format of the session was organised and scheduled at a regular time.

Although, at first, similarities can be drawn between some of the home group and one-to-one students’ responses, significant differences quickly emerge which result in a less than favourable account and overall rating of the home group approach to student support. Such an outcome is not surprising when considered in light of the findings in the antecedent of this evaluation which showed the Phase One home group student perceptions to be consistent with those found in Phase Two (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002).

The work of home groups
Students in the home groups reported that the predominant ‘work’ taking place in their sessions related to their school work and learning. Matters generally focussed on problems understanding school work, time management, goal setting/planning. Unlike the one-to-one advocacy, elements of well-being/welfare and relationship building seemed to be lacking—elements which of course are difficult to achieve in the large group setting. The following is a list, in rank order, outlining the main types of ‘business’ home group advocates helped students deal with:

- Problems understanding school work;
- Getting myself organised and being on time;
- Problems getting work in on time;
- Having a plan for the term and/or school year;
- Not wanting to do any work;
- Problems with teachers;
- Problems with friends;
- Feeling unhappy & anxious;
- Problems with family.

### Student perceptions of the home group approach

#### The home group advocate teacher

Like their one-to-one advocate student counterparts, students in the home group approach reported that they too talked matters over with friends prior to be involved in the program. Again parents rated highly as the usual point of guidance and advice; however, once more students indicated that they would rather not discuss their problems with anyone at all than go to a teacher.

In relation to perceptions regarding an advocate teacher’s qualities, the home group students’ responses were comparable to those students involved in the one-to-one model. They described their current advocate teacher most predominantly as someone who takes an interest in their progress at school and someone who treats them with respect. Many students also commented that their advocate teacher ‘helps me deal with things that annoy me’ and also provides the opportunity to discuss any learning difficulties that may arise.

In direct contrast to students involved in the one-to-one approach, an overwhelming majority of the students involved in home groups reflected disappointedly that they could not see the point of having discussion with their advocate teacher (see Table 2 below)—raising serious doubts about the effectiveness of the home group approach to student support under the guile of Advocacy. While other students valued having somebody they could approach for advice, they did not feel that regular contact with this person was required. As commented by this student, ‘I think they should leave us alone if we don’t want any help.’ A significantly smaller number of students indicated that they were happy to have special attention from their advocate teacher but, as is common in the large group approach, had not noticed any difference to their general well-being. However, given the low number of students who indicated that they had not noticed any difference to their academic performance, it would appear the home group’s focus on school related tasks may have been successful in improving student academic performance.

### Table 2: How home group students feel about having an advocate teacher.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOME GROUP STUDENT FEELING</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I appreciate having somebody who makes a special effort to look after my needs at school</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value having somebody I can approach for advice but I do not need to have contact with them regularly</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy to have special attention from my advocate teacher(s) but I don't think it makes a difference to my performance at school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy to have special attention from my advocate teacher(s) but I don't think it makes a difference to how I feel within myself</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot see the point of having discussion with my advocate teacher</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits & satisfaction of the home group approach**

As evidenced by the opening student quote to this section, the majority of students participating in the home group approach to Advocacy indicated that they had not had a worthwhile experience. In complete contrast to the students involved in the one-to-one approach, Figure 11 below shows that the majority of home group students felt that contact with their advocate teacher had either ‘never’ or ‘hardly ever’ been beneficial. It appeared the main reason for the student’s dissatisfaction with the home group approach was a perceived lack of staff/student interaction. In addition, there seemed to be an imbalance of focus on set tasks during sessions at the expense of elements of well-being/welfare. One student even commented that there weren’t enough ‘negative answers to circle on the questionnaire’ in relation to the home groups to adequately express his opinion.

Figure 11: How beneficial students in the home groups felt that contact had been beneficial.

![Beneficial contact graph](image)

The more traditionally based one-to-one advocacy model has potentially many benefits, not the least of which is the opportunity it allows for students to develop a different type of relationship with their teacher built on a new footing of increased mutual understanding and trust. The advocate teacher becomes a trusted, non-judgemental confidante who supports their student and, where
necessary, intercedes for them. Whereas, in contrast, it appears that the large group approach by nature does not allow for this different or new relationship between the teacher and students to develop. A key determinant influencing the success of Advocacy is the way in which individual schools adapt the program to fit within their existing processes and structures. In this respect, the home group model raises some serious concerns for the Middle Years team in terms of the future broad scale expansion and implementation of Advocacy to all schools.

Section Summary

The student section of the report can be summarised as follows:

- The responses of 121 students (including 53 females and 68 males) aged 11–14 years were considered.
- Student involvement in Advocacy was generally based on voluntary and targeted participation.
- Many felt that only those students who choose to be involved in Advocacy should participate. However, a substantial number of students indicated that the program should be made available to all students.
- Advocacy sessions ranged from formal structured, timetabled approaches to informal encounters. Meetings often varied in length and generally were not scheduled for a regular time or were held either once a week or fortnightly.
- A wide range of ‘business’ was taking place in Advocacy sessions including student-teacher relationship building, discussions about peer and family relationships, time management, goal setting and school-work related matters.
- Prior to becoming involved in Advocacy, the students mainly talked about problems with their friends and parents. Very few students approached a teacher to discuss problems.
- Advocate teachers were described as someone who takes in interest in progress at school and treats students with respect. The majority of students reflected that they appreciate having someone who takes a special interest to look after their needs.
- Most students reported that their contact with their advocate was beneficial.
- The home group approach to Advocacy adopted by some schools in the trial was not viewed favourably by the students. Many home group students felt that contact with their advocate teacher had not been beneficial. They felt it a waste of time and could not see any point to having discussion with their advocate.
This section of the report outlines the thoughts and opinions of parents regarding their child’s experience in the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project. Parents were asked to reflect on their initial expectations of the project and whether these were met, their child’s experience in the project and the impact of this involvement (both potential and real) on their child.

The approach to the parent data collection was two-fold: 1. It sought information about the child and their patterns of interaction at home prior to becoming involved in the project; and 2. It sought information on the child’s behaviour since becoming involved in the project. Such a two-fold approach enabled the Evaluation Team to develop a sense of the broader impact of the project on students. The responses of 31 parents, from both primary and secondary schools participating in the Phase Two trial, are considered in this part of the report.

**Expectations of Advocacy**

A number of parents did not have specific expectations of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project. However, it soon became apparent in relation to one primary school in particular, that a few parents were obviously confusing the Advocacy project with a transition program that had recently been implemented in the school. Although incorporating some of the elements of Advocacy, the main purpose of that program was to guide and assist students to ensure a smooth transition from primary to secondary school.

The majority of parents surveyed expressed a basic understanding of, and familiarity with, the task of Advocacy. They articulated expectations of the project spanning psychological well-being, the formation of better relationships with teachers, through to the opportunity to be listened to and taken seriously. While the following list describes the expectations most commonly reported by the Phase Two parents, these expectations were by no means discrete. Instead, parents expected for their child, an effective blend of the following:

| Pathway different from the ‘norm’ to take in relation to psychological well-being; | Anger management & responsible decision making; |
| To be able to talk in confidence about concerns regarding home or school life; | To encourage a better attitude towards school; |
| To form better relationships with teachers; | To be listened to and any worries taken seriously; |
| To gain an understanding of self-worth; | To have a confidante outside family & friends; |
| To give students a sense of belonging & a caring family type atmosphere; | To make my child happier at school. |
In the main, parents expected the Advocacy project to offer their child an opportunity to talk openly with a trusted confidante covering matters mostly relating to well-being. That is, to guide the students in the development of their self-awareness, to encourage relationship building and responsible decision-making, and to promote within the students a sense of belonging or connectedness to their school experience. Nearly all parents surveyed indicated that it is a good idea that teachers become more involved with students as individuals and not only teach them designated subjects. Only one parent felt teachers should concentrate on teaching and leave general guidance to parents and friends.

While parents reflected that some of their expectations of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project had so far been met, they did so with a cautionary note concerning the relatively short time frame in which the program had been operating prior to the evaluation. Ideally, a longitudinal study is warranted before such questions regarding the meeting of expectations and the overall impact of the project can be fully addressed.

**Behaviour prior to Advocacy**

As mentioned previously, parents were asked to reflect on their child’s behaviour prior to their becoming involved in the Advocacy Project. As shown in Figure 12 below, the majority of parents indicated that their child regularly discussed school matters at home, with 10 parents commenting that their child occasionally talked about school. Equal numbers of parents (3 each) indicated their child only talked about school with them if something special happened or only if they asked.

![Figure 12: The frequency of student/parent interaction discussing school matters at home prior to becoming involved in the Advocacy program.](image)

By far, the most common two issues raised by students at home with their parents were upsets with classmates and concerns about the behaviour of particular teachers. Other common issues included contention regarding school rules and routines, in addition to the dislike of lessons and difficulty with learning tasks.
Twenty-four parents felt matters were discussed adequately at home, and only five felt they were not.

Figure 13: Adequacy of discussion between students and their parents regarding school matters prior to becoming involved in the Advocacy program.

![Adequate discussion graph](image)

**Behaviour since Advocacy**

In the interest of comparison, and as a means of measuring the impact of Advocacy, parents were also asked to reflect on their child’s behaviour since becoming involved in the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project*. As shown in Figure 14 on the following page, parents felt the frequency of their child’s discussion of school matters at home remained at much the same rate as before being involved in Advocacy. The evaluators were reminded again that the advocacy project was only in the very early stages of implementation at most schools, making any significant changes to student behaviour difficult to determine at this time. Five parents indicated their children raise issues relating to school ‘more than ever’ at home since being involved in Advocacy.

According to their parents, most students refer to their advocacy sessions in positive terms. While others do not refer to them in any particular way, eight parents indicated their child refers to their advocacy sessions in a mixture of both positive and negative terms. However, and most importantly, the majority of parents surveyed felt that, through Advocacy, their child has been offered a better opportunity to discuss school and possibly home and friendship matters in recent months. As summed up by this parent, Advocacy can play an important role in the school:

> Having had two children go through this program, I would have to say it is fantastic. I hope it continues to be implemented so that other children benefit. It certainly has a place in the school environment.
The frequency of student/parent interaction discussing school matters at home since being involved in the Advocacy program.

![Frequency of discussions](image)

Whether the students have had a better opportunity to discuss matters at school since being involved in the Advocacy Project.

![Better opportunity?](image)

The impact of Advocacy

Impact on well-being

Although recognising that the program was still in the early stages of implementation, parents were asked to estimate the impact of the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* on their child’s well-being. As shown in Figure 16 below, just over half of the parents surveyed indicated that the Advocacy Program had made ‘little or no difference’ to their child’s well-being. However, twelve parents reported their child had ‘benefited from the advice and support provided by the advocate teacher’. Other parents felt the program had made a difference.
simply because their child’s problems or concerns had been listened to. A common comment included, ‘I think the idea of having a teacher as a mentor/buddy is a positive one. It is helpful to have someone else to discuss matters with other than a parent.’ Some had seen a significant change in their child’s attitude to school.

Figure 16: The impact of the Advocacy Program on well-being.

![Impact on well-being chart]

**Impact on student/teacher relationships**

The evaluation survey offered a Further Comments section where parents were invited to share any further thoughts about the Advocacy Program. The results in this section clearly showed that parents valued the (real and potential) impact of Advocacy on their child’s relationships with their teacher(s). As identified by this parent, ‘It is wonderful to further enhance relationships in my daughter’s life.’ The most prominent finding in the antecedent to this report (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002) and recounted in the Phase Two results, is the importance of a good student/teacher relationship being the key component to a successful Advocacy program.

As summed up by this parent:

> I feel the program is very positive. It gives students and teachers a better understanding of each other. Without breaching confidentiality, teachers can relate any concerns to parents. This has helped me greatly as a single-parent, as a male role model helps when raising a 16 year old boy. I feel as time goes on, the advocate will influence my son and guide him on issues I am not understanding of. It has my one hundred percent support.

**Parent concerns**

Parents were asked to reflect on the conduct of the Advocacy Program, and consider any concerns (existing or potential) they may have. While the majority of parents indicated few concerns about the conduct of the program, a small number raised issues regarding the loss of their child’s teaching/learning time at school to participate in advocacy sessions. Two parents suggested that the one-to-one relationship between the teacher and child is a concern to them, however this was not in the context of abuse or compromise, but rather if the student and teacher did not get along together. As explained by this parent, ‘The relationship between a student and teacher could be a concern if the student and teacher do not get on. This can be difficult in a small school with fewer teachers to choose [an advocate] from.’
Issues of confidentiality and privacy were also raised as potential concerns, particularly in relation to students feeling inhibited reporting another classmate’s or teacher’s behaviour in their advocacy session for fear of reprisal. A parent observed, ‘My child has commented that she wouldn’t like to report incidents that have occurred as it may get back to her teacher.’ Such filtering back of comments or information may also be of concern to some parents, particularly where private, family matters are discussed during the advocacy meeting.

A final question was raised by one parent concerning the professional expertise of advocate teachers, and the level of training or professional development they receive prior to, and after, becoming a child’s advocate. This parent queried, ‘...are the teachers equipped to deal with more delicate matters?’ Parents need to be assured that their child’s advocate teacher possesses the necessary skills and qualities to deal effectively and discreetly with any sensitive matters that may arise during advocacy meetings. The scope of professional development could be broadened, and regular, ongoing ‘in-service’ activities conducted both for, and by, (champion) advocate teachers.

Section Summary

Overall, parents expressed a positive attitude towards Advocacy and were pleased with their child’s experience in the Project. The parents were mindful that the Connecting Through the Middle Years Advocacy Project had been operating for only a short time in the trial schools, and were therefore reluctant to make grand statements concerning significant changes in their child’s behaviour or attitude towards school since being involved in Advocacy. They did, however, see the program as credible and hold high hopes for the future of Advocacy and the potential benefits for student well-being.

The information obtained from 31 parents can be summarised as follows:

- Parent data collection was two-fold seeking information about their child and patterns of interaction at home prior to, and since, becoming involved in the Project.
- Many parents did not have specific expectations of the Advocacy Project and some confused Advocacy with a transition program.
- Most parents expressed a basic understanding of, and familiarity with the task of Advocacy.
- Parents were mindful of making grand statements regarding their child’s achievement or progress given the relatively short time in which the Project had been operating.
- Many parents indicated that their child regularly interacted about school matters at home and this rate remained around the same when involved in Advocacy.
- Parents reported that their child most commonly raised issues at home regarding upsets with classmates and concerns of particular teacher behaviour. School rules and routines, the dislike of lessons and difficulty with learning tasks were also raised.
- Parents reported that their child generally refers to their advocacy session in positive terms.
- Just under half of the parents indicated that their child had benefited from the advice and support provided by the advocate teacher.
- Parents valued the (real and potential) impact of Advocacy on their child’s relationships with their teacher(s).
- Concerns were raised in relation to:
the loss of any teaching/learning time by being involved in Advocacy;
if the child and advocate did not get along (particularly in a small school where there are fewer teachers to choose an advocate from);
issues of confidentiality and privacy; and
the professional expertise of teachers to deal with delicate or sensitive matters.
Summary of survey findings

A number of key points, derived from the wide range of survey findings, have emerged as being significant. Key points were identified, firstly, using a process of analysis whereby main findings from the data were separated from supporting detail. The sorting process was augmented by value judgements which estimated the importance of each item in relation to the project aims, outlined in the Introduction, and issues raised in previous studies of Advocacy. The following list ensued:

1. ‘Connecting’ Phase Two resulted in establishment and adaptation problems for some schools.

Although 65% of schools in the sample established effective ‘Connecting’ programs by November 2002, 15% did not achieve this goal and a further 20% had adapted the concept of Advocacy to a degree where it was no longer representative of the initiative undertaken by the Middle Years project.

2. Those schools with established ‘Connecting’ programs wanted to continue.

Information from coordinators, advocates, students and parents support the view that participants in the program are happy and that optimism surrounds the establishment of Advocacy in the Middle Years. Fewer than 10% of participants felt their expectations had not been fulfilled.

3. The success of ‘Connecting’ was strongly tied to student-advocate interaction on a one-to-one basis.

Although there have been well-intentioned efforts to establish Advocacy programs on a whole-school basis, feedback indicates that home-group arrangements have not succeeded, overall. Student feedback, in particular, has been negative about large group arrangements.

4. ‘Connecting’ opened up channels of communication within schools.

Students, parents and advocates were pleased with the increased opportunity for interaction and dialogue brought by the ‘Connecting’ initiative. Students benefited from increased participation in discussion and advocates benefited from listening.

5. ‘Connecting’ promoted a sense of care within school communities.

Individual attention given in advocacy meetings not only contributed to students’ connectedness to school but gave teachers professional satisfaction by giving them the chance to ‘make a difference’.

6. Phase Two schools emphasised student well-being in their ‘Connecting’ programs.

There was less emphasis on learning plans, study methods and goal setting compared with Phase One schools and more emphasis on the well-being of the learner. Barriers to effective learning such as social and emotional problems were prioritised.

7. The shift to well-being issues in ‘Connecting’ created new needs for professional development.

Some advocates experienced a lack of confidence in dealing with some issues and expressed the need for professional development in the areas of (a) counselling...
and (b) understanding youth support systems in the wider community, as well as in the area of career advice.

8. **Advocates had confidence in ‘Connecting’ for its potential in early intervention into student problems.**

The knowledge some advocates acquired was used to prevent an escalation of students’ problems and avert a decline in their well-being. The role of ‘Connecting’ in preventing problems from developing has also been recognised.

9. **There was a preference for targeting students to participate in ‘Connecting’ in Phase Two schools.**

Random selection of students, preferred in earlier Advocacy projects, was replaced by targeting of students. Most schools strove to give students with the greatest need of support opportunities to ‘connect’ ahead of others.

10. **There was considerable support for an expansion of the role of the teacher.**

Parents were comfortable with the highly personal nature of interactions taking place through ‘Connecting’ but a need for advocates to be better prepared for their expanded role was recognised. Parents did not regard the supportive actions involved in Advocacy as intrusive or inappropriate for a teacher to carry out.

11. **Involvement in ‘Connecting’ had the potential to influence teachers’ classroom teaching.**

Some teachers found their experiences in Advocacy of value for reviving and maintaining a consciousness of well-being issues in students’ lives. Advocacy developed their professionalism, indirectly, by increasing their understanding of learning and behavioural traits requiring special attention.
PART THREE: SELECTED CASE-STUDIES

(i) The Case-studies

The four case-studies of the Phase Two *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* Evaluation are collated in the accompanying *Volume 2* of this Evaluation Report.
(ii) Case-study thematic analysis

The themes emerging across the four case-studies, and indeed supported by the questionnaire data presented in the preceding sections of this report, can be condensed to five common themes upon which the following thematic analysis is primarily based. While common issues could be identified, the case-study schools were not necessarily always in agreement regarding their resolution—none-the-less their Advocacy Programs were each, in their own individual way, considered a success.

Theme 1: The professional development of teachers as advocates

For participants of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project Phase Two trial, the initial intensive professional development sessions conducted by La Trobe University project officers and lecturers were paramount to their motivation. In all instances, this professional development not only inspired the teachers and advocacy co-ordinators to develop their own program, but also provided the impetus for this to happen. Staff involvement in such activities is considered a fundamental component of a successful innovation in student support.

Some schools also engaged their staff in expanded professional development activities above and beyond the initial La Trobe University sessions (see for example, the case-studies of Beaumaris and Thomastown Meadows Primary schools, and Wodonga West College). Although teachers indicated they were satisfied with the professional development they had received, as advocates, they often raised the suggestion that they would benefit from additional instruction covering the fundamentals of counselling and associated skills. It is interesting to note, that some of the more successful Advocacy Programs in the trial (see for example, Lakes Entrance Secondary College case-study), were those involving advocate teachers who were able to draw on broader skills and knowledge acquired through their own post-graduate studies or involvement in outside organizations. As a result, there is a burgeoning need for not only continued professional development, but professional development that encompasses a broadened variety of activities and foci.

Theme 2: The establishment of Advocacy and facilitating cultural change

Advocacy, as a program of student support, afforded the Phase One and Two trial schools the flexibility to adopt an approach that best suited their individual circumstances and processes. It allowed a number of people to be involved in the general shaping of the program and then unfold it in their own unique way. Throughout this evaluation it has become increasingly clear that there is no single prescribed model for the establishment and management of an Advocacy Program. Although one-to-one advocacy arrangements were most beneficial, these arrangements can be established and managed in a variety of ways. Indeed, as revealed in the following case-studies, a program of student support using a one-to-one student-teacher arrangement can be equally effective even when its particular modus operandi differs to another. The Lakes Entrance Secondary College and Wodonga West College case-studies provide specific examples of how two very different approaches to Advocacy can work.

While the initial stages of establishing an Advocacy Program can be time consuming, it is the task of effecting cultural change within the school that proves most difficult (see for example, Beaumaris and Thomastown Primary Schools).
Advocate co-ordinators and advocates themselves often struggled with their colleagues that Advocacy was in fact more than they were doing as good classroom teachers. Many staff members needed to be convinced that there is a higher level to the work of Advocacy and that it is a credible program of expanded, individualised student support. Although not all teachers were completely convinced of this distinction, they could see the potential for real benefits in enhancing student well-being—the start perhaps of the process of facilitating cultural change impacting on the ways in which students and teachers come to experience life in schools.

**Theme 3: Student selection and targeting advocacy according to need**

The approach to student selection, as recommended by the Middle Years team, was based on random sampling. However, the majority of Phase Two schools did not favour this method alone and adopted a more strategic approach involving a mix of random and targeted selection. This blended approach to student selection was to ensure Advocacy was not perceived in a negative light as being a program only for those students believed to be ‘at risk’. As demonstrated by the case-studies, students with diverse personalities, interests and varying degrees of problems were identified for participation in the program. All four case-studies provide good examples of the selection process for the purposes of the trial. However, with limited resources and existing staffing levels, the potential large scale implementation of Advocacy across all schools, may require a targeted approach of regular one-to-one support while enabling access to Advocacy for other students on an as-needs basis.

**Theme 4: The expanding teaching profession and integration of roles**

The professional role of teachers has become increasingly diverse over time and is in a continual state of change and expansion. The advocate teachers participating in the evaluation recognised the expanding role of their profession beyond that of the conventional subject-centred teacher and regard the goals and principles of Advocacy as a key element in this expansion.

Through its construction of Advocacy, the *Connecting Through the Middle Years Project* highlights some of the difficulties teachers experience in establishing roles that integrate both aspects of the advocate and traditional subject-centred teacher. The evaluation noted a discourse in the questionnaire and case-study data that for some teachers, these roles are dichotomous in nature due to the potential for a conflict of interest. As a result, for some schools, it was a deliberate strategy that advocate teachers not teach the children they are supporting (see for example, Beaumaris Primary School case-study). However at other schools, the class teacher became the advocate which enabled them to extend the level of support they offer to individual students. By integrating the roles of class teacher and advocate, they were able to make the support more effective and develop a different type of relationship with their students (see for example, the case-study of Thomastown Meadows Primary School). Meeting the aims of the Middle Years Advocacy Project would suggest that an integration of the roles of advocate in ways that inform and expand the role of teacher would be preferable.

**Theme 5: ‘Knowing me, Knowing you’—advocates and students acquiring a shared knowledge of one another**

An obvious shift in focus has manifest from the *Connecting Through the Middle Years* Phase One Pilot study, to the Phase Two evaluation findings that neatly complements the expansion of the teaching profession and the integration of
professional roles theme discussed above. This shift in focus has seen the Phase Two advocate teachers place a higher emphasis on the social welfare and emotional well-being of students (see for example, Thomastown Meadows Primary School and Lakes Entrance Secondary College case-studies) than their Phase One counterparts.

The value of the one-to-one student-advocate teacher relationship has been articulated most fervently in the Phase One Pilot study and has re-emerged as an important theme in the Phase Two evaluation. Indeed, the significance of this relationship is further highlighted and supported in findings across the four case-studies, particularly in relation to the benefits for student social and emotional well-being (see for example, Wodonga West College, Lakes Entrance Secondary College and Thomastown Meadows Primary School case-studies). The intensive, personalised nature of the one-to-one relationship contributes to the well-being/welfare flavour of the Phase Two study, and allows both the student and the advocate teacher to acquire a shared deeper knowledge of one another—a mutual understanding that arguably rests on a higher plain than achievable within the usual conventional teacher/student roles. The result of this deeper, shared knowledge is potentially very powerful with the capability to prevent an escalation of students' problems and avert a decline in their well-being, thus creating more rewarding and satisfying school experiences of both the teacher and student.
PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

The Conclusion links the research findings of the evaluation, that is, the thematic analysis of the case-studies (pages 55-57) and the summary of survey findings (pages 52-53) with the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project aims presented in the introduction to this Evaluation Report (page 8).

Importantly, the overall research findings from the evaluation of Phase Two of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Project are compatible with, and an extension of, those reported in the Final Report of the Evaluation of Phase One of the Project (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002).

There were five components to the project aims. These are, in brief:

1. To improve the social connectedness of young people to school;
2. To improve self understanding and attitudes to life-long learning;
3. To establish individual learning and pathway plans;
4. To improve knowledge of individual students;
5. To develop approaches for teachers to work with young people and provide support materials.

The survey findings and the case-studies thematic analysis show that these aims have been largely fulfilled in the Connecting Through the Middle Years Phase Two Project, though some aspects of the aims have not been fully realised. In addition, there have been gains, not necessarily anticipated, such as the raising of consciousness of student well-being issues amongst teachers, a better awareness of early intervention into student problems and a realisation that cultural change at the school level is needed in order to more fully address issues of student support.

This concluding commentary of the evaluation of the Connecting Through the Middle Years Phase Two Project is structured by reference to each of the five aims of the Project.

Aim 1:

To improve the social connectedness of young people to schools through promotion of a direct relationship between a teacher and a young person.

The survey findings show that this aim has been fulfilled to a high degree. It was only in schools where a ‘home group’ approach was used instead of a ‘one-to-one’ approach that ‘advocacy’ sessions had not been regarded as successful. Significantly, this mirrors the finding of the Phase One evaluation that a large group approach to Advocacy is problematic:

Grouped Advocacy or class-centred Advocacy as an implementation strategy is not only a clear departure from the espoused implementation model of Advocacy programs but it is also in danger of replicating the very conditions that are, for some students, weakening their connectedness to school (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002, p. 35).

The one-to-one approach, by contrast, has been welcomed and viewed as beneficial by teachers, students and parents alike; a positive response which can...
be interpreted as evidence of improved student-teacher interaction and relevant to increasing young peoples’ sense of connectedness to school.

Survey finding 5, that ‘Connecting’ promoted a sense of care within school communities, reinforces observations that the Project improved students’ sense of connectedness to school. The finding, derived from a large number of students who noted their appreciation in having somebody available who makes a special effort to look after their needs at school, is an important indicator that ‘Connecting’ had been successful. Equally, the fact that both students and advocates wanted ‘Connecting’ to continue is evidence that the aim of improving connectedness for the students involved in Phase Two has been fulfilled.

**Recommendations:**

1. That ‘Connecting’ be more widely implemented in the Middle Years to:
   - raise teacher awareness of social and emotional issues underlying learning at school;
   - enable teachers to gain better knowledge of individual students; and
   - place a special focus on the role of the teacher and cultural change in schools as teaching/learning organisations.

2. That one-to-one or small group advocacy meetings continue to be modelled as the most effective means of ‘Connecting’ in the roll-out of ‘Connecting’ programs to more schools.

**Aim 2:**

*To increase personal skills relating to self-understanding and to develop more positive attitudes towards life-long learning.*

The research findings show that ‘Connecting’ has contributed to students’ understanding of themselves and of problems that interfere with learning, but the findings do not reveal any specific emphasis being placed on life-long learning. The survey findings support the idea that students were given many new opportunities to develop self-awareness and to try new approaches to solve personal and learning problems. The case studies, in particular, show how teachers have helped their students with a range of personal and interpersonal matters so as to promote their social and emotional well-being. Students themselves have drawn an association between emotional upset and poor performance at school, highlighting the importance of schools’ involvement in well-being issues. The interplay between emotional well-being and student performance confirms the need to target students for ‘Connecting’ programs. Both Theme 3 in the Case-studies Thematic analysis and Survey Finding 9 identified the importance, from the school perspective, of selection procedures for student participation in ‘Connecting’ programs which included targeting students most in need of developing personal skills related to self-understanding and well-being.

The issue of life-long learning, however, seemed not to figure as a dominant issue for advocates in the Phase Two trial schools; advocates typically had other more pressing priorities in mind. Given the chance, in the questionnaire, to describe their expectations of ‘Connecting’, none of the respondents mentioned life-long learning, although some referred to motivation for learning and achievement in learning. The fact that life-long learning has been overlooked in ‘Connecting’ Phase Two invites a reappraisal of its place in the Program, which has focused on issues of student support and well-being.
Recommendations:

3. That an element of targeting be included in the selection of students for participation in ‘Connecting’ programs to ensure those in obvious need of personal skills development for self-understanding and well-being are not excluded.

4. That students’ immediate needs relevant to improved self-understanding and well-being be recognised and balanced against long term aims such as the improvement of attitudes to life-long learning.

Aim 3:

The promotion and development of individual learning and pathways plans, leading to individual learning programs and processes.

This aim appears not to have been fulfilled, although some advocacy sessions had involved discussions about learning, goals and related matters. The pattern was that ‘Connecting’ programs were conducted in an informal way, without the guiding influence of the Archemeter, which was abandoned by the trial schools early in Phase Two. Advocacy, in its transfer from the Later Years to the Middle Years, has undergone a metamorphosis and taken on a new form. As Survey finding 6 and Theme 5 show, teachers’ attention has been transferred away from learning issues to student well-being, foregrounding social and emotional factors that may negatively influence the learning capacity of young people.

The Evaluation showed that the transfer of interest away from individual learning programs and processes was not an either/or proposition for the teachers involved. The issue was one of giving time and space to the well-being of students whilst continuing to promote student learning and progress through the school curriculum. It was from this positioning of student well-being development within the school context that the evaluation was able to identify additional beneficial outcomes not specified in the Project aims. Although not targeted initially, these outcomes have an importance in the area of student support and for the wider issues of the role of the teacher and the cultural change processes under way in schools.

Firstly, as Survey finding 11 shows, the ‘Connecting’ project had the effect of raising teachers’ consciousness of well-being issues in relation to classroom teaching. The experience of ‘connecting’ with students made teachers more aware of the fact that social connectedness to school and well-being in general had a large role to play in learning. Not only did it make them more aware but, as Survey finding 5 shows, it provided a sense of professional satisfaction. The experience of ‘Connecting’ also made many teachers more aware of underlying issues associated with the existing institutional culture of their schools. Theme 2 of the Case Studies analysis shows that ‘Connecting’ has sparked debate about the level of individual student care in schools and whether there is a need to isolate it from classroom practice. This, in turn, has led to reflections on the role of the teacher, as explained in Theme 4. While the role of the school teacher has expanded over recent times, there is, undeniably, the potential for tensions when teaching duties and responsibilities begin to include those arising from new teacher roles akin to ‘parenting’ and/or adult-youth friendships. This potential for tensions is expanded in the commentary under Aim 4 below.

The Middle Years Project Team faces the task of assessing the place of individual learning, pathways planning and life-long learning in improving students’ connectedness to school. There is the clear option of accepting the changes that have occurred in accommodating Advocacy into the Middle Years of schooling, as
demonstrated in the Phase Two trial schools referred to in this Report, and then supporting teachers as they build new pedagogies based upon a fuller awareness of their students as individuals, individuals often in need of support related to their well-being and emotional health.

**Recommendations:**

5. That ‘Connecting’ programs involving the Middle Years be conceptualised as an integration of strategies aimed at improving both student emotional health and student learning capability.

6. That the Department Of Education and Training strengthen its links with health professionals to support the work of advocates in ‘Connecting’ programs.

**Aim 4:**

*Improved knowledge within the learning organisation of individual students.*

This aim has been completely fulfilled. Theme 5 shows that the increased attention to the social and emotional aspects of students’ lives and to well-being issues that affect learning has resulted in teachers having a better knowledge of the young people they are teaching. Some of this knowledge is shared informally, in staff rooms, rather than remaining with the advocate alone. Advocates take care that information of a sensitive nature is not disclosed whilst helping their colleagues understand underlying causes of students’ learning difficulties or behaviour in class. Survey finding 4, that ‘Connecting’ opened up channels of communication within schools and Survey finding 5, that ‘Connecting’ promoted a sense of care within school communities, also indicate an improved knowledge of individual students as does Survey finding 11, which noted that teachers gained by ‘increasing their understanding of learning and behavioural traits requiring special attention’.

While gaining knowledge of the individual student can only be viewed positively and be regarded as supporting teaching practice and teachers’ professionalism, it does raise questions about school responsibility and, as mentioned in the commentary under Aim 3, about the potential for tensions related to the sensitive nature of student-based information that teachers may become privy to in the course of their ‘Connecting’ work with students. While undoubtedly this potential is not new in the day-to-day work of teachers generally, its probability of actualisation is greatly increased through teacher involvement in ‘Connecting’ programs. There are risk factors that teachers need to be aware of, and protected from, in terms of their own professional and legal liabilities.

Related to this point are the questions relating to the level of school responsibility in matters associated with supporting student well-being. How does the school set limits that protect the individual student from invasion of privacy and an ‘institutional gaze’ that is beyond a level acceptable to families while at the same time attending to student well-being and learning interests? Some students interviewed in the evaluation of Phase One of the ‘Connecting’ Project indicated this was an issue of importance to them. Additional questions of relevance are, for example:

- should information be recorded and, if so, to what extent and in what form?
- how should this information be used, if at all, beyond the immediate scope of the ‘Connecting’ program?
recommendations:

7. That the Department of Education and Training develop further its existing policy on Privacy and Protecting Information (Practising Privacy) to include advice to teachers undertaking the role of advocate in ‘Connecting’ programs.

8. That the Department of Education and Training develop its existing policy advice and guidelines on the legal liabilities of schools and teachers to include the role of advocate in ‘Connecting’ programs.

9. That schools be encouraged to continue to acquire ‘indepth’ knowledge of their students using ‘Connecting’ programs within which advocacy practice is informed by the policy developments identified in Recommendations 7 and 8 above.

aim 5:

the development of approaches and dissemination of support materials for teachers working with young people.

the first part of this aim has been achieved. Teams of advocates, themselves, have developed distinctly different approaches to working with students within a one-to-one Advocacy arrangement for other schools to adopt or adapt. They have, in some instances, created strong links between Advocacy and class management and, in others, emphasis has fallen on listening and allowing students to ‘unburden’ their problems. As Theme 2 of the case studies thematic analysis shows, a number of implementation approaches have emerged as effective.

the second part of the aim has not been fulfilled. Although highly effective conferences were held in September and October 2002, there were no support materials evident beyond the conferences themselves. This is not seen as problematic since the Middle Years team required feedback from both Phase One and Phase Two evaluative studies before targeting aspects of ‘Connecting’ for improvement. The Phase Two study, through Theme 1 and Survey finding 7, recommends a broader range of professional activities than presently offered.

recommendations:

10. That professional development associated with ‘Connecting’ programs be expanded to accommodate the emerging needs of teachers in:

- Counselling;
- understanding child and adolescent well-being health issues in relation to learning; and
- giving individual learning pathways advice leading to further study and employment.

an overall assessment of the Connecting Through the Middle Years initiative shows that those aims of the ‘Connecting’ Project which have been fulfilled in Phase Two of the Project were those focusing on student improvements in the areas of:

- social connectedness to school; and
- development of personal skills and relationships.
In addition, the aim of acquiring a better knowledge of individual students was met.

The aims of the project not fully realised through Phase Two of ‘Connecting’ were those associated with:

- the development of positive attitudes to life-long learning;
- the development of individual learning and pathway plans; and
- dissemination of support materials for teachers.

An outcome of the evaluation which may need additional attention is the fact that a number of Phase Two trial schools could not get either a ‘Connecting’ program functional in their school or, if they did, merged it with other established programs in the school so that it was no longer aligned, in concept or spirit, to the Advocacy strategies that were to provide the ‘Connecting’ Project with its innovative protocols and procedures. As Survey finding 1 revealed, 35% of schools in Phase Two fell into this category and it could be that better support is needed, for some schools, in the initial stages of ‘Connecting’ establishment. This observation is supported by anecdotal evidence obtained from teachers in the course of carrying out the evaluation fieldwork in schools and at ‘Connecting’ professional development conferences. This additional support could be provided to schools by facilitating networks between ‘Connecting’ schools in local regions to assist teachers to envisage ‘Connecting’ in practice and through which teachers could exchange strategies associated with successful and sustainable programs.

The main area of attention for future development of Connecting Through the Middle Years is professional development, initially for strengthening the skills of individual teachers, and secondly in concomitant organisational change management by school managers. The continued and expanded professional development of teachers through ‘Connecting’ programs can be expected to also lead to changes in the role of the Middle Years teacher. These role changes may also produce a cultural change, overall, in the teaching profession at the Middle Years level which may well be the impetus for schools being regarded as teaching/learning organisations in which the emotional health and well-being of young people are promoted as necessary components of productive school-based learning environments—as the companions of effective pedagogical practices.

### Additional Recommendations

11. That consideration be given to assisting schools in the initial stages of establishing their ‘Connecting’ programs.

12. That the Department of Education and Training facilitate the development of teacher professional development networks through cluster school arrangements that build communities of ‘Connecting’ practice at the local level.

13. That schools implementing ‘Connecting’ programs be encouraged to implement advocacy arrangements that involve teachers as advocates for students that they teach as a deliberate strategy aimed at integrating both professional roles.

Complementary to the recommendations emerging from the Phase Two study outlined above, the Evaluation Team notes that the research findings further support those recommendations offered in the preceding Phase One Pilot Evaluation (Henry, Barty & Tregenza, 2002). While the majority of the Phase One recommendations have been subsumed in the Phase Two recommendations
presented above, there are others which have relevance for the management and conduct of ‘Connecting’ in general and are worth re-presenting here in conclusion.

**Phase One Recommendations**

14. That advocacy arrangements within ‘Connecting’ schools be informed by the following principles of better practice:

- Establish processes for recruiting advocates from within schools in the first instance. Based on this evaluation and the literature on advocacy, schools are encouraged to identify the characteristics of ‘good advocates’ and then recruit according to these characteristics.
- Only those teachers who volunteer to be involved in the Advocacy Program of a school be recruited.
- Teachers and students be granted the opportunity to select whom they wish to work with in their advocacy set.
- Explore the possibility of drawing on non-teachers in the role of advocate in the school after exhausting the available within school ‘manpower’ resource.

15. That ‘Connecting’ schools create a time and space for locating their ‘Connecting’ program within the routine timetabling arrangements for the school, recognising the tension between the organisational need to satisfy both the dominant grouped arrangements of normal classes and the one-to-one arrangements of the preferred advocacy approach within ‘Connecting’.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1

Coordinator Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to give the Evaluation Team an overview of the ‘Connecting Through the Middle Years’ program in your school. Please fill it in on your computer according to directions and SAVE your answers. Return the questionnaire by attaching it to an email addressed: kbarty@deakin.edu.au.

Key figures into the grey boxes on the right for the first four questions.

1. Approximately how many students attend your school?

2. How many students are involved in the ‘connecting’ program?

3. How many teachers are involved in the ‘connecting’ program?

4. How many months have students and teachers been ‘connecting’?

Click in the relevant box(es) for the next question.

5. What year levels are involved in ‘connecting’?

   Year 5
   6
   7
   8
   9

Click in the relevant box(es) to answer the next question. Questions 6, 7, 9 and 10 are also in ‘click the box’ format.

6. How are students selected for the program?
   - individuals are targeted
   - random selection
   - students volunteer

7. How are teachers involved?
   - on a voluntary basis
   - by incentives (eg extra time, pay)
   - as part of promotion (eg ETWR)
   - by invitation/persuasion

Write an answer to the next question by first clicking in the grey box. Questions 11, 12, 13 are in the same format.

8. Do you have people other than teachers acting as advocates? If so, who?

9. If your school uses the Archemeter how useful do you find it?
   - very useful
   - useful
   - not useful
10. How is your ‘connecting’ program structured?

- [ ] formally with set tasks (eg Archemeter)
- [ ] informally, determined by individual teachers
- [ ] a mixture of the above

11. What signs can you see that your ‘connecting’ program is or is not achieving its goals at this point in time?

12. In your opinion, what are the main factors that promote a successful ‘connecting’ program?

1. 
2. 
3. 

13. In your opinion, what are the main factors that impede a ‘connecting’ program?

1. 
2. 
3. 

14. What are your intentions for the program in 2003 and beyond?

- [ ] keep the program small and manageable
- [ ] expand the program to include more teachers and students
- [ ] discontinue when funding ends
- [ ] other:

Further comments:

The most convenient time(s) to contact me to arrange an interview are:

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<td>Time(s)</td>
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My preferred means of contact to arrange an interview is: (Please provide details)

- [ ] email:  
- [ ] Phone:  
- [ ] Fax:
Appendix 2

Teacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to give the Evaluation Team an overview of the teachers who are participating in ‘Connecting Through the Middle Years’ programs and what they are experiencing in their roles as advocates. Please fill it in on your computer according to directions and SAVE your answers. Return the questionnaire by attaching it to an email addressed: kbarty@deakin.edu.au.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please begin by providing information about yourself. Click in the grey box on the right and write an answer.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Sex</th>
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<th>2. Age</th>
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<th>3. Number of years teaching experience</th>
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<th>4. Subject teaching area(s)</th>
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<th>5. Other school responsibilities</th>
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<tr>
<th>Response to being an advocate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please reflect on your experience as an advocate. Click boxes to indicate your choice if this is an option (questions 12, 14, 16 and 17). If you are unable to generalise about your experience you may wish to leave out some parts and mention this at the end (quest. 20).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. How many days of professional development did you undertake before becoming an advocate?</th>
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</table>

| 7. Did you feel adequately prepared?                                                      |
|                                                                                           |

| 8. Do you teach students for whom you are an advocate?                                     |
|                                                                                           |

| 9. What were your expectations of what you could achieve as an advocate when you commenced the ‘connecting’ program? |
|                                                                                                           |

| 10. Are these expectations being fulfilled, in your opinion?                                    |
|                                                                                               |

| 11. Rank the following areas of student support according to the attention you believe you have given them: monitoring well-being of students strengthening student-teacher relationships supporting the learning process. |
| Write 'a', 'b', 'c' in the boxes.                                                                 |

| The most attention |
| Less attention     |
| The least attention |
12. Has the ‘connecting’ program brought to light factors which could adversely affect your students’ learning? 
*Mark any on the list and add others:*
- conflict with teachers
- family matters
- intimidation/bullying
- depression
- abuse
- other:

13. Is the ‘connecting’ program an effective way of establishing ‘early intervention’ for students’ problems?

14. Who, do you believe, is in need of a ‘connecting’ program at your school?
- all students
- certain students ‘at risk’
- students who depend on support to thrive in a school environment

**Use of support**
*Think about your interactions within your school and beyond.*

15. Are there any aspects of ‘connecting’ where you do not feel prepared/qualified to help students?

16. At what levels, if any, are there advocacy networks where you are able to discuss issues/strategies?
- school level
- school cluster level
- regional level
- community level

17. Have you referred students to any support services?
*Mark them on the list.*
- youth worker
- community services worker
- welfare teacher
- career teacher
- learning consultant
- psychologist
- counsellor
- other:

**Influence on teaching**
*Consider whether participation in advocacy has had outcomes for you as well as for students (or may do so in the long term).*

18. Has your experience as an advocate influenced your work as a class teacher in any way? How?

19. Do you consider it possible, in the long term, to integrate advocacy into everyday teaching (and not designate it as a separate activity)?

20. Please add any further comments:
### Appendix 3

**Student Questionnaire**

**About You**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boy / Girl</th>
<th>Age ..........</th>
<th>Grade/Year Level ..........</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Please read the questions and circle the answer that best suits you.**

1. **How often do you meet the teacher who is your advocate?**
   - a) Once a week
   - b) Once every 2 weeks
   - c) Once every 3 or 4 weeks
   - d) No regular time

2. **How long are your meetings?**
   - a) 10 minutes
   - b) 20 minutes
   - c) more than 20 minutes
   - d) I’m not sure
   - e) They vary in length

3. **Which of the following items on the list describe your advocate teacher(s)?**
   Choose as many as appropriate.
   - a) Takes an interest in my progress at school
   - b) Gives me the chance to talk about learning difficulties
   - c) Chats about my family and friends
   - d) Treats me with respect
   - e) Helps me deal with things that annoy me.

4. **Whom did you talk to, if you had a need, before you had an advocate?**

   If you circled a), what were the characteristics of this teacher?
   - a) A teacher
   - b) Friends
   - c) Parents
   - d) Coordinator at school
   - e) Nobody

   **Characteristics:**
5. Has your advocate helped you deal with any of the following?  
(Circle as many as you like)
- Problems understanding school work
- Problems getting work in on time
- Getting myself organised and being on time
- Having a plan for the term and/or school year
- Not wanting to do any work
- Feeling unhappy and anxious
- Problems with teachers
- Problems with friends
- Problems with family

6. How often do you have the feeling that your contact with your advocate has been beneficial?  
- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always, or nearly always.

7. Which of the following best describes your feeling about having an advocate?  
(Circle as many as you like)
- I appreciate having somebody who makes a special effort to look after my needs at school.
- I value having somebody I can approach for advice but I do not need have contact with them regularly.
- I am happy to have special attention from my advocate teacher(s) but I don’t think it makes a difference to my performance at school.
- I am happy to have special attention from my advocate teacher(s) but I don’t think it makes a difference to how I feel within myself.
- I cannot see the point of having discussion with my advocate teacher.

8. Who, do you believe, is in need of a ‘connecting’ program at school?  
- All students
- Students with special problems with being at school
- Students who choose to be involved
- No body
9. Please add any further comments if you wish (✓):

Please return your completed questionnaire to the Connecting Through the Middle Years co-ordinator at your school by **November 4th, 2002**.

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.*
### Appendix 4

**Parent Questionnaire**

*Please read the questions and circle the most appropriate response in the corresponding box. Some questions require a brief, written response (\(\checkmark\)).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1.</strong> What were your expectations of the ‘connecting’ program?</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>(\checkmark)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>2.</strong> Have these expectations been met?</th>
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<td>(\checkmark)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>3.</strong> Which of the following best reflects your attitude to the role of the teacher?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) It is a good idea that teachers become more involved with students as individuals and not only teach them designated subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Teachers should concentrate on teaching and leave general guidance to parents and friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please think about your child’s behaviour over a long period of time as you answer the following three questions.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>4.</strong> How often has your child generally talked about school at home?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Only if something special happens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Only if I ask</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>5.</strong> If your child has raised serious issues relating to school at home, indicate what they have been: (Circle as many as relevant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Dislike of lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) School rules and routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Difficulty with learning tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Upsets with classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Behaviour of teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>f) Other: (Please specify)</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>6.</strong> Do you feel that your child has discussed school matters adequately at home?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) No</td>
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</table>

*Please think about your child’s behaviour in recent times, since he/she has become involved in the ‘connecting’ program, as you answer the following questions.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>7.</strong> How often does your child raise issues relating to school at home?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Less frequently than before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) At much the same rate as before</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) More than ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Never</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
| 8. Does your child talk about his/her advocacy sessions? If so, how are they referred to? | a) In positive terms  
 b) In negative terms  
 c) A mixture of positive and negative terms  
 d) In no particular way |
| 9. Do you feel that your child has had a better opportunity to discuss school (and possibly home/friendship) matters at school in recent months? | a) Yes  
 b) No |
| 10. What, in your estimation, has been the impact of the ‘connecting’ program on your child’s well-being? | a) There seems little or no difference  
 b) It has made a difference that my child’s problems have been listened to.  
 c) My child has benefited from the advice/support provided by the advocate teacher.  
 d) There has been a significant change in my child’s attitude to school. |
| (Circle as many as relevant)                                             |                                                                         |
| Please add further comments if you wish:                               |                                                                         |
| 11. Do you have any concerns about the conduct of the ‘connecting’ program? | a) The loss of teaching/learning time at school is a concern  
 b) Confidentiality and privacy are an issue  
 c) The one-to-one relationship which is part of advocacy is a concern.  
 d) Other: (Please specify) |
| Mark any on the list and add comments if you wish.                      |                                                                         |
| 12. Please add any further comments if you wish:                        |                                                                         |
If you are willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview, please indicate the most convenient time(s) for us to contact you ():

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<th>Days</th>
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My preferred means of contact to arrange an interview is: (Please provide details )

- ☑ email: ________________________________
- ☐ Phone: ________________________________
- ☑ Fax: ________________________________

Name: ________________________________

Please return your completed questionnaire to the Connecting Through the Middle Years co-ordinator at your child’s school by November 4th, 2002.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.