Avoiding the Academic Attainment Drop

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What is valued in the transition between Grade 6 and Year 7?
Vinson explains that many principals described ‘being overwhelmed by the range of transition methods currently under consideration’ (2006, p85).

The risk here, as Vinson states, ‘a common enough problem in organisational innovation’, is that the very scale of what is being contemplated ‘can freeze the capacity to respond at any level’ (2006, p93).
The Reality: Vinson’s Research

- 95% of principals surveyed said they valued ‘detailed secondary/orientation information’ as ‘Vital/Important’

- 47% of principals described their co-ordinated transition programs as ‘fully or usually operating’.

The lowest ranking ‘transitional bridge’ was ‘learning and teaching’.

Support for ‘learning and teaching’ throughout transition (such as ‘teacher observation at primary and secondary’) were the lowest ranked actions.

Principals responded that ‘learning and teaching’ focuses were only addressed ‘fully or usually’ 8-10% of the time.
What does your school currently do to contribute to the ACADEMIC transition of Grade 6 to Year 7 students?

What kind of communication do you have with your feeder/future schools?

What value ($) is placed on LEARNING transition in your school?
Evidently, leaders understand the value in gathering and sharing information but there exists a gap between the *knowing* and the *doing*.

What are the consequences of not prioritising the value of transitioning effective learning and teaching information?
The ‘Academic Attainment Drop’

- Universally, academics concur that students experience a ‘loss in achievement’ during transitional years.

- Students potentially ‘lose’ up to a year of learning.

- Respected researchers from around the world agree this is ‘a global trend’.


Why does this happen?

Year 7 teachers fail to address the skills and content knowledge of individuals due to:

- Lack of useful (and trusted) information passed on from primary school (and primary school hesitation to detail information, if not convinced it is being used)
- Type of information shared is too 2-dimensional (see DEECD), and acts as a superficial introduction; a layer that is quickly shed

Also, Grade 6 students have very high expectations of the challenges awaiting them, and these expectations (for individual challenge) are not regularly met
In Primary: Are the Grade 6s so excited (and anxious) about secondary, that they have unrealistic expectations about the LEARNING challenges that lie ahead?

Do Grade 6 teachers have a lack of faith that their transitioned data will be used?

In Secondary: Do Year 7 teachers (and others) note how enthusiastic new students are, only to witness a declining in interest/motivation towards Year 8?

Do Year 7 staff have a lack of trust in the learning data transitioned from primary?
How can primary and secondary schools work together to strengthen the academic continuum of individual students?
We must all dismiss the ‘Fresh Start’ transition approach. It is a myth.

Behaviours, values, relationships, habits
= Fresh Start ✓

Ignoring the academic abilities of a child
= ‘Wasteful’ x

Avoiding the Drop

Fundamental need to:

1. Go above and beyond the DEECD regulated data transition process.
2. Ensure extensive feeder school communications about every individual.
3. Plan for materials and resources that address the needs of each individual.
THE BIG QUESTIONS

What learning information should we share between schools?

How will we share it?
At what point in the year does your school plan for your incoming/(outgoing) Year 7s (Grade 6s)?

What is the most efficient medium for you to use to correspond with feeder/future schools?
The ‘What’: Qualitative and Quantitative

- What do you think is important LEARNING information to share?

- How useful is it to share Grade 5 NAPLAN data and Grade 6 Lit/Num AUSVELS data?
1. ‘Demographics’ = enrolment and attendance data
2. ‘Perceptions’ = opinion surveys, such as the student attitude to school survey
3. ‘Student Learning’ = standardised tests, such as NAPLAN or Ondemand testing.

Question: Do you think standardised testing results are more important to share than teacher judgement?
However, the fourth measurement, one that Bernhardt suggests ‘seems to be the hardest for teachers to describe’ are the ‘School Processes’; what teachers actually do to get results from individual students.


NB: 6/24 claimed to regularly transition info, and 4/24 commented that they ‘had never’ transitioned any information

“HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY SHARE INFO BETWEEN FEEDER/FUTURE SCHOOLS?”

“If you only have a short amount of time for transition – as most schools have – like an hour, you end up talking about the kids who have problems.”
“HOW DO YOU TRANSITION INFO WITHIN YOUR OWN SCHOOL?”

“We didn’t used to have anything that was shared; now we have a proforma. It’s left up to the teachers’ devices to share this information – but, as teachers, most feel emotionally invested in the child they’ve just taught, and are hopefully likely to take time to go and speak with the next teacher.”
If schools struggle to create systematic and effective methods for the transference of learning data within their own walls, then it is equally, if not more, difficult to sustain any meaningful and systematic method of learning transference between schools.

ADDRESS THIS ‘IN HOUSE’ FIRST
What could you do (on a local scale) to address this between your feeder/future schools?
Bridging the Gap

- Quantitative transition data: NAPLAN, VELS & OnDemand
- Qualitative primary school teacher-assessment and advice on the best ways to care for and teach each individual student.
TERM 1: ‘Year 7 Perspectives’; students return to their primary schools

TERM 2: ‘Taste-test’ visits (half days at EC)

TERM 3: Data transfer (for TCs) & 1st visit

TERM 4: 2nd and 3rd transition visit

TERM 1 (following year): 5 day transition week
Materials are individualised

Team of Year 7 core staff

Literacy & Numeracy workshops

Dedicated Year 7 Learning Area

Themed Terms

Enrolment appointments are valued

A LOT of time is spent planning class dynamics

Transition Co-ord role is valued as a ‘learning and teaching’ position, not just admin

After Transition Week, challenging work begins (meeting expectations for individuals)
Elwood College’s Yr 7 ‘Growing Futures@EC’ program ranks in the top 20th percentile for:

- Stimulating Learning
- Teacher Effectiveness
- Classroom Behaviour
- Student Safety (top 5th percentile)

Traditionally, (from 2001-2011) we had a real retention rate of 50% (from Yr7-10)

In 2014 this had grown to 75%.
## YR 7 ENROLMENT DATA

Number of students enrolled in Year 7:

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
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<td>2014</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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*Beginning of ‘GF@EC’ & ‘Second Storey’

## YR 7 ATTENDANCE DATA

Average days absent per Year 7 student:

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Days Absent</th>
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