

MIDDLE SCHOOLING FOR THE MIDDLE YEARS

What might the jury be considering?

Prepared for the Australian Education Union by

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Preface

The terms “middle years”, “middle schooling” and “middle schools” have become a common part of discussions around schooling over the past decade. However, there is no agreed understanding of the terms, yet alone the principles that lay behind them.

Whilst some, particularly governments, seek to capitalise on the ideas by using them as a rationale for structural changes in the nature of schools, teachers recognise that the discussions around pedagogy and curriculum are far more important.

Those who have worked in specific middle years projects have generally become staunch advocates of them, whilst others remain sceptical. The potential effects on teachers careers are also a relevant consideration.

The AEU recognised that it needed to discuss, debate, and work towards policy in these areas, and asked Rod Chadbourne to prepare a discussion paper which clarified the definitions, canvassed the issues and presented the matters for consideration in a balanced way.

We thank him for doing this effectively and succinctly, and look forward to the discussion we trust his paper will provoke.

Roy Martin
For the Curriculum Professional Issues Committee
Australian Education Union

Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by the Australian Education Union, presents a review of the Australian literature on middle schooling. It does so within the framework of a series of questions, some of which are commonly asked and some of which emerged during the review process. The main themes and issues identified in relation to each question can be summarised as follows.

Do the educational principles and practices of middle schooling apply exclusively to students in the middle years? The literature emphasises that young adolescents have unique needs, that ‘middle schooling’ refers more to a particular type of pedagogy and curriculum than a particular type of school structure, and that setting up middle schools does not guarantee that middle schooling will take place. Several considerations bring aspects of these claims under scrutiny. First, while physical changes associated with puberty are clearly distinctive to young adolescents, other characteristics – such as the need for independence, identity, and peer acceptance – are not unique to students in the middle years. Secondly, practices that comprise middle schooling pedagogy and curriculum – such as cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, integrated curriculum, authentic assessment, and small learning communities – apply to students of all ages and stages and not just to students in the middle years. Rather than negate the case for middle schooling, however, these considerations strengthen it because they indicate that middle schooling applies to a far wider range of students than those between the ages of 10-15. Applying middle schooling across the spectrum would help make P-12 seamless. It would also raise the question of whether middle schooling should be given a more generic name.

Can middle schooling occur within traditional school structures? The literature documents numerous cases of highly accomplished teachers working alone in traditional classrooms who practice some of what middle schooling preaches; eg. teaching for understanding and higher order thinking, ensuring the success of all students, empowering students taking charge of their own learning, and working with heterogenous student groups. There appears to be less ground, however, for claiming that other aspects of middle schooling can just as easily be practised in traditional high schools: eg. collaborative teaching, integrated curriculum, a seamless transition between primary and secondary schooling, and small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention.

Is middle schooling a passing fad? The past decade has witnessed significant growth in official reports and inquiries on young adolescence, state and national middle schooling projects, the production of middle years curriculum materials, research on middle schooling by academics, middle schooling associations, middle years teacher education courses, middle schooling policies, and the implementation of middle schooling by educational institutions across the country. However, while middle schooling has become prominent, it is not yet dominant. On the other hand, if middle schooling is to be a passing fad, the literature suggests that the end of nowhere in sight.

Is middle schooling a front? During the 1970s, the principles of middle schooling received support from the ‘new left’, humanism and constructivism. During the 1990s, the rise of middle schooling occurred side by side with moves to introduce devolution, corporate management and workplace agreements for teachers. Within this context it was possible to (mis)construe middle schooling as being part of a broader set of initiatives that were politically and economically motivated, rather than based on educational grounds; that is, as fitting the imperatives of management rather than the needs

of young adolescents. While this interpretation may not represent majority opinion, it does raise for consideration the industrial implications and ideological underpinnings of middle schooling.

Does middle schooling improve student learning? Most evaluations of middle schooling in Australia have focussed on process rather than student outcomes. The situation is different in the USA. In that country, numerous quantitative studies conclude that the introduction of middle schooling can improve student learning outcomes. If future Australian evaluations show that middle schooling does not deliver what it promises, will this mean that middle schooling is fundamentally flawed, or, that it has met with more opposition and indifference than support?

What impact does middle schooling have on teachers' work and careers? The success of middle schooling in improving student outcomes depends largely on whether it operates under conditions that foster improvements in teaching. Three such conditions are: teacher time, teacher career structures and teacher leadership. The literature suggests that middle schooling requires more teacher collaboration and imposes a higher workload on teachers, than is the case in traditional schools. At the same time, middle schooling places more onus on staff to develop a stronger professional community in their schools. Of critical importance here is whether the upside of professional community offsets the downside of work intensification. To attract, develop and retain high quality teachers, middle schooling needs to offer teachers career advancement opportunities comparable to those in traditional schools. Middle schooling also needs to find ways to retain the benefits of traditional subject-based teacher leadership, while maintaining its strength in pastoral care, curriculum relevance and constructivist pedagogy.

Does middle schooling lead to better educational outcomes for Indigenous students? Very few studies have investigated this question. Nevertheless, a case based on inference and conceptual grounds can be constructed from the literature to suggest that middle schooling does have a positive impact. This case argues that middle schooling reduces cultural discontinuities between Indigenous homes and school, is more compatible with Indigenous learning styles, fosters the development of characteristics of effective teachers of Indigenous students, places high priority on equity and social justice, is compatible with full service community schools, and has been successfully implemented in schools with high Indigenous student enrolments. Some critical theorists, however, might regard this case as flawed because it rests on a liberal rather than radical view of the relationship between school and society.

To emphasise the need for further investigation the report concludes by outlining a number of issues not addressed in this review. One of these is whether middle schooling should be made mandatory for all young adolescents, or, be provided only those who are disaffected, disengaged and alienated within our traditional schools.

Introduction

This report was commissioned by, but does not purport to represent the views of, the Australian Education Union (AEU). Its purpose is to raise for discussion a range of issues relevant to the ongoing development of policy and perspectives on middle schooling and the value of middle schooling for the education of Indigenous students. The AEU requested that the report be as succinct as possible. Apart from that, the author was able to take a free hand.

Much of the literature on middle schooling constitutes advocacy. Generally, it is written by supporters of middle schooling who present a pro middle schooling stance. Relatively little of it is written by opponents of middle schooling, or researchers who work from a disinterested position. As a result, the literature tends to be characterised by a lack of public critique and debate about middle schooling of the type found, for example, in Whitehead (2000). The advocacy referred to here takes various forms, such as: putting forward recommendations about policy and best practice; offering practical ideas and success stories that make middle schooling seem achievable; and making claims about the benefits of middle schooling.

The written advocacy for middle schooling contrasts sharply with the verbal criticism made by some sceptics. According to the critics, middle schooling lacks clear definition, is only a passing fad, provides a front for less palatable reforms, has not been adequately evaluated, and impacts negatively on teachers' work conditions.

Like other forms of education, middle schooling attracts varying levels of support, resistance and indifference from stakeholders across the spectrum. This report explores some of the issues associated with the contested nature of middle schooling, without trying to resolve them. It does not advocate or oppose middle schooling. Nor does it provide an exhaustive analysis of each issue. The AEU sent successive drafts of the report to reviewers in each state for comment. Most of their responses have been either incorporated in the text of this document or quoted verbatim.

What Is Middle Schooling?

Distinctions can be made between the terms ‘middle years’, ‘middle school’ and ‘middle schooling’.

Middle Years

The term ‘middle years’ applies to early adolescence - generally students between the ages of 10 -15 (Barratt, 1998). In Australia, young adolescents can be found in upper primary school classes, lower secondary school classes, purpose-built middle schools and schools that cater for a broader range of year levels, eg. P-10, P-12 schools. Within these schools, the ‘middle years’ covers Years 5 -10, as per the shaded areas in the diagram below. (Schools Council, 1992).

PRIMARY SCHOOL							SECONDARY SCHOOL					
P	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Middle School

The term ‘middle school’ refers to an organisational unit, separate from primary and secondary school, that provides education for students in the middle years. This education may or may not be based on the principles of middle schooling; it may be no different from traditional practices. The Year levels covered by middle schools vary across Australia. Some middle schools cover only one Year level (eg. Year 6 or 7 or 8); others cover two Year levels (eg. Years 6-7 or 7-8 or 8-9); yet others cover three or four Year levels (eg. Years 6-8 or 7-9 or 8-10 or 6-10). Establishing a separate institution for students in the middle years and naming it a middle school does not guarantee that the education provided will be consistent with the philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy of middle schooling.

Middle Schooling

The term ‘middle schooling’ refers to formal education that is responsive and appropriate to the developmental needs of young adolescents. This education is characterised by a philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy based on constructivism. In practice, this involves elements such as:

- higher order thinking, holistic learning, critical thinking, problem-solving and life-long learning;
- students taking charge of their own learning and constructing their own meanings;
- integrated and disciplinary curricula that are negotiated, relevant and challenging;
- cooperative learning and collaborative teaching;
- authentic, reflective, and outcomes-based assessment;
- heterogeneous and flexible student groupings;
- success for every student;
- small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention in a safe, healthy school environment;

- emphasis on strong teacher-student and student-student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort;
- democratic governance and shared leadership;
- parental and community involvement in student learning.

During 1996-97, the National Middle Schooling Project developed “a common Australian view of the needs of young adolescents; the principles that should guide our work with them; and the practices that are regarded as most appropriate for their positive and successful development” (Cumming, 1998, p.14). The key points of this framework can be summarised as follows:

- Young Australian adolescents have a need for: identity, relationships, purpose, empowerment, success, rigour, and safety.
- Middle schooling practices should be: learner-centred, collaboratively organised, outcome-based, flexibly constructed, ethnically aware, community-oriented, adequately resourced, strategically linked.
- Three important goals of middle schooling are: engaged, focused and achieving adolescents; effective curriculum, teaching and organisational practices; genuine partnerships and long-term support. (Barratt, 1998; Cumming, 1998).

Some supporters of middle schooling emphasise that young adolescents develop a distinctive set of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social needs and therefore require a distinctive and developmentally appropriate educational program. Several questions can be asked here. Firstly, apart from the physical changes associated with puberty, are the cognitive, emotional and social needs of young adolescents really unique, or, do they exist for students of all ages and stages? Secondly, are the schooling practices and principles listed above really distinctive to young adolescents, or do they apply equally to students of all ages and stages? Or as a reviewer of this paper asked, “Is it more critical for young adolescents to create a positive learning environment?”

Are The Needs Of Young Adolescents Unique?

Few people would dispute that some of the needs and characteristics attributed to young adolescents are unique; eg. reproductive maturity and other physical changes associated with puberty. Some other claims, however, may warrant investigation. For example, is the need for independence, self-esteem, and peer acceptance distinctive to young adolescents? Are young adolescents more susceptible to mood swings, more sensitive to criticism, and more prone to growth spurts than pre-school children? Does the development of abstract thought distinguish early adolescence from early and mid-childhood, or, does the growth of both concrete and formal cognitive operations occur more or less concurrently from a young age? (Braggett, Morris & Day, 1999; Pinnell, 1998). More generally, if young adolescents do have characteristics and needs that are different from those of other students, are these characteristics and needs different in kind, or simply different in degree? If the answers to these type of questions indicate that the similarities between young adolescents and students of other ages and stages are greater than the differences, then it might be concluded that there is no need for middle schooling. An alternative conclusion, however, is that middle schooling should be supported even more strongly because it would apply to a far wider range of students than those between the ages of 10-15.

Several counterbalancing points should be borne in mind when examining the claim that young adolescents have unique needs and characteristics. Firstly, adolescence is not only biologically based, it is also socially constructed (Aries, 1962). Too much emphasis on the inherent nature of early adolescence might reinforce a tendency to blame and treat the 'victim' rather than the 'system' (Ryan, 1971). Secondly, while claims about the relative influence of biological and social factors in the construction of adolescence might be contested, the following contentions seem less disputable:

- of all students within the P-12 range, it is young adolescents who teachers generally find the most difficult to manage and teach and, in some cases, who teachers least want to work with;
- “through Years 5-8 young people’s learning either slows down, stops or even seems to go backwards At a time when learning should be jumping ahead” (Stringer, 1998, p.6, commenting on research by Peter Hill and colleagues);
- the highest incidence of student alienation, disengagement, disruptive behaviour, boredom and disenchantment occurs during the first years of secondary school (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996; Hill & Rowe, 1996, 1998);
- an unacceptably high incidence of clinical depression, eating disorders, delinquency, unsafe sexual practices, substance abuse, deliberate self harm, suicide, and mental health breakdown among students occurs during early adolescence (Carr-Gregg, 2001; Withers & Russell, 1998; Zubrick et al., 1997).

On some of these points, the number of students involved is substantial but the proportion of the total age group that these numbers represent is relatively small. The high numbers highlight the need for prioritised action; the low proportions caution against fuelling moral panic and an engineered crisis.

Is Middle Schooling Pedagogy Distinctive?

If young adolescents do have distinctive needs, does this mean that the middle schooling pedagogy designed to be responsive to those needs is distinctive? The answer may be ‘yes’ if the pedagogy of middle schooling is compared with traditional early childhood, primary and secondary schooling practices. The answer may be ‘no’ if comparisons are made with progressive early childhood, primary and secondary schooling practices.

Most of what is said in the literature about middle schooling aims, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, pastoral care, school structure, work organisation, student services, governance, school/parent/community relationships can be seen to apply equally to early childhood, middle childhood and adult education. Conversely, many studies that do not focus specifically on any particular phase of student development can be seen to apply to middle schooling. Put differently, the broad principles of constructivist pedagogy, integrated curriculum, authentic assessment, collaborative learning, professional community, learning organisations, facilitative leadership, democratic governance, safe and healthy school environments and so on, do not apply exclusively to middle schooling. (McLean, 2001)

According to Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (1998), research has discovered an emerging and unrecognised consensus about how students learn best: “virtually all the authoritative voices in each field are calling for schools that are student-centred, active, experiential, democratic, collaborative, and yet rigorous and challenging” (p.viii). This unrecognised consensus crosses content boundaries and grade levels. It comprises a coherent philosophy of 13 interlocking principles about best practice, namely, that children learn best when schools, teaching and learning are: student-centred, experiential, holistic, authentic, expressive, reflective, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging. The detail of each of these principles, as documented by Zemelman et al, captures the essence of middle schooling.

If the pedagogy currently advocated for middle schooling is not distinctive to the education of young adolescents, this does not necessarily mean we have to keep searching for a pedagogy that is distinctive. But it does provide a basis for wondering whether middle schooling is distinguished more by structural than pedagogical considerations, a view that is often disputed in the literature.

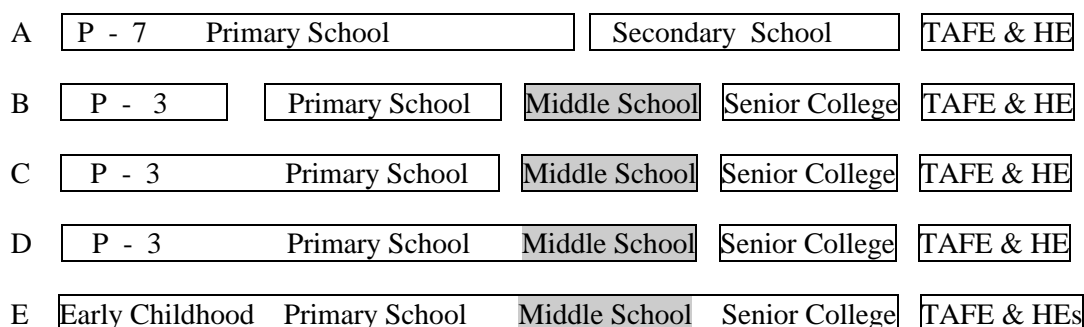
Separate Schools For Separate Stages Of Development?

Students undergoing formal education are often seen to move through five developmental stages: early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, late adolescence/young adulthood, and adulthood (Curriculum Council, 1998; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1989). The *middle years*, then, are located in the middle of middle childhood and late adolescence/young adulthood. A policy question here is whether school organisation should reflect the five developmental levels. One option would be to establish separate schools, or sub-schools, for early childhood (pre-primary and junior primary schools), middle childhood (primary schools), early adolescence (middle schools), late adolescence (senior colleges and TAFE) and adulthood (universities and TAFE). Each of these five types of school or sub school would have its own staff – administrative, teaching, general; its own buildings, facilities, resources and budget; and its own place and space.

Separate schools or sub-schools for Year 6-10 students might draw attention to claims about the distinctive needs of early adolescence. They might also reinforce arguments and moves to:

- re-separate early child education from primary schools;
- set up separate schools for students between early childhood and early adolescence;
- establish separate pre-service teacher education programs for each of the five developmental stages;
- adopt separate registration of teachers for each student developmental stage;
- identify specific teacher conditions for Year 5-10 teachers;
- develop separate sets of professional standards for the advanced certification of teachers, one set for each of the student developmental stages, something along the lines of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the USA.

The diagrams below portray five options (A-E). Each option can be analysed in terms of a range of questions. For example, which option is best suited for making P-12 education seamless? Which option is best suited for reducing the dysfunctional impact that transition from one school level to another can exert on students?



Several reviewers commented on these options in the following terms:

Is ameliorating transition a good thing? Some cultures highlight the transition from child to adult, and 'rites of passage' are certainly a focus in the literature. What gains and losses occur if we aim for "seamless" education? How is it dealt with better in middle schools than in a traditional way?

Do school structures make transition dysfunctional or is it the transition process itself and the curriculum that causes the dysfunctionality? Is transition per se desirable?

Is Middle Schooling A Passing Fad?

Over the past 100 years, numerous educational reforms have come and gone while traditional schooling has remained remarkably resilient. Rather than take root and flourish, many of these progressive innovations have withered on the vine. A few have survived, but mainly on the margins. Educational beliefs and practices that are advocated beyond what the evidence warrants often become short-lived fashions.

Is middle schooling a passing fad? During the early to mid 1970s various forms of progressive education in Australia rose to prominence, if not dominance. The term 'middle schooling' played no real part in this phenomenon but the concept did, particularly in small alternative schools that have been operating now for over three decades. Since 1990, growing support for middle schooling has come in various forms from a diverse range of agencies. These include:

- *A decade of government sponsored and official inquiries and reports on the education of young adolescents:* eg. Report of the junior secondary review (Eyers, et al., 1992); Middle years of schooling discussion paper (Schools Council, 1992); In the middle: Schooling for young adolescents (Schools Council, 1993); Action plan for the middle schooling years (Department of Education and Children's Services, 1994); Victorian Years 5-8 project (Kruse, 1995); From alienation to engagement (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996); Teachers working with young adolescents (Board of Teacher Registration, 1996); Planning for middle schooling in Western Australia (Jackson, 1999).
- *A range of specific middle years projects across Australia:* eg. the AEU-SA middle schooling project (South Australia Institute of Teaching, 1994, 1996); National Middle Schooling Project (Barratt, 1998); Middle Years of Schooling Years 5 to 8+, Individual Learning Pathways Project (Braggett, 1999); Middle Years of Schooling Project (Braggett, 1999); Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project (Hill & Russell, 1999).
- *The inclusion of middle schooling in broad national educational initiatives:* eg National Schools Network (www.nsn.net.au); Innovative Links Project (1994-97); Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (McRae, 2000); Innovation and Best Practice Project (Cuttance et al., 2001).
- *The production of middle schooling ideas and resources by agencies such as:* the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (www.acsa.edu.au); National Schools Network (www.nsn.net.au); academics and professional development providers (eg. Brennan & Sachs, 1998; Boyd & Maroulis, 1998; Harvey, 2000; Kiddey & Robson, 2001; contributors to EQ Australia, Autumn, 1997); and numerous practising classroom teachers, as evidenced in the books and other resources on display at events such as the Middle Years of Schooling Association conferences.
- *Research on middle schooling by Australian academics;* eg. Bigum, Fitzclarence & Green (1994), Braggett (1997), Braggett, Morris & Day (1999), Burke & Jarman (1994), Chadbourne (1998, 1999), Cormack (1991, 1996, 1998), Cotterell (2001), Dwyer (1994), Fuller (2001), Groome & Hamilton (1994), Hill & Rowe (1996, 1998), Hill & Crevola (1999), Hill & Russell (1999), Hill et al. (2001), McInerney et al. (1998, 1999), Mackay (2001), Russell (2000), White (1993), Yates (1999).

- *The rise of middle schooling professional associations*; eg. the Middle Schooling Network in South Australia, the Middle Years of Schooling Association in Queensland, the Middle Schooling Association in Western Australia, the Middle Schooling Network and the Australian Middle Years Association in Victoria (Australian Journal of Middle Schooling, Vol.1, No.1, p.60).
- *The introduction of middle schooling units and programs in preservice and postgraduate teacher education courses*; eg. Deakin University, Edith Cowan University, Flinders University, University of South Australia, University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, University of Tasmania – to name a few.
- *The recognition of middle schooling in the policies and activities of a diverse range of school education agencies, such as*: professional educator associations (eg. the Australian College of Education, Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria, Australian Secondary Principals Association), some teachers unions and employers, and the Australian Council of State School Organisations. (See www.acsa.edu.au/projects/middle/reports).
- *The increasing adoption of middle schooling in educational institutions across the spectrum in most Australian states*; eg. government and non government schools, Catholic and non Catholic schools, urban and rural schools, wealthy and low fee paying private schools, and schools in high, middle and low socioeconomic areas.

This list of points, and the items within each point, represents only a small sample of a much wider range of developments related to middle schooling in Australia. Nevertheless, the list does suggest that middle schooling is being examined seriously and, in numerous cases, adopted by all the major parties with a stake in the school education of young adolescents. It also indicates, particularly when supplemented by the broader array of details not listed above, that middle schooling is on the way up, not the way down. If middle schooling is to be a passing fad, then the end is not yet in sight. Having said that, another impression is that while the number of teachers, researchers and schools significantly touched by middle schooling is still growing it has yet to achieve dominant proportions.

Middle Schooling Within Traditional School Structures?

For the purpose of this paper, the structural characteristics of traditional schools are assumed to include:

- dividing schooling into the primary years (eg Years 1-7) and the secondary years (eg. Years 8-12) with no separate provision for the middle years (eg. Years 6-10);
- grouping students into classes of about 30, with lessons delivered by a single teacher working in isolation from colleagues;
- conceptualising the curriculum into subjects or disciplines;
- organising the high school timetable into a number of short, equal-length lessons;
- placing high school teachers in subject departments.

To some extent, middle schooling can occur within these traditional school structures. For example, many aspects of constructivism that underpin middle schooling can be successfully implemented within the 'subject-centred' curriculum structure of traditional schooling. A constructivist philosophy of teaching and learning advocates that students:

- be constantly presented with worthwhile and challenging tasks;
- work as a learning community, not a collection of individuals;
- actively construct their own understandings rather than passively accept what others say;
- engage in reasoning rather than memorising;
- problem solve rather than mechanistically seek answers;
- connect ideas and their applications rather than learn isolated concepts and processes. (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1991).

Research suggests that the more subject expertise teachers have, the more they can: devise challenging and engaging learning tasks for students within their subject; provide clear and powerful explanations of complex concepts within their subject; and teach for understanding and higher order thinking within their subject. (Stodolsky, 1988).

Interestingly, many books on teaching in the middle years are subject-specific. See, for example: Butler & Liner (1995), Combs (1997), Levstik & Barton (1997), Mohnsen (1997), Victor & Kellough (1997). The same applies for journals and periodicals; for example, *Mathematics teaching in the middle school*, published nine times a year by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Numerous case studies of exemplary teachers, whose practice exemplifies middle schooling principles, focus on subject-specific teaching. For example:

- Samuel Wineburg and Suzanne Wilson's (1988) study of a wise high school history teacher;

- the TIMSS videotape classroom study of eighth-grade mathematics instruction in Germany, Japan and the US (Stigler, Gonzales, Kawanaka, Knoll & Serrano, 1999);
- the mathematics teaching cases produced by Year 4-8 teachers, in conjunction with the Far West Laboratory for Education Research and Development (Barnett, Goldenstein & Jackson, 1994).

Even movie films purporting to profile high quality and innovative teachers of adolescents focus on subject-specialists. For example: *Music from the heart* (music); *Stand and deliver* (mathematics); *Up the down staircase* (English), *Mr Holland's Opus* (music).

A similar picture emerges from the literature on professional teaching standards. Exemplifications of these standards centre predominantly on subject-specific teaching. This applies in the case of generic and subject-specific standards (eg. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1991; Zemelman, et al., 1998; Australian Association for the Teaching of English and the Australian Literacy Educators' Association, 2000).

In all of these written and visual cases, the teachers work alone in traditional classrooms, not collaboratively in teams. Collectively, these cases show that within a traditional structure, teachers can practice some of what middle schooling preaches, such as: teaching for understanding and higher order thinking, ensuring the success of all students, cooperative learning, authentic assessment, and negotiated curriculum. Research by Daniels, Bizar and Zemelman (2001) is relevant here. They ask what one teacher can do to make a big, traditional high school more personalised, coherent, and caring when each teacher has to teach 150 students every day and when there are no reform initiatives under way. Their answer to this question is that, for a single teacher,

There are certain patterns of instruction – teacher-student conferences, book clubs, reading and writing workshops, inquiry teams, thematic units, digital portfolios, and more – than can make the classroom more personalised, more engaging, more student-centered....teaching methods like these help kids feel known and heard, give them a chance to make choices, take responsibility, connect with others, generate products with craftsmanship and care, gain recognition, and develop a voice. By teaching in this way, one lone teacher can make schools seem smaller – one class, one period, one student at a time....What individual teachers do in their classrooms matters tremendously....We know that having one special teacher with one interesting class, one fifty-minute bright spot each day, can make the difference between giving up on school and hanging on. (p.42)

What is not clear from the written and visual cases referred to above, and the quote from Daniels et al., is whether single teachers working within a traditional structure can do these things as adequately as their middle schooling counterparts. Though, it is probably safe to say that the traditional school structure would make it more difficult for teachers to implement the following practices, than is the case with middle schooling:

- integrated curriculum;
- collaborative teaching;
- a seamless transition between primary and secondary schooling;
- teaching for understanding and higher order thinking across subjects;
- small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention and a safe, healthy school environment.

It is also probably safe to say that if the practices listed above are to be delivered in traditional schools, then the power of teachers as agents of change needs to transcend the power of the organisational structures as agents of conservatism.

Is Middle Schooling A Front?

The rise of middle schooling in Australia during the 1990s followed closely on the heels of attempted devolution, decentralisation and deregulation in the management of education. Much of the discourse of restructuring reflected the values of competition, choice, market forces, productivity and economic rationalism. Concern about corporatising and privatising education, combined with moves to introduce workplace agreements, generated resistance among some teachers to the devolution agenda (Robertson & Smaller, 1996). Within this industrial context, it was possible to (mis)interpret employer initiatives to promote middle schooling as a front for reducing the central bargaining power of teacher unions. That is, it was possible to (mis)construe these initiatives as a backdoor approach for ushering in reforms that might undermine teachers' career paths and working conditions. On this issue, one reviewer commented:

I agree with you that this is the attitude of some teachers etc., but it should not be thought that this is what the AEU thinks. For example, in South Australia, middle schooling has been very much a grass roots movement with no pressure from DETE, and in Queensland there have been constructive discussions between the Union and the Department.

As with any form of education, middle schooling is not value free. Nor is it immune from ideological and political cooption by parties of the left, right and centre. These observations warrant a brief look at some history.

During the 1970s, critics of traditional education came predominantly from the ranks of the 'new left', humanism, and constructivism (eg. Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Holt, 1971; Illich, 1971; Reimer, 1971, Schoenheimer, 1972; Radical Education Dossier, 1976-1984; Hannan, 1985). These critics condemned the regulation and rigidities of traditional education in the name of social justice, democracy and self actualisation. Among the alternatives they proposed were various forms of de-schooling, free-schooling and re-schooling. Throughout this era, conservatives, such as some contributors to the British *Black Papers* (Cox & Dyson, 1971; Cox & Boyson, 1975) and the Australian *ACES Review* opposed progressive education, defended traditional education and promoted 'back to the basics'.

By the 1990s, some conservatives had shifted ground and voiced similar objections to traditional education that the progressives had made two decades earlier. However, their opposition to the regulation and rigidities of traditional education was made in the name of choice, market forces and economic productivity (eg. Chubb & Moe, 1990, 1992). For their part, 'progressives' have not abandoned their concerns about traditional education.

In short, public critics of traditional education can now be found across the ideological landscape. Radical educators and free schoolers have long been advocates of many middle schooling principles and, more recently, support for middle schooling has come from some quarters of corporate management within the education sector. Most advocates of middle schooling, though, probably come from an ideological position more towards the middle than either end of the spectrum. As a variation on the theme of whether or not middle schooling is a front, Vianne McLean (2001, p.15) makes this observation:

Some of the new group of critical theorists in early childhood have highlighted the ways in which, over centuries, society has seen a need to control children because of the risk they would represent to the stability of society, if allowed to run free. Examining the history of early childhood through this lens provides a totally different, and far less rosy, perspective. Suddenly our organisational practices and patterns of interaction seem more about controlling children than facilitating their growth and development. I wonder what insights would emerge when this type of critical theory lens is applied to middle years education. Might the desire for control and maintenance of societal stability also be playing a role here?..... While much of the interest and investment in middle years educational research in the USA, by large foundations and corporations such as the Kellogg Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (Norton, 2000:135) may well be motivated by genuine philanthropic concern to improve the life chances of adolescents, a more critical perspective also might suggest this is a form of risk management that is seen to be in the best interests of the society at large.

One reviewer regarded this as “A provocative quote! Progressive middle schooling is about developing the students’ ability to critically question their world. This does not seem a conservative agenda. Have they mis-read it?”

What Evidence Is There That Middle Schooling Works?

Cumming points out that while passion about middle schooling is to be encouraged, “Passion alone ... is unlikely to convince those who remain committed to conventional structures and practices, or who may regard middle schooling as little more than a contemporary bandwagon or passing fad” (1998, p.4). What we require, he says, is substantial evidence to show that middle schooling results in “improved learning outcomes for ten to fifteen year olds” (1998, p.4). This means longitudinal evaluations and detailed case studies.

Numerous small case studies on middle schooling have been completed in Australia through agencies such as: the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (1993, 1996); South Australian Institute of Teaching (1994); Department of Education and Children’s Services (1996); National Schools Network (www.nsn.net.au); Innovative Links Project (1994-97); cluster group initiatives in Victoria and the Northern Territory (Braggett, Morris & Day, 1999); Innovation and Best Practice Project (Cuttance et al., 2001); IESIP–SRP projects (McRae et al., 2000); and a variety of other people and agencies (eg. Lovegrove et al., 1982; Cumming, 1998; McInerney et al., 1998; Chadbourne & Harslett, 1998). To the extent that these case studies include appraisals of middle schooling, they tend to make formative rather than summative evaluations. They tend to focus on process rather than product. They tend to rely on qualitative research, soft data, single cases, anecdotal and self report type evidence. In their report on the Innovations and Best Practice Project (IBPP), Hill et al. (2001, p.117) make this comment:

Given that for many of the middle-years schools involved in the IBPP, the changes they were implementing were still new and/or in an initial pilot phase, the relatively high proportion of schools with evidence of success is impressive. At the same time, it is important to note that almost all the evidence related to non-cognitive outcomes, particularly student and teacher attitudes. While there are good reasons to believe that such outcomes are important precursors to the improvement of learning outcomes, most of the middle-years schools had yet to generate convincing evidence of improved learning in terms of curriculum outcomes.

To which one reviewer responded, “Yes, but broadening outcomes-based education and things like teacher morale and attitudes are important issues.”

To date, Australia lacks the type of longitudinal evaluations of middle schooling based on quantitative evidence that have been conducted in the USA (Russell, 2000). Some curricula programs that incorporate middle-schooling principles, however, have been quantitatively assessed. One such program is Stepping Out, a literary resource developed in Western Australia for middle and secondary schools. Trials of Stepping Out took place in 158 government schools over a five-year period. Evaluations of the program found that its strategies benefited all students, particularly low achievers, ESL/NESB students and students with learning difficulties (Deschamp, 1993, 1994, 1996).

International comparisons need to be treated with caution due to contextual differences between countries. At the same time, the experience of other countries should not be ignored. In the USA,

numerous longitudinal and quantitative studies have shown that middle schooling does improve student learning outcomes. For example:

- In 31 Illinois middle schools that implemented the recommended practices on the original *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), “Student scores on standardised tests of mathematics, language arts, and reading achievement increased significantly.” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p.4 reporting on a study by Felner et al., 1997, pp.543-544).
- In Massachusetts the 26 middle schools that implemented *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) achieved improvements “well above the state norm in the use of effective instructional approaches, including the use of math manipulatives and extended writing assignments, and eighth-grade students were taking algebra at a significantly higher rate than the state average.” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p.4 reporting on a study by DePascale, 1997, p.14).
- In Michigan, 20 schools that received grant funds to pursue middle grades improvement “showed dramatic gains in seventh-grade reading scores (+10 percent) and substantial gains in seventh-grade math scores (+6 percent) on state tests.” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p.5 reporting on a study by Mertens, Flowers & Mulhall, 1998).

In addition to the studies listed above, Jackson and Davis (2000) document the results of other evaluations that show middle schooling improves student educational outcomes. They also draw the following overall conclusions from their review of these studies.

- So far in the USA, middle schools have been more successful at implementing structural reforms than changes in pedagogy, assessment and curriculum.
- Significant and sustained improvements in student educational outcomes is difficult to achieve if schools introduce only some elements of middle schooling; thus middle schooling should be introduced comprehensively and holistically, rather than in half measures.
- While structural reforms can lead to improvements in students’ behaviour and sense of socio-emotional well being, by themselves they do not lead to improvements in academic achievements.
- Improvements in student academic achievement remain out of reach unless there are changes in classroom practices and climate, particularly changes to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.
- Change in middle years classroom practices occurs least in high-poverty urban and rural communities where poor student achievement needs most attention.

One reviewer questioned the last dot point by asking, “How true would this be in Australia? There is a feeling that here it is the poorer suburbs where most change has taken place. It is easier to be progressive in a working class school than a middle class one as there is less concern from parents with TES etc.”

Some of the summative evaluations cited by Jackson and Davis look at middle schooling as a whole. Others, however, look at one aspect of middle schooling – such as school size, heterogenous classes, parent/school relationships – and it is not always clear whether these aspects are located in a middle schooling context. Furthermore, with regard to these aspects, some other researchers have reported mixed findings. For example, in a recent study, Venville Wallace, Rennie and Malone (1999, p.2) conclude that:

There is conflicting evidence about the success of integrated programs. According to Vas (1991), since the 1940s more than 80 normative or comparative studies have reported that students in various forms of integrated programs performed better, or as well, on standardised achievement tests than students enrolled in separate subjects. Marsh (1993) tracked some of the major research studies on integration from the USA, the UK and Asia over the past half century and concluded that although the earlier studies “gave the impression that curriculum integration had many positive elements over single discipline teaching, there is a dearth of evidence of a positive or negative nature over recent years” (p.ii). While some empirical studies have shown that students can learn science and mathematics concepts in an integrated manner (Richie & Hampson, 1996; Roth 1993), there also is evidence that some students have difficulty in grasping the content of integrated courses (Richie & Hampson, 1996; Wicklein & Schell, 1997).

Given the difficulties of demonstrating cause/effect relationships in a field as complex as schooling, the shortage of conclusive summative evaluations of middle schooling should come as no surprise. Student outcomes in any type of schooling are due to multiple factors, such as private coaching, home support, peer group influences, teacher expertise, resource levels, and school effects. Furthermore, some student outcomes (such as changing sexist and racist attitudes) can take years to achieve and progress at any one time is difficult to determine; for example, during the period of laying the foundations for changing deep seated attitudes, progress might be significant but imperceptible (Chadbourne & Ingvarson, 1992).

Does Middle Schooling Affect Teachers' Work Conditions?

In the absence of hard student-outcome-type evidence, judgements about the likelihood of middle schooling producing positive results need to be based on a consideration of the factors facilitating success. Two types of enabling factors suggest themselves here, namely, 'educational' and 'professional' factors. Educational factors refer to students' learning conditions, such as: curriculum resources, learning activities, physical place and space, and the climate and culture of a learning community. Professional factors refer to teachers' work conditions, such as: professional development, professional community, class sizes, DOTT (duties other than teaching) time, and teacher selection and promotion. The relationship between these two sets of conditions can be portrayed in two contrasting ways: as mutually exclusive, with educational conditions seen as focussing on students' interests and professional conditions as focussing on teachers' interests; or, as symbiotic in the sense that "teachers working conditions are students' learning conditions" (Andy Hargreaves, *Western Teacher*, 14 July, 2000, p.11). The following discussion focuses on only three conditions of teachers' work.

Time

The literature contains an implication that middle schooling teachers require more DOTT time than their traditional school counterparts because of increased collaboration and an intensification of work (Whitehead, 2000). The need for collaboration arises from the middle schooling emphasis on:

- integrated curricula structured around themes that cut across subject-specialisations;
- collegial assistance to help teachers to work outside their subject-specialisation;
- team teaching and combined classes taught by several teachers;
- other recent innovations (eg. outcomes-based education) that require teacher collaboration. (Hargreaves, 1994)

The literature also contains an implication that, compared with conventional practices, middle schooling imposes a higher workload on teachers, because:

- teacher collaboration is a non negotiable part of middle schooling;
- teaching multiple subjects and integrated courses requires extra time for lesson preparation, being coached by a subject-specialisation mentor, and attending multiple subject-specialisation meetings;
- middle schooling pastoral care systems involve making more contact with parents, accommodating the special needs of young adolescents, being party to a whole school approach to student services, and in some cases working in a full-service school;
- outcomes-based learning and integrated curriculum based on themes create a need for extra teacher professional development;
- middle schooling staff are under more pressure to be innovative and student-focussed (eg. the negotiated curriculum) than traditional school staff;

- middle managers in a middle school setting often take on a dual role as teaching/learning team leader and head of a subject-specialisation;
- the demands of middle schooling add to rather than replace traditional demands; eg. some middle schools still have faculty meetings despite introducing new curriculum team ones.

On the other hand, it might be argued that the type of extra work that middle schooling creates can strengthen professional community among teachers. Effective teachers are active members of professional communities (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Two-way links can be established between (a) teacher competencies and commitment for middle years teaching, and (b) the climate, culture and structure of professional communities. Middle schooling can help teachers build professional community, and professional community can enhance and sustain teacher capacity to work effectively in the middle years of schooling. Thus, the argument continues, the downside of work intensification might be offset by the upside of professional community

A professional community is characterised by a climate of trust, openness, support, optimism, high morale, and efficacy (Nias, Southworth & Yeoman, 1989). This climate reinforces, and is reinforced by a culture that values: collaboration, teamwork, and de-privatisation of practice; interdependence, shared responsibility, collective commitment and professional accountability; reflective dialogue; strong processes of peer review and critique of work practices; a focus on student learning and the primacy of the clients' interest; career-long professional learning, and continuous improvement (Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996; McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996). The structure of a professional community enables members to operate on the basis of: shared, facilitative and group-centred leadership; participative, collegial decision making; and leaders functioning as a first among equals, not as line managers (Crowther, 1996; Hart, 1994; Murphy & Louis, 1994; Smylie, 1995).

While professional community also applies as an enabling condition for the success of traditional education, it is arguably more imperative for middle schooling. In its pure form, the structure of traditional education relies less on teacher teamwork, collaboration and de-privatisation of practice than is the case with middle schooling. For example, Ashton and Webb (1986) found that professional community (collaboration) reduces teachers' sense of powerlessness and increases their sense of efficacy. These two researchers compared a traditionally organised junior high school and a progressive middle school. The two schools catered to students from similar social backgrounds but "the middle school secured higher student attainment scores in the basic skills" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p.45). Ashton and Webb attributed this difference to the teachers' sense of efficacy and their perceptions of their role in the two schools.

In the junior high schools, teachers were "somewhat fatalistic" about their students' academic potential. Teachers here saw their pursuit of more ambitious goals earlier in their career as naïve. They were more realistic now, they said. Students' failure to comply with academic goals was viewed as a problem of motivation; a problem with the students or their backgrounds.

The middle school teachers had a stronger sense of efficacy: "They were convinced that they could make a significant contribution to the lives of children and were publicly and personally committed to doing so" (Ashton and Webb, 1986, p.106). They defined their work more widely – emphasising personal development as well as academic achievement; work with colleagues as well as work with students. Collaboration among teachers – team teaching and

shared decision-making – was an organisational feature of this school. Resources and supplies were shared. Planning was done together; scheduled at the beginning and end of the school day. Teachers talked about everything. They thrashed issues out in reaching a common focus. This helped give them a common sense of accomplishment, of belief in their efficacy (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p.45) .

While professional community may help middle schooling teachers cope with the intensification of their work, it can not, by itself, generate an inexhaustible supply of goodwill. And, as one reviewer noted, “Professional community can allow for sharing of common professional and workload concerns which pose a threat to employers/managers.”

Teacher career structures

The heavy burden of responsibility for change and improvement in schools ultimately rests on the shoulders of the teachers. However noble, sophisticated, or enlightened proposals for change and improvement might be, they come to nothing if teachers don't adopt them in their own classroom and if they don't translate them into effective classroom practice (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p.13)

The most powerful resource a school has to improve student learning is the professional expertise of its teachers. Put differently, the success of middle schooling, as for traditional schooling, depends inescapably upon the competence, capacity and commitment of teachers. To attract and retain high quality teachers, middle schooling needs to offer career advancement opportunities comparable with those available for teachers working in traditional schools. In a Western Australian study (Chadbourne, 1999), most teachers said that working in middle schools would not jeopardise their promotion prospects because:

- middle schools give teachers many opportunities for gaining leadership experience;
- in the near future, teachers will be able to make a career in middle schools, equivalent to career paths in primary and secondary schools;
- where middle schools are part of a larger secondary school, teachers have the opportunity to move to the senior school campus, normally after teaching for two years in the middle school;
- in traditional high schools, beginning teachers usually teach in the ‘lower school’ for several years before taking ‘upper school’ classes; and often there are not enough upper school classes to go around;
- traditional schools are slowly moving away from a faculty model based on subject specialisations;
- because of their experience with integrated and outcomes-based curricula, middle schools often receive invitations to sit on outside curriculum working parties and serve as presenters at PD courses, all of which adds to their CV;
- middle schools provide teachers with more than average opportunities to participate in innovative programs and add this to their CV;
- some teachers recruited from the primary school sector see their appointment to a middle school as a rise in status;
- middle schools can provide temporary teachers with a five-year contract;
- in terms of a ‘subjective’ career path, middle schools provide experienced teachers who have taught many years in traditional schools with an opportunity to teach a different subject, break out of a rut, and add more variety and new challenges to their professional lives. For primary teachers,

middle schools offer an opportunity to work with older students, teach curriculum at another level, and teach with different staff.

A minority of teachers, however, took a different perspective. They felt that teaching in a middle school would jeopardise career advancement, particularly in cases where middle school teachers:

- gain no upper school teaching experience before taking up a middle school position;
- miss out on the depth of subject specialisation gained in traditional schools, which makes their applications for HOD positions less competitive;
- find that claims about middle school teachers gaining fast track promotion, through merit selection and innovative middle school experience, are illusory;
- take six years to cover the range of teaching from Years 8-12 where the progression involves two years in middle school, two years in the transition year (say Year 10) and two years in the senior school;
- discover that where, across the middle and senior campuses, there is only one principal and three deputy principals, there are less promotional opportunities within the combined school than in small traditional schools;
- find that, in terms of a 'subjective' career, less status is attached to teaching middle school classes than senior school classes.

Attempts to ensure that middle school teachers enjoy parity of career advancement opportunities with other teachers face a number of questions. For example, should early childhood, primary, middle years and secondary school teachers be provided with a common career structure or a separate career structure for each field? Within their own field, should middle years teachers be provided with a single career path or a range of options? Should decisions about career advancement structures be devolved to the local school level so that all promotional positions in the middle years are school-based? Or, should such decisions be made at a more central level? These are complex matters, though considerable flexibility already exists according to one reviewer who commented:

In Queensland the school can decide what it wants its promotion positions to be (eg. HOD or head of middle schooling), but job specifications are drawn up centrally and appointments done on an interview conducted at district level. There are examples of schools with an overarching principal, and three sub-school principals (a P-12 school). It seems to me that a set of principles could be drawn up including equal status, capacity to either progress in middle schooling or to move between age groups, etc. Selection at the local level has more problems than it solves, since it leads to idiosyncratic jobs, and leads to 'best' teachers in 'best' schools etc.

Teacher grouping

Teachers' professional identities and commitments are influenced substantially by the school-based professional groups they work in. In traditional secondary schools, teachers are grouped into subject departments. This practice can lead to Balkanisation (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991) and to academic subject teaching taking precedence over attending to the needs of the whole child (adolescent). Middle schooling encourages teachers to be grouped into small cross-disciplinary sub-schools or learning communities.

As mentioned earlier, research suggests that we can not be dismissive about the power of teachers' subject matter knowledge (Stodolsky, 1988). The more subject expertise teachers have the more they can teach for understanding and higher order thinking within their subject and, arguably, the more effectively they can work within integrated and cross-curricula programs. Teacher grouping in traditional schools might offer more opportunities for subject development and subject leadership than teacher grouping in middle school situations. This applies particularly in middle school situations where subject development and leadership are weakened because:

- the strongest subject specialists are placed in the senior school (Year 11-12) rather than the middle school;
- primary teachers recruited to teach in the middle school are generalists rather than subject specialists;
- the middle school has replaced formal subject departments and HODS with cross-curricula learning teams and generic leaders without subject specialist support;
- subject specialists within the middle school are dispersed across different learning teams and have limited opportunities to know what each other is doing, maintain a common thread, and establish a powerful professional community;
- the subject 'mentors' in the middle school are responsible for the PD of twice as many teachers as are HODs in traditional schools and have a higher administrative load than HODs because they also serve as learning team leaders;
- some senior school specialists refuse to take a turn teaching in the middle school;
- within the integrated curriculum of the middle school, cross disciplinary themes take precedence over subjects;
- arrangements to address the pastoral care needs of the middle year students eclipse arrangements for meeting teachers' needs to develop and maintain subject expertise;
- relatively few teachers in the middle school belong to subject associations;
- the middle school teachers become generalist in their thinking and neglect subject specialisation.

There is a key challenge here. How can middle schools retain their strength in pastoral care, curriculum relevance and constructivist pedagogy but also maintain the benefits of subject-based curriculum leadership available in traditional schools?

Will Middle Schooling Benefit Indigenous Students?

The AEU asked that this report consider whether middle schooling is likely to help improve academic, attendance and student behaviour outcomes for Indigenous students. Several complexities surround this task. One is the diversity of experience and circumstances among indigenous young people. Variety in terms of their location and cultural background cautions against thinking in terms of stereotypes.

A second complexity relates to what is meant by academic, attendance and student behaviour outcomes and what counts as indicators of improvement. For instance, the term ‘academic’ sometimes refers to abstract, verbal, literary activities (particularly those found in science, mathematics, English and society and environment) as distinct from the concrete, physical, applied activities found in learning areas such as sport, music and art. Within this construct, indicators of academic achievement include: national and state literacy and numeracy test results; tertiary entrance examination scores; and entry and completion rates of post compulsory schooling courses, particularly those that lead to university. Is this conception of ‘academic’ too narrow?

The term ‘attendance’ seems straightforward enough, but student non-attendance at school can have different meanings depending on what factors it is due to – factors such as: home schooling, family obligations, geographical isolation, juvenile detention, poor health, truancy. Do these factors mean that sometimes non-attendance at school can be regarded as an acceptable phenomenon rather than a cause for concern?

Judgements about the capacity of middle schooling to improve student behaviour depend on whose definition of appropriate behaviour prevails. What counts as acceptable behaviour can vary from person to person and situation to situation. For example, behaviour considered insolent by one person might be considered courageously assertive by another person. Behaviour considered dishonest in one situation might be seen as showing consideration for the feelings of others in another situation.

A third complexity arises from the diversity of theories constructed to explain educational disadvantage, as reflected in relatively low levels of academic, attendance and behaviour outcomes at school. Some theories ‘blame the system’, others ‘blame the victim’ (Ryan, 1971); some stress the power of ‘agency’, others stress the power of ‘structure’; some see the home as making the difference, others see the school or society as the overriding influence (Sharp, 1980). Claims about the capacity of middle schooling to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students depend to some extent on which of these different theories inform the judgements.

Very few studies have investigated the impact of middle schooling on the academic achievement, attendance and behaviour of Indigenous (and non Indigenous) students in Australian schools. Any claims about such an impact, then, need to be based more on inference and conceptual grounds than on direct evidence and empirical data.

There is direct evidence to show that traditional schools have not served young Indigenous adolescents well in terms of academic achievement, attendance, retention rates, suspension from school and other forms of disciplinary action. By itself, this does not warrant the inference that middle schooling could do no worse or may do better, but it is a matter to bear in mind. Put colloquially, while the jury may be

back on the impact of traditional schooling, it is still out on whether middle schooling makes a positive difference to the education of Indigenous students. Supporters of middle schooling could put forward the following types of circumstantial evidence for the jury to consider.

Cultural discontinuity between home and school

One of the factors contributing to the relatively low educational outcomes that characterise the participation of Indigenous students in traditional schooling might be the influence of cultural discontinuities between home and school. As conceived by the cultural difference theory (Keddie, 1973; Leacock, 1971; Valentine, 1968), success in traditional schools depends on students being:

- competitive: trying to out-score other students;
- individualistic: working in isolation from other students;
- achievement motivated: striving to achieve regardless of the relevance or interest value of the task;
- future oriented: being prepared to wait years for rewards from study;
- academic: engaging seriously in literary, verbal, abstract work at school.

The cultural difference theory argues that middle class parents have developed these values because they work predominantly in bureaucracies and businesses where the dominating motives are promotion and profit. In order to gain promotion and profit it is necessary to be competitive, individualistic etc. And, to complete the argument, because middle-class parents pass these values on to their children, they are not likely to find school a foreign place because they come from homes that have cultural continuity with it. It is easy for them to become engaged in schools because they relate positively to the values of the institution. On the other hand, because people who occupy low socio-economic positions develop a different set of values to the middle class, their children are likely to find school a foreign place and to experience a form of 'culture shock' (Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 1971). In their case there is often cultural discontinuity between home and school which may lead to alienation, failure and dropping out.

Most Indigenous students come to school from working class homes. Also, Indigenous cultures place emphasis upon values such as:

- group membership; sharing within the group rather than individual excellence;
- being person-motivated rather than task-motivated; responding out of respect for the teacher as a person, rather than the teacher as an authority figure;
- non verbal, physical communication; gestures, visual attentiveness, learning by observation and imitation;
- past/present orientation rather than future orientation. (Aboriginal Education Services, Education Department of Victoria, 1984).

Consistent with these cultural characteristics, research (Evans, 1991, p.2) on Indigenous learning styles suggests that, "Most Aboriginal children learn effectively through:

- observing and imitating aided by a highly developed visual memory;
- practising skills through observation and imitation, 'trial and error' and 'persistence and repetition';

- actively participating in real-life happenings rather than interacting with information;
- problem solving based on reality; intrinsic motivation stimulates the desire to learn;
- regularly using concrete materials;
- learning activities that are viewed as ends in themselves; skills are tackled as a ‘whole’ rather than as a series of sequential parts;
- exploring and experimenting.”

The philosophy and processes of middle schooling have more in common with the culture and learning styles of Indigenous students than do the cultural pre-requisites of student success in traditional schools. Particular aspects of middle schooling that would make Indigenous students feel more ‘at home’ include: the small size of the (sub) school, the school and classroom as a community, close interpersonal relations between teacher and students, authentic learning and assessment tasks, cooperative learning, heterogeneous classes and active learning. Relationships and being person-motivated are central to middle schooling and Indigenous culture.

Characteristics of effective teachers of Indigenous adolescents

According to Fanshawe’s research (1976, 1999, 2000), effective teachers of adolescent Aboriginals are:

- demanding: they have confidence in the ability of Indigenous students to achieve rigorous and realistic goals; they avoid expecting little and getting little from their students;
- warm and supportive: they give Indigenous students guidance, help, understanding and encouragement; they value Indigenous students as people, respect their culture and are free from racial prejudice; they are knowledgeable about Indigenous adolescence and Indigenous culture;
- stimulating: they know their subject content well; they can develop ways to present material and organise activities that are relevant, original and imaginative – rather than dull and routine;
- responsible and organised: they are businesslike, systematic and proficient at facilitating the learning of Indigenous adolescents; they are clever strategists who can match different instructional techniques to different student learning styles; they work in harmony with their teaching team and the Indigenous community.

The principles and practices of middle schooling provide teachers with a framework to develop and exercise these characteristics. Positive teacher/student relations (being demanding, warm and supportive) are fostered through the small size of the (sub)school, the extended length of time each teacher can spend with a relatively small cohort of students, the emphasis upon community and group building within classes and the sub schools, and the importance attached to cultural diversity. Middle schooling places teachers under pressure to be stimulating by its insistence on constructivist pedagogy, authentic assessment and integrated curriculum. It also requires teachers to be well organised, given the complexities and labour-intensive nature of interdisciplinary studies, heterogeneous classes, small group work, flexible work organisation, team teaching, cooperative learning, and forming coalitions with parents and community youth groups.

Middle schooling emphasis on social justice

Middle schooling should remain on the national agenda for educational review and reform and the future direction of middle schooling should be underpinned by principles of equity and social justice. There should be a strong emphasis on the needs of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students as those who are or have been the student group who are most alienated during the middle years of schooling.

(ACSA: www.acsa.edu.au/projects/middle/reports/saae.htm)

According to its advocates, middle schooling should aim to place an equal emphasis on excellence and equity. In the middle years' literature, the concept of equity refers to equality of educational outcomes, not just equality of access to schooling; that is, outcomes that lead to equality of rewards, as well as equality of respect. Equality of respect involves acceptance of cultural diversity, multiculturalism and differences in life styles. Equality of rewards involves structural equality and equality of life chances. As part of this emphasis on equity, the middle years' literature raises the profile of care, justice, inclusiveness and service as central purposes of schooling. In doing so, it effectively urges teachers to see themselves as moral agents and social advocates for the children and communities they serve (Knowles & Brown, 2000). More specifically, according to the National Middle Schooling Project (Barratt, 1998, pp.29-30), the following guiding principles are essential components of middle schooling:

- Identity: exploring how individual and group identities are shaped by social and cultural groups;
- Relationships: developing productive and affirming relationships with adults and peers in an environment that respects difference and diversity;
- Rigour: taking on realistic learning challenges in an environment characterised by high expectations and constructive and honest feedback;
- Safety: learning in a safe, caring and stimulating environment that addresses issues of discrimination and harassment (eg. racism);
- Ethical-awareness: ensuring that justice, care, respect and a concern for the needs of others are reflected in the everyday practice of students, teachers and administrators.

The overseas literature articulates similar values. For example, Jackson and Davis (2000, pp.11-13) emphasise that:

Along with intellectual development, at the heart of our definition of “middle grades education” is the requirement for equity in outcomes for all groups of students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, family income, or linguistic background.

High performing schools with middle grades are socially equitable. They seek to keep their students' future options open. They have high expectations for all their students and are committed to helping each child produce work of high quality. These schools make sure that all students are in academically rigorous classes staffed by experienced and expertly prepared teachers. These teachers acknowledge and honour their students' histories and cultures. They work to educate every child well and to overcome systematic variation in resources and

outcomes related to race, class, gender and ability. They engage their communities in supporting all students' learning and growth.

Full service community schools

The literature provides grounds for arguing that the more middle schools become full service community schools, the greater their capacity to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. A full service community school, "integrates the delivery of quality education with whatever health and social services are required in that community ... (drawing) on both school resources and outside community agencies that come into the schools and join forces to provide seamless programs" (Dryfoos, 1998, p.72). The type of community agencies referred to here include health services, family resource centres for parent education, learning ESL, legal support, probation offices, community police, youth organisations, child care, social service agencies, individual and group counselling, mentoring services, after school recreational and academic programs, and agencies assisting with food, clothing and housing.

Full service community schools have particular relevance for the middle years of schooling. Compared with other periods of student development, young adolescence is characterised by more alienation and disaffection with school and society. Youth alienation and disaffection in schools takes the form of high rates of absenteeism, underachievement, vandalism, bullying, stealing, and fighting. Youth alienation and disaffection in society is reflected in the high rates of substance abuse, deviance, suicide, homelessness, and mental health problems. For these reasons, the middle years' philosophy places particular emphasis on pastoral care, school/parent partnerships, seamless integration of school/community services, and authentic student/community experience.

Jackson and Davis (2000, p.217) claim that full service community schools can "markedly increase the odds of student success, especially in low income communities." This claim applies to Indigenous students because it is not only schools that fall short of delivering positive outcomes; often, other government and community agencies are less than successful in meeting the needs of Indigenous students. Full service community schools can enhance the schools' capacity to help community agencies achieve their goals with respect to Indigenous students, and enhance the community agencies' capacity to help schools achieve their goals.

There is a growing literature on full service schools in Australia (eg. Australian Centre For Equity Through Education, 1996; Mukherjee, 1997). Also, an increasing number of Australian states are introducing full service schools. For example, the Australian Capital Territory Education and Community Services (ACTECS) has established a Full Services Schools Unit. Although this unit targets 15-18 year old students, its work is relevant to the schooling of young Indigenous adolescents. Last year (2000) the unit visited full service schools in Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria. Several passages from the report of those visits (ACTECS, 2001, p.7) are worth citing here.

Two of the education centres we visited (in Queensland) were outside the government education system and appeared to have a number of successes in terms of student retention in education. One of these was the Southside Education Centre. The Centre is an independent school, originally funded by the Baptist Church, but now funded as an independent school by the Commonwealth and run for adolescent girls by a former government schoolteacher. It has

approximately 30 students enrolled and about 30% of these are Indigenous students. The school is based in a large suburban house.

There are some good models (in Tasmania) of Indigenous education programs that we can learn from in order to enhance the educational experiences for young Indigenous students (two of the Colleges in Tasmania had specific Indigenous programs and one had a very good transition program for Indigenous students).

Promising Precedents

A number of Australian schools based on middle schooling principles have a significant Indigenous adolescent student population. As such they provide another source of contextual data for determining the suitability of middle schooling for Indigenous students. Two sets of schools can be cited here. One set participated in the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP). The other set forms part of the Koorie Middle Years Link Project.

Strategic Initiatives Programme

In 1997 the IESIP launched a series of Strategic Results Projects (SRPs) across the country. The process and results of these projects are documented in a report titled, *What works? Exploration in improving outcomes for Indigenous students* (McRae et al., 2000). One project, titled MY1, took place in a K-12 Catholic school in a remote regional centre. It aimed to “Improve the quality of student transition from Year 7 to Year 8, retention rates, pastoral care, academic progress and community involvement” (p.29). The process included the following structural, curricular and pedagogical changes:

- restructuring the Year 8 timetable so that groups are taught five different learning areas by two teachers in the same room;
- integrating English and Society and Environment, including some Science, and complementing this with computing;
- encouraging teachers to adopt more collaborative, student-centred classroom practices, more portfolio assessments and more graphic and written literacy teaching.

The evaluation team made two observations about MY1. First, experiments in middle schooling are important in Indigenous education. Second, the changes made through the project are yielding benefits to the point where they might be considered for wider implementation. Pages 192-196 of the report provide a more detailed account of the intentions, activity and outcomes of MY1.

Pages 197-222 of the report (McRae, 2000) document ten other projects designed to support Indigenous students in the middle years of schooling. These projects focus on a range of intentions, such as: improving literacy and numeracy, helping talented Indigenous students across Gardner's ‘seven intelligences’, strengthening achievement motivation, enhancing appreciation of Indigenous culture, and improving attendance, retention and completion rates. Many of the factors identified as responsible for the success of these projects reflect middle schooling principles – for example: collaborative teaching, small teaching/learning communities, strong community liaison and parent support, experiential learning, and intensive levels of individual support.

Koorie Middle Years Link Project

Over 5000 Koorie students are enrolled in Victorian government schools. A major initiative to assist Koorie students in the middle years is the Koorie Middle Years Link Project, involving nine government schools, a Catholic school and an independent boarding school. This project is being conducted in conjunction with another initiative, the Koorie Literacy Links Project. Both links projects aim to maximise literacy outcomes for Koorie students by identifying and implementing good practice using videoconferencing technology as a tool to link school community sites. Both projects started in 1998/1999, with key elements such as:

- the establishment of school community teams including a literacy teacher, a school based Koorie educator, a regional Koorie education development officer and a representative from the local Aboriginal education consultative group;
- ongoing professional development for all stakeholders through face-to-face gatherings and multi-point videoconference link ups;
- the development of school community action plans that address the literacy needs of Koorie students, involve Koorie community members, integrate the use of videoconferencing technology, reflect a whole school approach to improved outcomes for Koorie students, and link to school charter priorities;
- access to funds through regional Koorie education committees to purchase and trial culturally inclusive reading materials for Koorie students;
- a review of current middle years programs/resources, especially in literacy teaching and learning, that may assist in improving outcomes for Koorie students in participating schools.

In 2000, both the Koorie Middle Years Link Project and the Koorie Literacy Links Project considered the nine design elements of the Hill and Crevola (1999) model of school improvement as pre-conditions essential for achieving initial and sustained literacy learning outcomes. At a workshop with all project stakeholders, each of the nine design elements was considered in terms of how the project may or may not be addressing them, how the project can better address the elements and whether the model needs to be modified. The items identified by the project stakeholders are consistent with the student-centred, constructivist philosophy and practice of middle schooling, as the following examples indicate:

- set high expectations that every child has the ability to be literate;
- develop stronger school/community links;
- make school environments positive, safe and secure;
- insist that teachers are non judgemental in their teaching of Koorie students;
- recognise the relevance of establishing and seeking to meet benchmarks;
- adopt more culturally relevant curriculum;
- encourage more student self assessment/goal setting;
- use portfolios of student learning;
- negotiate curriculum ownership of the project by the students;
- implement interest-based, hands-on activities and small group work;
- incorporate multiple intelligences and different learning styles into programs;
- increase choices/ownership of learning.

- acknowledge the importance of community connections;
- employ whole class videoconference link ups;
- exercise pastoral care within literacy groups;
- have staff access and address community networks;
- promote professional leadership among teachers to build respect.

A variety of quantitative and qualitative data is being collected to identify the impact of the Koorie Middle Years Link Project on educational outcomes for young Koorie adolescents. What can be said at this stage is that the project reflects middle schooling principles and is regarded by the team members and Indigenous people as being inclusive and supportive of Indigenous culture.

A broad but brief alternative view

The above analysis of how middle schooling might improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students fits a liberal rather than radical model of school and society. Radicals (eg. critical theorists and neo-Marxists) might interpret the analysis as implying that cultural measures can solve a structural problem, as addressing symptoms rather than causes, as embracing multicultural rather than anti-racist education. While such radical views might not be warmly received by many advocates of middle schooling, they do bring us back to the question – can schools compensate for society? (Apple & Weis, 1983; Berlowitz & Edari, 1984; McCarthy, 1988; Pinar, 1995; Rizvi & Crowley, 1993).

Closing Comments

This report has attempted to raise issues for discussion rather than resolve them. Numerous questions related to these issues have not been addressed. Three examples can be cited to indicate the need for further investigation.

First, if evaluations show that middle schooling fails to deliver what it promises, does this mean that, conceptually, it is fundamentally flawed? Or, could it mean that, while basically, sound, middle schooling has met with more opposition and indifference than support? Or, could it mean something else?

Secondly, if the principles of middle schooling apply equally to students of all ages and stages, then why call it ‘middle’ schooling? Why not call it something more generic, such as, ‘best practice’ or ‘progressive education’? One consideration here is the claim that early childhood, primary and post compulsory schooling have moved much further down the ‘middle schooling’ track than has schooling for young adolescents. If this claim is valid then the term ‘middle schooling’ highlights the need for reform in a relatively neglected area, namely, education in the middle years. In response to this consideration, one reviewer asks:

Is it valid to argue that we cannot change senior years as we would like because of the university stranglehold on curriculum, etc., so we create middle years where change is possible? If so, then as retention increases and the nature of students in the final years becomes more like that in the middle years, perhaps there are arguments that we should worry more about secondary schools in general.

Thirdly, should middle schooling be made mandatory for all young adolescents, or only for those who are disaffected, disengaged and alienated? Isn’t it the case that some students not only survive, but also thrive under conventional schooling practices? On this question Daniels, Bizar and Zemelman (2001, p.30) make the following comment:

Every big high school.... *already* has a small school hidden inside it – an unofficial but highly developed and powerful institution....this small school consists of....students who star on the sports teams, excel in academics, and lead extracurricular activities. What these kids get that other students don’t get is extra time with adults – extra mentoring, modelling, and coaching.... They develop relationships with teachers that are more personal, richer, and more lasting than most students ever enjoy....So how do students get ‘admitted’ to the unannounced small-school program in every big public high school? By being high achievers, by being unusually personable, by being fluent with adults.... (by) showing an early talent in some conspicuously adult-pleasing activity.

Daniels et al. (p.31) conclude that “*every* kid should be in a small school, instead of just a secretly selected fraction. This could happen if people started new small schools....or by breaking bigger schools up into smaller, identifiable units.” Food for thought.

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