

Australian Journal of Middle Schooling



Australian Journal of Middle Years of Schooling

Supported by the New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling





Call for Manuscripts

Health and Well-Being in the Middle Grades: Research for Effective Middle Level Education

Edited by **Katherine Main and Susan Whatman**

A volume in **The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education** series
Steven B. Mertens and Micki M. Caskey, Series Editors

Current research around the middle grades has brought a heightened attention by teachers, policymakers, and researchers recognizing that this stage is a time when a students' health and social and emotional well-being directly impacts their academic progress. To date, school leaders and teachers have not been well served by explicit resources for middle grades education that focus on aspects of the health and well-being of young adolescent learners to support the planning of curriculum and teaching and to support teachers and leaders working with this age-group. The purpose of this research-based volume is to address that gap and to enable school leaders, teachers, academics, and teacher candidates to develop an understanding of the health and well-being aspects of young adolescent learners and to provide them with the necessary tools and information to address the health and well-being needs of these learners. This call is for chapter submissions that report on empirical research when working with young adolescent learners and responding to their health and well-being.

For the proposal, potential authors should submit a 500-word abstract, references excluded, and a 150-word bio. Abstracts should include a clear statement about the topic of the proposed chapter and a description of the research methodology. Author(s) should draw on empirical evidence and a strong literature base for their chapters. They may also include vignettes or anecdotal evidence. Note: The expectation is that final manuscripts for this volume of the handbook will include reports of current or completed projects, not speculated research or research in progress.

Suggested topics include:

- Introduction to health and well-being (theoretical construction)
- International and national policy overview (young adolescent focus)
- Organizational well-being (use of well-being frameworks)
- Leading and promoting well-being
- Well-being for leaders (what is it, self-care, supports)
- Well-being for teachers (what is it, self-care, programs)
- Well-being programs (critical analysis, implementation, evidence, sustainability)
- Well-being for all students (what is it, benefits, programs)
- Emotional intelligence / social and emotional learning / Risk taking and health
- Measuring well-being

The target audience for this volume includes teachers, teacher educators, educational researchers, and those involved in the leadership, development, integration, and instructional delivery of the health and well-being of middle grades students. Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in this handbook series. Authors should not simultaneously submit this manuscript to another journal or book for publication consideration. All manuscripts will undergo a review/revision process.

Intent to submit due February 21, 2020. Decisions on proposals by **April 3, 2020.** Final manuscripts due **October, 30, 2020.**

Inquiries & Submissions: Submit all inquiries and intent to submit proposals to the editors at middlegradeshealthandwellbeing@griffith.edu.au

Guidelines for proposals: Authors who would like to contribute to this volume should include the following in their letter of intent:

- Author(s) name(s), affiliation(s), and contact information for lead author; and
- A working title for the proposed chapter.
- A 500-word abstract, references excluded, and a 150-word bio

Manuscripts: Manuscripts should not exceed 30 pages (inclusive of all references & appendices) and should follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Manuscripts will be submitted electronically and must be double-spaced with one-inch margins. Specific research methodologies and approaches need to be described. Data collection protocols should be included in the final chapter. On a separate page, include the author(s) name, institutional affiliation, and all contact information (phone, fax, mailing address, email). Do not insert headers or footers into the manuscript. Insert page numbers in upper right hand corners. Include an abstract of approximately 150 words. Insert tables and figures in the text where appropriate.

The Handbook of Resources in Middle Level Education and The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education are endorsed by the Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group, an affiliate of the American Educational Research Association. As stated in the organization's Bylaws, the purpose of MLER is to improve, promote, and disseminate educational research reflecting early adolescence and middle-level education.

IAP - Information Age Publishing, PO Box 79049, Charlotte, NC 28271
704-752-9125 (phone) • 704-752-9113 (fax) • www.infoagepub.com

Editorial

Albert Einstein, among the many timeless observations that he made, noted that "Curiosity is a delicate little plant that, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom." Engaging students in learning is fundamentally what teachers are paid to do but it is perhaps the most fraught and difficult aspect of a teacher's work - none more so than for teachers of students in the middle years.

Ensuring that students are fully immersed in their learning rather than being compliant and disengaged is key but how can we design our teaching and learning programs to ensure that students perceive meaning and value in what they are doing? Why can our middle school students spend hours perfecting a 'hospital flip' on their skateboard but not apply themselves with equal intensity in their classroom activities? Student engagement is a common theme throughout the articles in this edition of the Australian Journal of Middle Schooling which perhaps highlights the criticality of this issue.

Swain and Pendergast explore the impact of NAPLAN on curriculum delivery and the impact of different approaches in two different schools on both teachers and students. This interesting research clearly shows that the approach of a school towards standardised testing can have far-reaching consequences. Shanks and Dowden explore teacher professional learning and development (PLD) and the views of their study participants towards the quality of the PLD they receive with respect to their work with middle years students.

With such a strong emphasis across Australia on the need for continual improvement, it is important that the quality of PLD is high and meets the needs of participants.

In the non-refereed section is an article by Ross which elaborates on her Master of Philosophy research on passive disengagement. She provides a wonderful overview of what engagement is and how it can be fostered within a middle years classroom context.

In "Focus on Schools" is an interest article that reports on the experiences of a Catholic boys school with inquiry-based learning. The article is an overview of the approach taken by the school and an honest account of what transpired. Along with the other contributions in previous editions of this journal, the article highlights the wonderful array of ways in which schools are striving to better engage students.

The second research roundtable occurred at the 11th Conference for Adolescent Success held in Brisbane in August of this year. The roundtable provides a wonderful opportunity for researchers to share their research and help to grow the network of researchers who are investigating elements of education in the middle years. Participants were asked to provide a one page overview of their research and some of these are presented in this edition of the journal.

Finally, Hargreaves provides her reflections on the recent study tour to Finland hosted by Adolescent Success and Latitude Travel. Drawing upon her deep understanding of the Australian education system, Hargreaves provides the reader with an honest account of her observations from the tour.

I would like to sincerely thank all contributors for this edition of the journal and, as always I would really encourage readers to consider sharing examples of different initiatives that are occurring at their own schools. With the end of the year fast approaching I would like to wish all readers and supporters of the Australian Journal of Middle Schooling and Adolescent Success a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

Dr Anne Coffey
Journal Editor
Adolescent Success

(@adolescentsuccess)

Journal Sub-committee

Dr Katherine Main Dr Tony Dowden Angela White

The views expressed in this journal are those of the individual contributor and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Publications Sub-committee or Adolescent Success - the Association dedicated to the education, development and growth of young adolescents.

For further information about Adolescent Success refer to www.adolescentsuccess.org.au

Contact:

Adolescent Success. PO Box 2175 Toowong Q 4066 Australia

Ph: +61 4 5247 5184

Executive Officer: Angela White

Acknowledgements: Photographs from the following

CBC Fremantle, WA.

Janetta Hargreaves

President's Annual Report 2018-19

It has been my honour to have served another year as the president of Adolescent Success. The past year has been one of consolidation, with many initiatives coming to fruition thanks to the tireless efforts of our committee and of our Executive Director – Angela White. Much thanks and acknowledgement must also go to our partners – Furnware, The Learning Bar, Latitude Travel, CYC Burleigh, QCCC, and Higher Ground. They play a significant role in assisting us in our ongoing work.

This year, the Learning Bar as a new partner, has provided a number of our member schools access to their middle years survey – Tell them from Me. I look forward to seeing how schools utilise this valuable data within their settings, and trust that we can continue to develop our partnership into the future.

Our strategic priorities for 2018 and into 2019 have been to build upon those we began in 2017. We aim to be known as a leader and to grow and serve our members. In addition, we have focused strongly on developing our leadership in education throughout Australia and providing Professional Learning to educators throughout Australia.

As such, we have aimed to engage our members in the states and territories in relevant learning opportunities. Our workshops have been the centrepiece of our Professional Learning during the past year, being facilitated in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. We thank our management committee members in all of these regions for ensuring the success of each of these events. They have proven to engage our members effectively and have contributed to building our membership base.

Last September saw our first Finland Study Tour led by our partners Latitude Travel. Angela and I attended this inaugural tour, along with 16 other educators from Australia and New Zealand. It enabled us to make wonderful connections both within our membership, but also with the Finnish Education Tour Company who provided the learning on the ground. A second study tour to Finland will take place later this year, and I am sure it will prove to be as equally successful.

Another of our professional learning opportunities that has been ongoing during 2019 is the Action Research Project that began in Singapore in October of 2018. Donna Pendergast and Katherine Main facilitated this

project using their text *Teaching Middle Years – Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment*. We are fortunate to have such high profile educators working with us and leading such high quality research. Their continued support of the work we do with young adolescents is highly valued. Having a team of teachers working through this Action Research project, I know the value that this adds to a school and the engagement and education of our students. Most participants in this project have come together to share their progress and present at our conference this year.

An integral part of our professional learning is our biennial International Conference, with its theme this year - Future Ready Students. The success of our conference is due again to the work that our Executive Director has undertaken during the past 12 months. Our conference committee met regularly to assist in the preparations and lead up to this major event and I thank each of them for their time and energy which has ensured we have quality keynotes and break-out sessions.

A key aspect of our conference is the presentation of our Adolescent Success Awards to a number of outstanding

middle years educators. This year, we had a wide range of nominees from around the country and we commend all who nominated. As an association, we are very happy to be able to congratulate the following in their respective categories:

- Middle Years Educator of the Year – Paige Cathcart – Riverside College, Qld; Middle
- Years Educator of the Year Runner up – Martin Ogle – Catholic Education Officer, Tas;
- Future Ready Students Award Winner – Janet Coomber – Xavier College, SA; runner up – Jonathon Harding – St Andrews Anglican College;
- Middle Years Leader of the Year Kia Sheidow – Seymour College, SA, and Scott Dirix – Salisbury East High School.

Our financial position for 2019 has been sustained. The continued support of our partners allows for improved engagement with our membership, and contributes to our financial stability. This international conference provides a solid base of revenue, but in the current educational climate, we believe that there are other approaches to improving our overall position. We believe that an increasing Professional Learning agenda will sustain the continuation of the Association more effectively. For the 2019-2020 period, our Professional Learning calendar is full and the new structure for our Management Committee will facilitate this extensive regional conference program. We plan to facilitate the following events in each state and Territory, with some in NZ:

PD 2020:

NSW - Ascham School Wed 5th August

NSW - St Philips Christian College - Friday 1 July

VIC - Ballarat Fri 13th March

ACT - Burgmann Sat 1 August

WA - Georgiana Molloy School either 8th or 15th May

TAS - St Patricks School Friday 4th December

SA - Seymour College Friday 21st August

QLD - Redlands College Friday 24 April

QLD - Brisbane - date TBA

NT – March

Auckland - Kristin School - date TBA

Christchurch - St Margarets College - date TBA

In 2020, our partners Latitude Travel are planning to host a study tour to High Tech High Schools in California. This will be an exciting opportunity of professional learning and I look forward this experience.

As a clear priority, we recognise that membership is the basis of our association and this year, thanks to ongoing negotiations, we have been able to secure a membership partnership with Education Queensland, raising our membership base significantly. This increased membership provides us added security, as with greater membership comes greater participation in professional learning, thus greater opportunity for growth.

I lastly present to our members, our new Management committee structure which will allow us to broaden our membership base and work more closely within the regions. This new structure will consist of the following positions:

- President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Journal Editor, Communications Manager.

In addition, we welcome a regional General Member from each state and territory. In response to our new membership partnership with Education Qld, we also welcome a General Member from this sector. This new structure will support

our Executive Director more and we look forward to working more effectively across the country, which will strengthen us as a National Association.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the outgoing members of our management committee. Jan Hargreaves, our Vice President, Simon Wagg and Megan McKenzie - general members who have made significant contributions to our committee and association and they will be missed. I wish them all the best into the future, and know that they will continue to be active members in the association. I thank Jan also for taking responsibility of leading the upcoming study tour in Finland. I know she will be an exceptional leader and liaison for the tour.

In conclusion, I thank our Executive Director for the work that she does to ensure Adolescent Success is an vibrant association, connecting educators throughout Australia, New Zealand and other international regions. I commend also, our management committee, who as volunteers to their roles provide insights, knowledge and expertise ensuring that the association is current, yet dynamic.

Lastly, I thank all members for their continued support and encourage continued involvement in all upcoming events and information. As President, I look forward to working for the association throughout this next tenure.



Debra Evans
President



CONTENTS

Investigating the provision of professional learning and development for middle level teachers in New Zealand

*Brenda Shanks
Tony Dowden*

Abstract

The current emphasis on quality teaching focuses on the correlation between professional learning and development (PLD), teacher efficacy and enhanced student learning outcomes. Abundant research evidence demonstrates that young adolescents (10-15 years old) have specific educational needs that are best catered for via developmentally responsive classroom practice, hence the rationale for scrutinising the nature and quality of middle level PLD. In this study, a sample of Years 7-8 teachers in New Zealand (NZ) schools were interviewed to determine the quality of their PLD experiences. Interviews with three key informants, who are international experts on the middle years of schooling, provided additional perspectives. The study concludes that if student learning outcomes and adolescent wellbeing are to be improved, middle level PLD should focus on enhancing teacher efficacy via both whole school and individualised initiatives.

Introduction

While the process of schooling is complex and involves multiple variables, the contemporary research base unequivocally identifies teachers as the most important influence on student learning (Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Hattie, 2009, 2012). In particular, Hattie's synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses of student achievement showed that "the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching" (2009, p. 22). Research on professional learning and development (PLD) highlights the centrality of effective PLD for enhancing the quality of teaching (Kennedy, 2016; Wiliam, 2016). Enhancing the quality of teaching, especially improving student-centred approaches which involve knowing and understanding students, is just as crucial to the success of student learning outcomes in the middle years, as it is in other years of schooling. The 2015 Position Paper of the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) in the USA emphasised this point by linking teachers' knowledge of developmental needs of young adolescents (10-15 years old) with their ability to implement effective curriculum and pedagogy:

Successful middle level teachers, at their most fundamental level, must be *experts* in the development[al] needs of young adolescents ... comprehensive understanding of the developmental stage of early adolescence provides a substantial basis on which middle level teachers can create curriculum, utilise effective teaching strategies, and use assessment wisely and effectively. (p. 1, emphasis added)

Implicit within AMLE's statement is the necessity to provide high quality PLD for middle level teachers. Indeed, targeted PLD for middle level teachers that results in improved teacher effectiveness is increasingly viewed as the key to enhancing student learning outcomes in the middle years (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2002; Main & Pendergast, 2015; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). This position is supported by abundant evidence showing that young adolescents have specific educational needs that are best catered for by pedagogies and practices that are developmentally responsive; that is, an integrated approach to all aspects of schooling that is specifically tailored to respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents (NMSA, 2010; Pendergast, Main, & Bahr, 2017). Reform of the middle years of schooling has led to the establishment of specialised middle level Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs as well as enhanced PLD for middle level teachers, particularly in Australia and USA.

The New Zealand context

Past recommendations for specialised middle level ITE in New Zealand (NZ) (e.g., Dowden, Bishop, & Nolan, 2009) have not been implemented. Instead, middle level teachers in NZ straddle a bipartite system of primary and secondary schooling that does not adequately acknowledge early adolescence as a distinct stage of human development and fails to recognise that specific pedagogies and practices are needed in the middle years. Indeed, the notion that 'effective teaching' in the middle years simply involves implementing prescribed pedagogical strategies without

reference to students' age or developmental level is a widespread belief held by NZ educators (Shanks, 2010).

At the heart of the NZ Curriculum is the vision to develop "confident, connected, actively-involved and life-long learners" (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007, p. 8). The Curriculum mandates high quality schooling by devolving responsibility to schools to design, implement and review local on-site curricula that respond to the particular needs, interests and circumstances of each school's students and community. It defines the concept of effective pedagogy as "teacher actions promoting student learning" (p. 34). One key teacher action is 'Teaching as Inquiry' which is predicated on Schön's (1991) generic reflection in/on action model. This two-stage model differentiates between thinking on one's feet during an event and in-depth analysis of an event after it has occurred to identify what could be done more effectively. 'Teaching as inquiry' is promoted by the Curriculum as an ongoing process that is integral to identifying PLD needs.

The NZ Curriculum describes three pathways for learning during the years of schooling that seamlessly connect with early childhood education and tertiary education. It identifies a specific 'Learning Pathway' for Years 7-10, which highlights the need for developmentally responsive approaches to meet the learning needs of young adolescents (p. 41). Regrettably, there is a disconnection between policy and practice, thus the transition from primary and secondary schooling is a struggle for many students. NZ's Education Review Office (ERO) concluded that in order for

Years 9-10 students to be actively engaged and successful learners, "improvements are needed in most [secondary] schools" (2012, n.p.). During the middle years in NZ, student engagement deteriorates (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). While students in NZ stay in high school for longer, secondary schooling has been characterised by rising levels of underachievement because academic progress slows in Years 9 and 10 (Durling, 2007). In summary, the research evidence indicates a mismatch between the learning needs of young adolescents and contemporary approaches to schooling in the middle years in NZ.

The MoE has responded to underperformance in the middle years by commissioning reports which duly highlighted the need to improve educational outcomes for young adolescents (Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Durling, Ng, & Bishop, 2010; Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). To date however, reform of ITE in NZ has not focused on preparing teachers for the middle years. Initiatives have focused on limited structural changes rather than adopting the principles of middle level education as a basis for reform. As a result, the NZ schooling system does not adequately cater to the unique needs of students in Years 7-10. Students in Years 1-8 are taught by primary teachers and students in Years 9-13 are taught by secondary teachers; and teaching and learning is typically viewed through the generic lens of 'one-size-fits-all'.

Given the multi-faceted concerns regarding the quality of education in the middle years, it is pertinent to question whether NZ teachers are adequately equipped to meet young adolescents' learning needs. In the absence of specialised studies

in NZ universities that focus on the middle years of schooling (Shanks & Dowden, 2013), this article discusses: (1) the experiences of six Year 7-8 teachers' with respect to middle level PLD, and (2) the opinions of three international experts concerning the provision of PLD for middle level teachers.

Literature review

Developmentally responsive practice in middle-level classrooms

Adolescents undergo major physical, socio-emotional and cognitive changes as they progress from childhood to adulthood (Caskey & Anfara, 2014). While early adolescence is characterised by considerable diversity in terms of growth and development, young adolescents exhibit a unique set of developmental characteristics that set them apart as a distinct group requiring specific pedagogies and practices that respond to their learning needs. In addition, young adolescents in the current generation – 'millennials' – are subject to rapidly changing political, socio-cultural, technological and generational influences in the 21st century (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007; MoE, 2009). It is during this developmental stage of early adolescence and the transition between types of schooling that students are at the greatest risk of disengaging from learning (Durling, 2007; Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010).

A plethora of research has identified the quality of teacher-student relationships as being pivotal to student engagement in their learning during the middle years (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; NMSA, 2010; Rumble & Aspland, 2010). Bishop, Berryman, Powell, and Teddy (2007) found that strong

teacher-student relationships were a prerequisite for Māori student achievement in the middle years. Similarly, Buckskin (2015) emphasised that good teacher-student relationships are a prerequisite to positive academic progress by Indigenous Australian students in the middle years. Mutually respectful relationships, underpinned by the principles of social constructivism, value the unique perspectives of young adolescents and respond to their quest for identity (Pendergast et al., 2017). When young adolescents are able to make connections to past learning experiences and are provided with opportunities to reflect on their learning, they develop a range of self-regulatory skills essential to becoming confident, connected and actively engaged learners (MoE, 2007).

Research in the middle years of schooling emphasises the need for relevant, challenging, integrated and exploratory curriculum designs, including multidisciplinary curricula such as STEM and other variants, which are relevant and respond to the learning needs of young adolescents (Beane, 2005; Dowden, 2014; NMSA, 2010; Weillbacher, 2019). Such curricula utilise themes drawn from the authentic concerns of students, rather than prescriptive subject content knowledge. Socially significant issues, where students actively engage in real-life contexts, allow students to develop increasing levels of responsibility and autonomy. The utilisation of a student-centred curriculum design, focused around 'big ideas' as a basis for inquiry, enhances students' sense of agency and develops their capacity for problem-solving and abstract thinking. While student-centred integrated curriculum approaches

have recent currency in NZ (e.g. Brough, 2012; Dowden, 2012; Fraser, Aitkin, & Whyte, 2013; Fogarty-Perry, 2017), they are a clear departure from traditional approaches to curriculum design, thus the provision of high quality PLD is essential (Bickmore, 2014; Pendergast et al., 2017).

Pedagogies that respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents are crucial to enhancing learning outcomes (NMSA, 2010). Designing responsive pedagogies requires teachers to cater for diversity and to focus on students' intellectual development (NMSA, 2010). Inherent within this is the need for middle level teachers to focus on developing students' thinking skills via opportunities for analytic thinking, critical literacy and higher-order thinking (MoE, 2007; Pendergast et al., 2017). Implementing responsive pedagogies requires teachers to maintain high expectations of learners and offer learning experiences that integrate multiple learning approaches such as inquiry, self-directed learning and peer interaction (Landroth, 2013). The notion of developmental responsiveness also requires teachers to provide learning environments that adhere to democratic principles that value student voice in processes such as decision-making, negotiation and co-construction of classroom curricula (Beane, 2005).

Assessment should be aligned with pedagogy and cater for the diverse needs of young adolescents (Shanks & Dowden, 2013). Responsive assessment in the middle years should not only accommodate the characteristics of learners but also recognise local contexts (Wyatt-Smith, Adie, van der Kleij, & Cumming, 2017). Assessment also recognises the developing

autonomy of middle level learners by: providing opportunities for self and peer assessment (Davies & Hill, 2009); fostering teacher and peer collaboration in the co-construction of criteria; negotiating how learning will be demonstrated; and utilising a range of technologies (Pendergast, 2017).

Targeted PLD for middle level teachers

The case for specialised PLD for middle level teachers is strongly supported by the literature (AMLE, 2015; Bickmore, 2014; Bishop, 2008; Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2002; Main & Pendergast, 2015; Shanks & Dowden, 2015). The common thread is that the systemic provision of PLD is essential if middle level teachers are to develop a full understanding of the principles of middle schooling and the implications for classroom practice.

Middle level reform, and by extension PLD, has been traditionally associated with technical changes such as establishing separate middle schools, block timetabling and teaching teams. This was certainly the case in NZ during the 1990s when middle level advocates were preoccupied with establishing middle schools (Dowden et al., 2009). While the delivery of PLD via workshops or similar is common, this is known to be of limited value (Desimone, 2009). A more effective approach to middle level PLD is aligned with the themes of collaboration, relevance, shared decision-making and healthy school cultures (Bickmore, 2014; Main & Pendergast, 2015). In Queensland, for example, a massive state-wide PLD program, designed to meet the needs of

junior secondary (Years 7-9) teachers at the systemic level, resulted in the implementation of a set of quality teaching principles for junior secondary schooling that are responsive to students' developmental needs (Pendergast, Main, Barton, Kanasa, Geelan, & Dowden, 2015).

Collaborative reform activities involve teachers working in teams with the support of facilitators (Ruebel, 2012). The theme of relevance is enacted through the implementation of job-embedded professional development (JEPD) involving teacher learning grounded in authentic teaching practice to improve student learning (Croft, Cogshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). As part of a cycle of continuous improvement, JEPD is primarily classroom-based and focused on connecting learning, and is implemented daily via an inquiry-based approach. Rather than implementing a 'top-down' approach, contemporary PLD models emphasise the importance of shared decision-making by senior managers and teachers. The duration of reform activities is also salient, with longer term initiatives having a greater impact on enhancing teacher capacity and improving student learning outcomes (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

In NZ high schools, school leaders generally provide subject-based PLD but, as ERO (2012) noted, this kind of PLD often fails to enhance the pedagogical practice of Years 9-10 teachers. ERO commented that "it would be wise for secondary leaders to evaluate the extent to which the focus of PLD should also be on building pedagogical practices that can be applied across a range of learning areas, subjects, and disciplines" (p. 33).

In summary, the literature shows that the key factor influencing student motivation, engagement and academic achievement is the *quality of teaching* (Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Hattie, 2012). Enhancing teacher capital by increasing teachers' understanding of middle schooling principles, and thus their self-efficacy, directly influences their responsiveness to students' needs and, ultimately, leads to enhanced learning outcomes (Pendergast & Main, 2017). Accordingly, the literature implies that investment in targeted PLD for the middle level focused on enhancing teacher efficacy is the key to effective middle level reform.

Method

This study utilised a phenomenological design for research inquiry (Creswell, 2014) to capture the lived experiences of six Years 7-8 teachers regarding middle level PLD. The teacher participants represented a diverse range of experience with respect to the middle years and all had completed a primary program of ITE. In addition, the perspectives of three international experts, recognised as leaders in middle years' research and the provision of middle level PLD, were obtained. The principles of qualitative research inquiry guided the recruitment of participants, the collection and analysis of data, and the formulation and reporting of findings. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Otago and the study was classified as minimal risk.

The three experts were Professor Donna Pendergast, Dean of Education at Griffith University, who is a leading researcher in the middle years of schooling; Dr Katherine Main, a Senior Lecturer

of Education at Griffith University, who specialises in the middle years of schooling; and, Professor Penny Bishop, who is Professor of Middle Level Education at the University of Vermont, USA. The expert participants each gave permission to be identified.

In-depth and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data (Creswell, 2014). Interview schedules were used to guide individual interviews. The interviews with the teacher participants focused on: (1) their motivation for teaching young adolescent students; (2) their philosophy of teaching; (3) the middle level PLD they had engaged in; (4) the level of input they had in relation to decision-making about their PLD; and (5) their suggestions for future PLD. The interviews with the three key informants focused on: (1) their roles as leaders in middle level education; (2) their rationales for middle level PLD; (3) their opinions concerning enabling policy and initiatives; (4) their beliefs about the core components of effective PLD; and (5) their opinions on future directions for middle level reform. The interviews were approximately 90 minutes long. They were conducted either face-to-face or via audio-visual technology and recorded before being transcribed.

Interpretative analysis was used to create meaning from the data. To enhance validity, the two investigators engaged in independent data analysis (Bouma, 2000). Coding was used to identify patterns of meaning, which were then refined and represented in discrete categories and emergent themes (Creswell, 2014). Relevant data were selected to illustrate each theme and to ensure that the participants' voices were prominent in the reporting process.

Results

Five themes emerged from the interviews. These were: (1) The principles of middle schooling provide a framework for responsive practice; (2) Inadequate initial teacher education preparation; (3) Strategic influence at the policy level; (4) Decision-making about PLD should be collaborative and related to teachers' work; and (5) Teacher preferences for future PLD. The perspectives of the teachers and the experts have been presented together, within each theme where relevant, to facilitate comparison of the teacher and expert data sets.

(1) *The principles of middle schooling provide a framework for responsive practice*

All three experts emphasised the need for the principles of middle schooling to form the overarching framework for the philosophy, pedagogy and practice in middle level classrooms. In effect, this requires school communities to envisage the principles of middle schooling as being positioned above curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and other facets that contribute to schooling. Penny explained:

Rather than [middle level PLD] becoming ... a literacy initiative or a special education initiative [it becomes] an umbrella [that helps teachers to] see how to fit other initiatives within it.

Penny elaborated that middle level PLD provided in Vermont was needs-based, thus the central focus of middle level PLD in her context was to help schools to identify their goals and then align them with the core principles and practices of middle level education.

This informed approach to guiding and improving practice,

which is grounded in a coherent philosophical foundation, was absent from the perspectives of the teacher participants who lacked knowledge of the principles of middle level education. Importantly, the teachers did not recognise that young adolescence is a distinct stage of human development that requires a specialised approach to classroom teaching. Rather than describing a sound philosophical framework for their practice, the teachers identified a grab-bag of generic touchstones that they believed would promote effective practice in Years 7-8. While most of the teachers articulated the importance of knowing the learner, understanding the developmental needs of young adolescents was not identified as a basis for their practice. Rather, the dimensions of effective teaching were utilised as a generic approach for all learners. The teacher participants' responses revealed a lack of identity as teachers of young adolescents and this extended to their inability to provide a rationale for middle level education other than preparing students for senior schooling. Essentially, the teachers saw their role as preparing students for future studies, as opposed to facilitating authentic learning within students' lived contexts. One teacher commented:

It's all about relationships ... teachers need to have that personal one-on-one connection with kids ... my philosophy is that they need to have very clear expectations ... [and] preparing them as much as possible for the transition into the senior years of schooling.

This comment reveals a modicum of wisdom of practice, in that teacher-student relationships are important and that expectations

need to be clear in the middle level classroom, but it falls short of genuinely knowing the young adolescent learner. In addition, this approach does not adequately prepare students for senior schooling because it fails to recognise that teaching in the middle years should empower young adolescent students to become life-long learners, thereby implying a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student (Pendergast et al., 2017).

(2) *Inadequate initial teacher education preparation*

The experts emphasised that the main aim of middle level PLD should be to enhance teacher efficacy, that is, a teacher's belief in his/her ability to have a positive impact on student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). When middle level teachers have not completed an initial teacher program specifically tailored to teaching young adolescents, they lack efficacy with respect to meeting students' learning needs.

Five of the six teacher participants believed that their experience as an ITE student had failed to adequately prepare them for teaching Years 7-8 students. One explained:

I had really good [subject area] knowledge, I knew how to assess students. I knew how to build relationships with younger primary learners but I didn't know how to develop relationships with older students in Years 7-8.

The teachers had learned via a process of trial-and-error to develop relationships with young adolescents and cater for their diverse learning needs. One

elaborated that she had on-going difficulties with managing student behaviour and sustaining student engagement.

Katherine believed that enhancing teacher efficacy should be central to middle level PLD initiatives because, when teachers believe in their ability to teach young adolescents, they are more likely to be motivated to implement and sustain developmentally responsive practices. She added that ongoing middle level PLD empowers teachers by helping them develop enough knowledge and understanding to be confident in their ability to teach young adolescents:

Effective PLD ... change[s] teacher practice and build[s] their sense of efficacy. There's a strong correlational and causal link between teacher efficacy and [better learning] outcomes. So, if you improve [teachers'] sense of efficacy in their ability to teach ... [they become] resilient ... [and] put more effort in. There is strong research evidence that this will actually improve student outcomes.

(3) *Strategically influencing at the policy level*

The teachers participants believed that the Ministry of Education (MoE), which mandates government policy and is the main provider of PLD in NZ, had priorities that did not include middle level PLD. They identified the MoE's emphasis on improving student achievement in numeracy and literacy as the main driver of whole-school PLD in their schools. Moreover, the MoE's focus in recent years on targeting 'priority learners' – defined as Māori or Pacific Islander students, students with special needs, or students

from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds – left little room for other PLD. Although teachers across the sector were meant to be able to choose PLD relevant to their professional growth, the reality was that the nature of their PLD was driven by baseline data and thus decided on by senior managers. As a result, none of the teacher participants had experienced PLD that specifically targeted the middle years.

One of the experts, Donna, highlighted the importance of adopting a strategic approach when lobbying politicians or other stakeholders at the policy level in order to enact change initiatives. With regard to some successes in influencing policy in her state, she commented:

I think the politics has a lot to do with it because unless there is a commitment at a systems level then schools can do all sorts of amazing things but it's only going to change that school ... I'm chair of [a state committee], so I work with the Minister, I work with the Director-General and I influence. And that's how I think that you actually have an impact ... Unless it gets to policy it's not going to happen. So being highly influential at that level is very important.

Donna also explained that she has been involved in research that has provided evidential data on the impact of a range of middle level initiatives. This informed politicians and other stakeholders and led to legislation that has provided the infrastructure for reform.

(4) *Decision-making about PLD should be collaborative and related to teachers' work*

The teacher participants unanimously identified time constraints as a key barrier to their participation in middle level PLD, however, the experts believed that this could be addressed through providing PLD as a result of shared decision-making where teacher voice is valued, and where PLD is relevant within the daily work of teachers. When PLD is embedded in teachers' work it has greater impact and is more likely to be sustained. Katherine commented:

There are several features around PLD that make it effective. It has to be connected to teachers' work and it has to be done [collaboratively] ... [Teachers must be] agents of the change. ... How that works is critical because if ... [PLD is] mandated ... [it becomes] a political issue ... in terms of time ... [Teachers] prioritise their time and say 'well I haven't got time to do that' but if the leaders approach [PLD] in a way that the teachers feel invested in ... [they] make the time to actually make it happen.

The teacher participants frequently mentioned time constraints. One commented:

We are so busy! Teachers never have enough time – it's always time – there's never enough time to do anything.

Although these comments reflect that work intensity was a problem, it also revealed that middle years PLD was a low priority in their schools because there was no time allocated to it. The comments may also reflect limited opportunity for teachers to participate in decision-making with respect to whole-school PLD. Nonetheless, when teachers understand they have serious gaps in their professional knowledge, they are more likely to

invest time and effort into lobbying for high quality PLD.

Penny identified action research as a key feature of PLD she led in the USA. Action research engages teachers in a cyclical process of posing authentic questions, problem-solving to identify and apply interventions, gathering evidence and engaging in reflection. Accordingly, contextualised middle level PLD enables teachers to solve local problems and precisely respond to students' learning needs with reference to their lived experiences and thus help students to develop skill sets for engaging in contemporary contexts.

Donna described a particular case of middle level PLD in detail. This was a large-scale PLD project in Queensland, involving junior secondary (Years 7-9) schooling in 259 state high schools that implemented contextualised reform in each school (Queensland Government, 2015; Pendergast et al., 2015). A key component in the project was the use of the Education Change Model (ECM) (Desimone, 2009), which encompasses the stages of initiation, development and consolidation, and is underpinned by core features for effective PLD.

Accordingly, PLD must be content focused with explicit links to the knowledge and skills teachers require in daily classroom work; it must involve participants in active learning where they are engaged in meaningful discussion, planning and practice, both during the PLD and in everyday work; it must ensure coherence by reflecting the connection between the PLD activity and the classroom; it must be of sufficient duration to enable participant engagement and implementation; and it must

involve the collective participation of teachers undertaking PLD, so that it generates opportunities for relevant interaction and discourse. Donna further explained that in the Queensland project PLD was needs-based and resourced to provide a knowledge framework so that each school could identify where they were positioned on an 'initiation-development-consolidation' continuum. Individual schools developed an action plan and were provided with online coaching (see Pendergast et al., 2015). In the ECM, the initiation phase of PLD is crucial because it engages teachers in the philosophical underpinnings of middle schooling, especially the notion of developmentally responsive pedagogy and practice. In the process, teachers' beliefs are likely to be examined, confronted and re-shaped. Donna elaborated:

The [school-based] PLD that I have done for 15 years has really explained why it is that we need to do this kind of work, what's different about young adolescents and their learning, what it is that we need to understand as educators. What did we miss in our preservice teacher education that was specialised information around young adolescents? ... It's not until the development phase where fine-tuning the pedagogies and assessment practices and all of that really takes place. What tends to happen with [other] models ... is that they start at the development phase and they try to focus on changing day-to-day practices, but they miss the philosophy component. So one of the common reform glitches, is starting at the wrong place because then you've got to go back there anyway, because it's the important 'why' stuff.

(5) Teacher preferences for future PLD

When asked about their ideas for future PLD, the teacher participants expressed a desire to take part in a range of PLD opportunities that would enable them to know and understand young adolescents so that they could design learning experiences that were developmentally responsive. One of the teachers commented on the possible focus for such PLD:

I'd love to see something around the psychology of [Year 7-8 students]... how their brain is developing, what we can do to help them in their life at the moment ... to help us teach them better [and] connect more effectively to them as learner[s].

The teacher participants seemed to intuitively recognise that the needs of Years 7-8 students are distinct and cannot be met by generic dimensions such as 'knowing the learner', as espoused by extant ITE programs in NZ. Genuinely knowing young adolescent learners entails the need for middle level PLD that is focused on developmental needs so that teachers are able to effectively respond to these.

Some of the teachers also identified a preference for enrolling in postgraduate study as a way to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the principles of middle level education. They saw this form of PLD as providing greater flexibility in their respective workloads and also a way to address time constraints within their day to day lives.

The experts explained that some universities in USA and Australia offer postgraduate programs

tailored to the needs of middle level teachers. One example is the Graduate Certificate of Middle Education delivered online by Open Universities Australia. Katherine described the program:

[It consists] of four units ... it's basically to upskill teachers. I've had people ... all across the world doing it, because it's fully online ... The first unit is based on understanding the adolescent learner. The second one [situates] the adolescent learner in contemporary society ... The other two units ... [involve implementing] an action research project within [the] classroom.

The teacher participants made it clear that they wanted to have a greater say in decision-making relating to PLD and, more particularly, they wanted PLD with a greater emphasis on the principles of middle level education and the nature of young adolescence.

Discussion

The perspectives of the teacher participants in this study reflected the low profile of middle level education in the NZ schooling system by revealing a lack of knowledge and understanding about young adolescent students' developmental needs or the principles of middle level education. The teachers gave higher priority to PLD focused on subject area content than to PLD focused on developing sound pedagogies for the middle level classroom. This puts the cart before the horse because effective PLD for middle level teachers needs to establish the principles of middle schooling before focusing on curriculum design.

The experts emphasised the existence of a causal relationship

between middle level PLD, teacher efficacy and improved student learning outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007). Moreover, within the experts' contexts, the political status of the middle years was comparable to other years of schooling, thus the experts were not distracted by a continual need to provide a justification for middle level PLD. Instead, they focused on designing PLD programs that were context-specific, data-driven and embedded in the daily work of middle level teachers. They used inclusive approaches to whole-school or year level PLD that engaged teachers in goalsetting, problem-solving, applying interventions, gathering evidence and practising ongoing reflection. Such approaches are consistent with both the NZ Curriculum's "Teaching as Inquiry" approach that promotes student learning (MoE, 2007, p. 35). While there were subtle differences in the approaches to middle level PLD advocated by the experts, their work with teachers was consistently underpinned by the core principles of effective PLD. To complement whole-school PLD, the experts highlighted the importance of universities providing postgraduate study opportunities for middle level teachers.

The results of this study reveal a pressing need for high quality middle level PLD in NZ. It should be unacceptable for teachers to have to resort to trial-and-error for behaviour management in classrooms and to be in a knowledge vacuum with respect to the developmental stage of young adolescence. As a result of the MoE's recent restructure of PLD, schools now have the autonomy to identify their focus for whole-school PLD. School leaders may submit a proposal and apply for

central funding for an identified whole-school focus. This provides an opening for all schools catering for young adolescents to identify PLD for the middle years that focuses on enhancing teacher efficacy as a key to improving student learning outcomes. Schools may engage in whole-school PLD or PLD within communities of learning to collaboratively examine the principles of middle level education. Specialised PLD within communities of learning, led by experienced facilitators and supported by experts in middle level education, could provide an avenue for high quality middle level PLD. ITE providers could also support middle level reform by providing opportunities for postgraduate study on the middle years of schooling. In order to make progress towards the provision of high quality middle level PLD in NZ, collaboration between policymakers, the MoE, universities and the school sector will be required.

Conclusion

Teachers and students in the middle years in NZ continue to be served by a bipartite primary/secondary system of schooling that does not respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents. Given ongoing concerns about the variable quality of schooling in Years 7-10, along with negative statistics on student disengagement in these years, it is time for stakeholders to take action and effect change. This study concludes that it is an imperative for middle level teachers in NZ to engage in high quality PLD that will catalyse developmentally responsive classroom practices. If the vision of the NZ Curriculum to develop "young people who will be confident, connected, actively-

involved lifelong learners" (MoE, 2007, p. 8) is to be realised, it will require middle level teachers who are experts in facilitating the learning of young adolescents. School communities catering to young adolescents currently have the autonomy to identify an inquiry focus for high quality middle level PLD focused on enhancing teaching efficacy, pedagogy and classroom practice, however strategic and effective leadership will be needed in order to instigate change. Ultimately, middle level teachers in NZ need high quality PLD that will equip them to be effective in the classroom.

Brenda Shanks

Southland Campus

University of Otago

New Zealand

+64-3-211-6843

brenda.shanks@otago.ac.nz

Tony Dowden

Springfield campus

University of Southern Queensland

Australia

+ 07-3470-4347

Tony.Dowden@usq.edu.au

References

- Association for Middle Level Education. (2015). *Position statement on the professional preparation of middle level teachers*. Retrieved from <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/487/Middle-Level-Teacher-Preparation-and-CertificationLicensure.aspx>
- Bahr, N., & Pendergast, D. (2007). *The millennial adolescent*. Camberwell, VIC: Australian Council for Educational Research Press.
- Beane, J. A. (2005). *A reason to teach: Creating classrooms of dignity and hope*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bickmore, D. L. (2014). *Research summary: Professional learning and professional development in the middle grades*. Retrieved from <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/466/Professional-Learning-and-Professional-Development-in-the-Middle-Grades.aspx>
- Bishop, P. (2008). *Middle years teacher credentialing in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Report of the Sir Ian Axford Fellow*. Wellington, NZ: Fulbright New Zealand.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Powell, A., & Teddy, L. (2007). *Te Kotahitanga: Improving the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream education, Phase 2: Towards a whole school approach*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.
- Bouma, G. D. (2000). *The research process* (4th ed.). Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press.
- Brough, C. (2012). Implementing the democratic principles and practices of student-centred curriculum integration in primary schools. *The Curriculum Journal*, 23(3), 345-369.
- Buckskin, P. (2015). Engaging Indigenous students: The important relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers. In S. Groundwater-Smith, & N. Mockler (Eds.), *Big fish, little fish: Teaching and learning in the middle years* (pp. 155-174). Port Melbourne, VIC: Cambridge University Press.
- Caskey, M., & Anfara, V. (2014). *Research summary: Developmental characteristics of young adolescents*. Retrieved from <http://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/Research/ResDet/TabId/198/ArtMID/696/ArticleID/455/Developmental-Characteristics-of-Young-Adolescents.aspx>
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Croft, A., Coggshall, J. G., Dolan, M., & Powers, E. (2010). *Job-embedded professional development: What it is, who is responsible, and how to get it done well*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.
- Davies, A., & Hill, M. (2009). *Making classroom assessment work*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Council of Educational Research.
- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualisations and measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181-199.
- Dinham, S., & Rowe, K. (2007). *Teaching and learning in the middle schooling: A review of the literature*. Camberwell, VIC: Australian Council for Educational Research Press.
- Dowden, T. (2012). Implementing curriculum integration: Three easy lessons from past practice. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 25-31.
- Dowden, T. (2014). Challenging, integrated, negotiated and exploratory curriculum in the middle years of schooling: Designing and implementing high quality curriculum integration. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 14(1), 16-27.
- Dowden, T., Bishop, P., & Nolan, P. (2009). Middle schooling in New Zealand. In S. Mertens, V. A. Anfara, & K. Roney (Eds.), *The handbook of research in middle level education* (vol. 7): *An international look at educating young adolescents* (pp. 135-156). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Durling, N. (2007). *Teaching and learning in middle schooling: A statistical snapshot*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.
- Durling, N., Ng, L., & Bishop, P. (2010). *The education of Years 7-10 students: A focus on their teaching and learning needs*. Report commissioned by the Research Division of the NZ Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/the-education-of-years-7-to-10-students-a-focus-on-their-teaching-and-learning-needs/executive-summary>
- Education Review Office (NZ). (2012). *Literacy and mathematics in Years 9 and 10: Using achievement information to promote success*. Retrieved from <http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/literacy-and-mathematics-in-years-9-and-10-using-achievement-information-to-promote-success/>
- Flowers, N., Mertens, S., & Mulhall, P. (2002). Research on middle school renewal: Four important lessons about teacher professional development. *Middle School Journal*, 33(5), 57-61.
- Fogarty-Perry, B. (2017). Social justice and curriculum integration in a New Zealand primary school: A foundation principal's view. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 32(1), 39-47.
- Fraser, D., Aitken, V., & Whyte, B. (2013). *Connecting curriculum, linking learning*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Council of Educational Research Press.
- Gibbs, R., & Poskitt, J. (2010). *Student engagement in the middle years of schooling (Years 7-10): A literature review*. A report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved from www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kennedy, M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching? Review of *Educational Research*, 86(4), 945-980.
- Landroth, A. (2013). Implementing a technology-based pedagogical approach in the middle school classroom: A perspective. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 14(1), 52-58.
- Main, K., & Pendergast, D. (2015). Core features of effective continuing professional development for the middle years: A tool for reflection. *RMLE Online*, 38(10), 1-18.
- Ministry of Education (NZ). (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum (English-medium teaching and learning in Years 1-13)*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education (NZ). (2009). *Building conceptual understandings in the social sciences: Being part of global communities*. Wellington, NZ: Author.
- Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C., & Barber, M. (2010). *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*. Retrieved from <http://mckinseysociety.com/how-the-worlds-most-improved-school-systems-keep-getting-better/>
- National Middle School Association (USA). (2010). *This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents*. Retrieved from <http://www.amle.org/AboutAMLE/ThisWeBelieve/tabid/1273/Default.aspx>
- Queensland Government. (2015). *Year 7 is moving to high school*. Retrieved from <https://www.qld.gov.au/education/schools/programs/pages/year7.html>
- Pendergast, D. (2017). Middle years education. In D. Pendergast, K. Main & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed., pp. 3-20). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D., & Main, K. (2017). Quality teaching and learning. In D. Pendergast, K. Main, & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed., pp. 66-80). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D., Main, K., & Bahr, N. (Eds.). (2017). *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed.). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D., Main, K., Barton, G., Kanasa, H., Geelan, D., & Dowden, T. (2015). The Education Change Model as vehicle for reform: Shifting Year 7 into high school and implementing Junior Secondary. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 15(2), 4-18.
- Ruebel, K. (2012). *Research summary: Professional learning communities*. Retrieved from <http://www.amle.org/ServicesEvents/Podcasts/TabId/255/ArtMID/755/ArticleID/310/Professional-learning-Communities.aspx>
- Rumble, P., & Aspland, T. (2010). The four attributes model of the middle school teacher. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 10(1), 4-15.
- Schön, D. (1991). *The reflective practitioner*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Shanks, B. (2010). *Forgotten students, forgotten teachers: Positioning the middle years in New Zealand teacher education*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, Launceston, TAS.
- Shanks, B., & Dowden, T. (2013). Reinvigorating middle-years teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(1), 99-112.
- Shanks, B., & Dowden, T. (2015). Teacher education for the middle years of schooling: Sustaining quality middle level preparation in Australian universities. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(12), 59-72.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk-Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk-Hoy, A. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6), 944-956.
- Weilbacher, G. (2019). Rediscovering the middle school mission. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(6), 34-38.
- William, D. (2016). *Leadership for teacher learning*. Bristol, UK: Learning Science.
- Wyatt-Smith, C., Adie, L., van der Kleij, F., & Cumming, J. (2017). Assessment. In D. Pendergast, K. Main, & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed., pp. 301-320). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

- Pendergast, D., & Main, K. (2017). Quality teaching and learning. In D. Pendergast, K. Main, & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed., pp. 66-80). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D., Main, K., & Bahr, N. (Eds.). (2017). *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed.). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D., Main, K., Barton, G., Kanasa, H., Geelan, D., & Dowden, T. (2015). The Education Change Model as vehicle for reform: Shifting Year 7 into high school and implementing Junior Secondary. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 15(2), 4-18.
- Ruebel, K. (2012). *Research summary: Professional learning communities*. Retrieved from <http://www.amle.org/ServicesEvents/Podcasts/TabId/255/ArtMID/755/ArticleID/310/Professional-learning-Communities.aspx>
- Pendergast, D., & Main, K. (2017). Quality teaching and learning. In D. Pendergast, K. Main, & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed., pp. 66-80). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D., Main, K., Barton, G., Kanasa, H., Geelan, D., & Dowden, T. (2015). The Education Change Model as vehicle for reform: Shifting Year 7 into high school and implementing Junior Secondary. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 15(2), 4-18.
- Ruebel, K. (2012). *Research summary: Professional learning communities*. Retrieved from <http://www.amle.org/ServicesEvents/Podcasts/TabId/255/ArtMID/755/ArticleID/310/Professional-learning-Communities.aspx>
- Rumble, P., & Aspland, T. (2010). The four attributes model of the middle school teacher. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 10(1), 4-15.
- Schön, D. (1991). *The reflective practitioner*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Shanks, B. (2010). *Forgotten students, forgotten teachers: Positioning the middle years in New Zealand teacher education*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, Launceston, TAS.
- Shanks, B., & Dowden, T. (2013). Reinvigorating middle-years teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(1), 99-112.
- Shanks, B., & Dowden, T. (2015). Teacher education for the middle years of schooling: Sustaining quality middle level preparation in Australian universities. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(12), 59-72.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk-Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk-Hoy, A. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6), 944-956.
- Weilbacher, G. (2019). Rediscovering the middle school mission. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(6), 34-38.
- William, D. (2016). *Leadership for teacher learning*. Bristol, UK: Learning Science.
- Wyatt-Smith, C., Adie, L., van der Kleij, F., & Cumming, J. (2017). Assessment. In D. Pendergast, K. Main, & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd ed., pp. 301-320). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.



The effect of externally developed national testing in schools: Exploring two school sites

Katherine Swain
Donna Pendergast

Introduction

A shift towards a national assessment-driven approach to educational accountability occurred in 2000 with the Australian Government announcement that all education authorities should provide evidence of school standards through the reporting of literacy and numeracy performance against national benchmarks. The introduction of the National Assessment for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in 2008 is one such measure, aligning as it does with a rise in high-stakes assessment programs around the world (Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). NAPLAN is intended to be a national accountability system that gauges student achievement and progress (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010) and provides greater transparency and accountability for the performance of schools (Gillard, cited in Donnelly, 2010). NAPLAN

involves standardised and norm-referenced testing of Australian students enrolled in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 between ages eight and fifteen, in predominantly the middle years of schooling, annually in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy. The tests are conducted in the school setting under strict administration principles and nationally agreed protocols to ensure integrity and consistency of test delivery (ACARA, 2011).

Subsequently the public website - www.myschool.edu.au - was launched to provide reports on NAPLAN outcomes for every Australian school, adding to the already high-stakes testing because of the links between NAPLAN results and government funding. The publication of school-level data increased the public profile of NAPLAN and consequentially changed the way it was perceived. Researchers in the field of education such as Lobascher (2011), Polesel, Dulfer and Turnbull (2012) and

Swain and Pendergast (2013, 2018) have noted that the introduction of NAPLAN signified a shift towards an assessment-driven approach to curriculum and an accountability-driven education system. It is in this space that our study set out to explore how Australia's national assessment affects curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in classrooms in two school sites. Specifically, we explored the impact of national assessment implementation on learning and teaching in seven classrooms in two school sites in Queensland. The study focussed on Year 7 students who were viewed as young adolescents, Year 5 students viewed as on the cusp of young adolescence and Year 3 students through the lens of those approaching adolescence. The school sites were selected because they employed different approaches to the implementation but shared location and socioeconomic status, with a similar demographic student profile.

Context

National assessment practice

In understanding the intent of national assessment, it is important to reflect on the purpose of assessment in general. Earl and Giles (2011) suggest the three main purposes of assessment are: assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning. Assessment for learning, includes all tasks undertaken by teachers and students to provide information which informs future learning. Assessment as learning involves students self-assessing to identify learning gaps as well as receiving and responding to feedback from their teachers. Assessment of learning, which occurs at the completion of a learning cycle or task, and can be internal or external. NAPLAN is assessment of learning, according to this classification.

The approach that commonly underpins national testing is a psychometric approach to measuring knowledge or other attributes. Psychometric assessment uses standardised instruments designed to generate a measure of a perceived objective or attribute (Cumming, 2012). Norm-referenced approaches compare performance of a student to that of a group, and criterion-referenced standards can be used to profile an individual student's achievement in comparison to an expected standard. There are advantages and disadvantages to using psychometric testing (Cumming, 2012; Stiggins, 2005). Providing students, teachers and parents, with an indicator of how students compare to their peers, or to some criterion, is one of the advantages of psychometric testing. Another advantage is that it provides insight

into what concepts need to be re-taught and reviewed (Brown, Irving & Keegan, 2007). Information gathered from psychometric testing is also used to make administrative decisions with regard to programs and other aspects of the system or to make decisions about the student (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008).

Despite widespread support from educational authorities for standardised tests, there have been numerous criticisms. Critics of psychometric testing argue that equitable assessment that strives to identify, as validly and reliably as possible, what students know and can do should offer students opportunity to demonstrate or perform what they know and can do (Rowntree, 1987). The Melbourne Declaration for Schooling (MCEETYA, 2008), advocates the need for appropriate educational practices in the middle years to ensure optimal learning outcomes for young Australians. Among the practices is a call for authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations, evidenced by higher-order thinking challenges (Swain & Pendergast, 2013) involving problem solving and reasoning (Kohn, 1999). Psychometric assessments do not engage these practices by challenging students to formulate their own answers, nor do they further assess a student's knowledge base of a subject or directly assist student learning (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008; Stobard, 2008; Wyse & Torrance, 2009). Such tests, which are developed externally, especially national test programs which are developed and interpreted beyond the school site, decontextualises assessment from the classroom and halts learning when assessing (Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Gronlund & Waugh, 2008).

NAPLAN does not assess the full gamut of curriculum or developmental expectations of 21st century education. NAPLAN is not, in its present form, assessment for learning, which can support and promote learning in part because of the quality of interactive feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Harlen, 2005). Formative assessment is part of the instructional process which informs both teachers and students about student understanding at a point when timely adjustments can be made (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 2009). This is an increasingly recognised issue, as formative assessment methods are known to be important to raising overall levels of student achievement. Indeed, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development notes, "[Q]uantitative and qualitative research on formative assessment has shown that it is perhaps one of the most important interventions for promoting high-performance ever studied" (OECD, 2008, p.2).

National assessment as high stakes

Accountability assessments are frequently described as high-stakes assessment. In Australia, NAPLAN is high stakes for schools and for state and territory education systems. Critics of national high-stakes assessment practices such as Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2011), Plank and Condcliffe (2013) and Swain, Pendergast and Cumming (2018) warn of many unintended negative consequences of attaching high-stakes to assessment. These include narrowing the curriculum, where teachers merely drill test content to achieve improved test results; where the curriculum lacks depth (teaching-to-the-test), where

teachers coach students how to become successful test-takers (test wiseness) and where teachers focus learning and teaching on select groups of students to achieve maximum improvement, none of which involves high levels of academic rigour. Some preparation of students to participate in the types of tests is advised. Clearly, lack of prior experience could equally invalidate the student outcomes.

Broadfoot and Black (2010) propose that student achievement on high-stakes accountability assessments have become the legitimate currency for judging the quality of the education process and evaluating teacher performance. The pitfalls of such a practice to audit schools' performance and that of their pupils are many and therefore the use of such instruments for gauging the quality of teacher instruction is inappropriate (Broadfoot & Black, 2010).

Criticism of NAPLAN takes many forms. It is argued that NAPLAN testing need not lead to improved student outcomes. Among the many negative consequences of attaching high-stakes to assessment is that it can result in a narrowing of the curriculum where teachers merely drill content to focus only on those concepts and levels of cognitive skills required to achieve improved test results (Harlen, 2005; Shepard, 2003; Wyse & Torrance, 2009). Swain, Pendergast and Cumming (2018), warn that assessment systems lose much of their dependability and credibility when high stakes are attached to them. Indeed, in high-stakes testing regimes it is common for teachers to adopt surface rote teaching where regurgitation of mere facts is the outcome and the curriculum

lacks depth and complex knowledge required for problem solving and decision-making (Harlen & Deakin-Crick, 2003) and explicit scaffolding of learning experiences in which students participate (Hardy, 2013). Hardy (2013), in his research involving a school in north Queensland, concluded that NAPLAN was impacting teacher practice. He found that some teachers engaged in explicit teaching about NAPLAN, including NAPLAN-like activities such as familiarity of test style and ensuring students were able to fill in the answer sheet correctly (Hardy, 2013). According to Hardy, such activities were 'employed to further improve test results' (2013, p. 75). A study conducted by Swain and Pendergast (2013) involving an analysis of NAPLAN reading tasks revealed that less than 10% of questions afforded the cognitive challenge of higher-order thinking, and hence the interests of middle years' education and NAPLAN testing might offer some tension in our education system. Hardy (2013) warns that, 'as a social act, the very process of counting necessarily influences, indeed 'creates', the world in which it is undertaken' (p. 68).

A second and related concern is that, even if high stakes testing regimes improve performance in tests, they do not necessarily improve learning outcomes. That is, an increase in test scores is not indicative of an increase in student learning (Wiliam, 2008). Haladyna, Downing and Rodriguez (2002) and Swain, Pendergast and Cumming (2018) warn that test practising may lead to 'test wiseness' which will affect the consistency of the test results with repeated testing. 'Test wiseness' is therefore recognised as a threat to the validity of test score interpretation resulting

in students achieving inflated results on skills where no mastery exists (Broadfoot & Black, 2010). A concern is that teachers may incorrectly read this 'test wiseness' as an indication of student learning, interpreting that their students have mastery of these skills and move on to the next level. Their students, however, may experience difficulty having not achieved depth of understanding of concepts and may be overlooked in terms of potential intervention. A margin of error exists in all assessment (Stiggins, 2005), however, the results are often used as if the information is quite precise (Wiliam, 2008). This in turn misleads the teaching and learning process which highlights the consequences of misusing the data.

Hohensinn, Kubinger, Reif, Schleicher and Khorramdel (2011) argue the opposite of 'test wiseness' is 'test anxiety'. Broadfoot and Black (2010) note that, if anxiety affects test performance, it can be regarded as a source of invalidity which will distort the test scores. Hohensinn et al. (2011) similarly argue that students cannot perform to the best of their ability when they are upset or anxious. They further submit that a student's level of anxiety is dependent on the student's perception of cognitive demands. From this perspective, the use of the test scores may be problematic. Hence, the interpretation and use of test scores must be carefully considered when high stakes are attached.

Broadfoot and Black (2010) suggest that student' attitudes to learning and the strategies they use to further their own learning may be affected by the way assessment is conducted, therefore, if 'test anxiety' does interfere with optimum performance the anxiety

might be reduced by making tests less 'test-like'. Whether 'test wiseness' or 'test anxiety' affects test results, students will only experience an increase in achievement through teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998) and learning which involves higher-order thinking strategies and authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations as identified by the MYSA Position Paper (2008).

A further concern of the impact of high-stakes assessment is the narrowing of the focus of teaching. Black and Wiliam (1998) illustrate this effect using the analogy 'it does not matter how much time the farmer spends measuring the pig; the pig will not get any fatter if the farmer does not feed it'. When teaching time is diverted to developing test skills and sitting tests, the time allocated to teaching is reduced. Critics of high-stakes assessment practices, such as Broadfoot and Black (2010) and Stobart (2008), support the concern that this culture of constantly measuring student performance reduces valuable teaching time and that the accountability movement that places inordinate value on test scores to ensure reaching a single benchmark will lead to the practice of 'teaching to the test' instead of teachers focussing on areas needing development and even neglecting the child. Plank and Condliffe emphasise this concern, noting that 'Policies centered on high-stakes testing have, in many cases, achieved the goal of influencing day-to-day classroom activities' (2013, p. 1153). When the nature of the assessment is high-stakes, the teacher pedagogy and learning experiences are subverted to mimic more closely the assessment with the result becoming more

significant than the students taking the test. Such practices fail to use the cognitive skills of deductive and inductive reasoning, hypothesising, comparing, classifying and critiquing, all identified by Bloom (1956) as higher order thinking strategies. The exact same strategies recommended for inclusion in teaching pedagogies aimed at engaging middle school learners.

The New Taylorism

In this study, the lens of New Taylorism is applied to determine its harmony with the observations emanating from the study. New Taylorism evolved from Taylorism, which is the application of scientific management to increase efficiency. It was developed by mechanical engineer and author, Frederick Taylor, who in 1909 published a book that linked factory productivity with work efficiencies (Littler, 1978). Taylor has been described as the 'pioneer' of scientific management and increasing productivity and his approach is still widely employed today, especially in business and management contexts (Turan, 2015). Taylorism is underpinned by four key principles, listed below, with language modernised for contemporary times by Caramela (2018):

- Break down assignments into subtasks
- Delegate responsibilities and train workers
- Monitor performance
- Allocate work between employers and managers.

Taylorism has been applied in a range of settings over the last century. The concept of the 'New' Taylorism is embedded in the original notion of Taylorism as the underlying approach that

led to the US public education model. The original Taylorism model was designed to expand public education, making it available to the masses of students – accepted as a desirable goal. However, the addition of high stakes testing regimes makes this 'new' and one which Au warns serves the opposite function, that is to narrow education and place public education at risk while simultaneously "failing to prepare children for the intellectual rigors demanded within the globalised economy" (Au 2011, p. 40).

Au (2011) argues that high-stakes testing may lead to school leaders influencing classroom teachers to utilise standardised approaches such as focussing on test skills, scripted curriculum and narrow foci on what is being tested, as a response to the high stakes nature of national assessment. This is where teachers' labour is "controlled vis-à-vis high-stakes testing and pre-packaged, corporate curricula aimed specifically at teaching to the tests" (p. 26). In such a system school leaders lose autonomy in the way they conduct their usual pedagogy, impacting on the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in classrooms. The effects typically include curriculum narrowing and an increase in direct teaching, including drilling test content, practising testing protocols and test wiseness and do not include the comprehensive range of signature practices to engage young adolescents in relevant, meaningful and challenging learning (MYSA, 2008).

The New Taylorism lens is of particular interest in this study. Earlier research appears to reveal indications of this phenomenon occurring in the Australian context. For instance, a study of 8300

Australian teaching staff conducted by Dulfer et al. (2013) revealed a series of impacts that align with the notion of New Taylorism. For instance, teachers reported an impact on their teaching style and content choices, and that NAPLAN had led to a reduction in timetabling of other subjects in their schools; two-thirds reported it led to less time to focus on other subjects. Teachers reported one of the many unintended consequences associated with NAPLAN is the narrowing of teaching strategies and of the curriculum. They reported that key learning areas such as art, music and language were less likely to be addressed due to the increased testing focus. Furthermore, the study revealed that one-third of the teachers surveyed set more than seven practice tests prior to the testing period and 80 per cent reported test preparation added to an already overcrowded curriculum. Teachers reported a reduction in 'face-to-face' teaching time with one-half reporting that their pedagogy had changed and was more test-driven. Thirty nine per cent of the teachers reported they were teaching by rote and were administering weekly practice tests as a method of increasing test results. The findings indicate that NAPLAN has led to 'teaching to the test' whereby teachers were narrowing the curriculum in order to test children. Teachers also indicated that other unintended negative consequences included negative impacts on students' health and well-being, with 90 per cent of teachers reporting that students were feeling stressed prior to testing. Staff morale, and school reputation and capacity to attract and retain students and staff (Dulfer et al., 2013) were also impacted. While such effects on students are beyond the scope of this study, classroom practices

were firmly in our sights in order to ascertain if we also witnessed evidence of New Taylorism in action.

This study

School sites

The two primary school sites with students from Prep to Year 7 are located in south-east Queensland. They were selected because of their close proximity to each other and their socioeconomic and demographic similarity. However, their approach to NAPLAN differed at the school sites. In School A an intentional, highly defined program was delivered by teachers in the lead up and during the NAPLAN tests, including strategies developing test readiness, adjusted curriculum emphasis to favour literacy and numeracy, and adjusted teacher approaches to learning and teaching. In contrast, School B adopted a

Table 1
Study participants by school location

School A	School B
1 Principal	1 Principal
1 Year 3 teacher	2 Year 3 teachers
1 Year 5 teacher	1 Year 5 teacher
1 Year 7 teacher	1 Year 7 teacher

Data collection and analysis

The study design included three data collection stages. Stage 1 involved structured interview data collected from the Principals. The purpose of this was to gain an understanding of the school culture with respect to the implementation of NAPLAN. Stage 2 involved focus group interviews with seven

low-key approach to preparation for NAPLAN with no specific demands on teachers regarding preparation or attention leading up to or during the testing period.

Participants

The participants of the study were:

- the principal from each school,
- 7 teachers comprising 3 from School A and 4 from School B. (One teacher from School A was unable to participate in the data collection due to absence).

There were also 7 classroom observations; 3 in School A and 4 in School B. The observations were of the teacher participants' classrooms and sought to align the comments about practice made by teachers in the focus group conversation with their actual practice in the classroom. The teachers and their year levels are summarised in Table 1.

of the eight classroom teachers. Stage 3 involved observation data collected from classrooms at each school site. The purpose of this stage was to investigate the alignment between teacher comments and actual classroom practice.

More than 70 pages of transcripts from Stage 1 and Stage 2 were

analysed using thematic content analysis. "To make sense of the text" (Creswell, 2007, p. 244) the analysis and interpretation of transcriptions of students', teachers' and parents' focus group interviews, formal interviews conducted with the school managers, and of observation checklists and field notes, follow Creswell's six stage model for analysing and interpreting qualitative data.

1. Preparing and organising data
2. Exploring and coding
3. Describing findings and forming themes
4. Representing and reporting findings
5. Interpreting the meaning of findings
6. Validating the accuracy of findings

This paper will focus on Stage 2, the teachers' viewpoint and Stage 3 classroom observations.

Stage 2 - Teacher semi-structured focus group interviews

The teacher focus group interviews involved one focus group for each school. Teachers were encouraged to share experiences of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in their classrooms leading up to, during and post the implementation of the testing process. Prompt questions were used to ensure the flow of conversation. Questions were designed around NAPLAN practices and procedures and fell into three categories: students; teachers; and pedagogy. Table 3 outlines the prompts used to guide the direction of conversations and the related category of each.

Table 3
Teacher focus group questions/prompts

Prompts/Questions	Category
Does NAPLAN affect your students? Explain	Students
Do you notice any change in student/teacher relationships or student behaviour during NAPLAN preparation period? Explain	Students
Do you think NAPLAN affects student attendance?	Students
What was your classroom like before the introduction of NAPLAN?	Pedagogy
What is your ideal teaching situation?	Pedagogy
Has preparation for NAPLAN affected student time in relation to: Excursions, Classroom enrichment activities, Student performances, Parent contact etc?	Pedagogy
Do you feel pressured by the parents to increase your class's NAPLAN results?	Teacher
Have you ever felt like transferring to a year level that does not have NAPLAN?	Teacher
How much time would you spend per year on NAPLAN practice?	Pedagogy
Do you think that practising for NAPLAN is the only way to achieve improved test results? Explain	Pedagogy
When you are preparing for NAPLAN do you target specific groups of students? Explain	Pedagogy
During the NAPLAN preparation period how much time would you spend on: individual seat work, whole group instruction, basic skills, concept development using hands on activities, critical thinking?	Pedagogy
Do you think that NAPLAN results impact you personally? Explain	Teacher
Do you feel that NAPLAN results will be used to award teachers and administrators financial bonuses?	Teacher
Does NAPLAN preparation only occur in those year levels involved in the testing?	Pedagogy
Do you think there are better ways of assessing student abilities or is this the best way to achieve valid results? Explain	Pedagogy

To support the data collected from the teachers, and to assess the level of alignment between participants' accounts of the learning and teaching environment, class observations were undertaken during the test preparation period.

Stage 3 - Classroom Observations

Classroom observations took place in the test preparation period prior to testing in May. Data were gathered using a criteria checklist. Seven separate visits spanning 45–60 minutes were conducted in the Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms. The structure for the observation schedule involved four points of focus: the physical arrangement; classroom atmosphere; student and teacher activity; and lesson content, context and pedagogy.

Findings

The findings are presented separately for the two stages.

Stage 2 - Teacher semi-structured focus groups

Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with one group of teachers at each school. Questions/prompts were related to three categories, students, teachers, and pedagogy. Group discussion commenced in relation to implementation of NAPLAN and any perceived consequential impact on student/teacher relationships, student behaviour and student attendance. Having focused on possible effects of NAPLAN on students, the focus of topic turned to include possible effects on teachers personally and professionally. Teachers were also asked to compare learning and teaching at their schools prior to, and post, the implementation and discussed their perceptions of, and reactions to, a perceived pedagogical shift.

School A Teachers

Three teachers at School A attended the focus group interview, the fourth teacher was forced to withdraw due to illness. The teachers reported that preparation for NAPLAN commenced at School A in the second week of the school year with two-thirds of every day devoted to practising for the testing period in May.

The Year 7 teacher's perception of NAPLAN testing was somewhat dissimilar to that of the Year 3 and Year 5 teachers. The Year 7 teacher disputed that NAPLAN and preparation for NAPLAN affected her students negatively. She reported 'teaching to the test' and supported changes to classroom structure and teacher pedagogy to accommodate NAPLAN. In contrast, the Year 5 teacher, and the Year 3 teacher both perceived national testing and preparation as impacting students negatively. They suggested that it created unnecessary stress short-term and consumed valuable teaching time which resulted in long-term side-effects. They added that practising for the tests involved introduction of too many concepts over too short a time which reduced opportunities to appropriately scaffold student learning for development of deep understanding. This focus on test preparation caused a shift in their classrooms from student centered pedagogy conducive to best practice for middle school learners involving cooperative learning and collaborative teaching (MYSA, 2008; Swain & Pendergast, 2013) to a more teacher focussed approach.

School A's teachers did not support the inclusion of Year 3 students in NAPLAN on the grounds that they were too young to be included,

although conducting practice tests did 'ease their suffering'. The Year 5 teacher reported, '[I]n Grade 3 they still need to learn those logical steps. I do feel that it is going to affect their later learning because now they are not learning'. The Year 7 teacher refuted any adverse influences on Year 7 students and claimed that the benefits over-rode any negative outcomes. However, she later stated that the national testing can cause Year 7 students stress.

Concerns were raised by School A's teachers regarding restricting students to a limited duration to complete tests and that these time limits created unnecessary stress. Furthermore, the Year 7 teacher questioned the integrity of including trick questions in an attempt to confuse students. School A's teachers maintained that the tests were set above their students, the Year 5 teacher explained, '[I]t's way too high for them. It's crazy. There is a lot in the Reading test for them to read for the time they have'. The Year 3 teacher added, 'It's not aimed at our year level because there's a lot of inferential reading, there is no way you can do it in time'. School A's teachers suggested that trick questions were embedded in the tests and that the added pressure involved in teaching students how to identify a trick question consumed time better dedicated to more important tasks.

Continual test preparation was reported to impact School A's student/teacher relationships; however, teachers presented differing perceptions of resulting repercussions. The Year 7 teacher viewed changes in her classroom as positive for the purpose of easier behaviour management. She contended that test preparation positioned her students in test-

like situations where interaction was disallowed, thus ensuring simplicity when detecting inappropriate student behaviour. She explained that the process of testing, analysing, addressing weaknesses and re-testing using past tests reassured students that their teachers would provide them with appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding in order to achieve success. According to the Year 7 teacher this routine assisted in development of student/teacher relationships based on trust.

In contrast, the Years 3 and 5 teachers suggested that constant practising for NAPLAN resulted in insufficient time available to provide experiences which assist in development of a healthy school environment with an emphasis on strong teacher-student relationships (MYSA, 2008). The Year 3 teacher explained, 'I just think they still need that TLC (Tender Loving Care) and they don't get that I don't have time...'. The Year 5 teacher added, '[F]irst term you should be focusing on behaviour and tuning the children into their learning, but it is really hard to engage the kids when from the start of the year it is testing'.

The teachers at School A admitted to feeling pressured by NAPLAN and all that it entails. Expectations placed on the principal by higher authorities were shared with teachers, who then passed them on to students. A Year 3 teacher explained that she gets anxious about how her students suffer and added that some of her children were crying. She explained, '[I]t doesn't matter how you go about starting the test and preparing them for it they still feel the pressure'. The Year 7 teacher suggested a further stress related to externally developed tests involved teacher

effectiveness being gauged by students' results. If their students failed to achieve improved test results, they feared punishment by the principal by means of transfer to a Year level not involved in the testing. This meant that those teachers with a love of teaching middle years students were forced to teach in other year levels where their skills were not utilised. The Year 7 teacher explained that students' test results were, 'Pulled apart... scrutinised... year level by year level... teacher by teacher. The principal does graphs, and he puts them up in staff meetings and we all know who's who'. Teachers at School A claimed that NAPLAN results were not indicative of best practice teaching designed to engage the young adolescent as there were other areas of curriculum equally as important as those addressed in the tests.

According to School A teachers, curriculum and pedagogy had significantly transformed since NAPLAN had been implemented. They outlined that learning and teaching prior to NAPLAN included whole term integrated unit plans which encompassed curriculum expectations across seven key learning areas. Highly scaffolded concepts were introduced through topics generated from the

students' real world. There was time for explicit teaching of basic skills, school camps with curriculum connections, art and drama experiences, and learning through discovery and problem solving which included higher order thinking skills. All of these aspects had been eliminated and replaced with NAPLAN preparation involving 'teaching to the test' and 'test wiseness' thus narrowing curriculum.

The teachers revealed genuine concern for their students' future. The Year 5 teacher explained that, 'rather than doing one concept in depth in one day she probably covered five or 10 concepts.' Each participant identified the absence of important pedagogy such as hands-on manipulative material for students still functioning at the concrete operational stage. They added that the frequency of student group work had reduced and reported that most instruction was whole class and involved students sitting at their desks the majority of the time and not involving the integrated and disciplinary curricula that are negotiated, relevant and challenging suggested by MYSA (2013). The Year 3 teacher explained, 'We don't sit on the carpet and share; tell stories and



run language programs.' School A's teachers suggested that curriculum, assessment and pedagogy conducive to best classroom practices included appropriate time available to cover concepts from foundation through to deep understanding and was not that which was associated with NAPLAN structure.

School A's teachers suggested that student data collected from administering multiple practice tests were used during parent/teacher interviews. They surmised that multiple collections of results constituted a more reliable approach to obtaining data than the 'point-in-time' NAPLAN tests which produced invalid data because students were able to guess or students may be experiencing other issues which may affect their ability to achieve, which would skew results. Skewing of results raised concerns as they believed that NAPLAN results impacted the distribution of funding received from governments for intervention to address student needs. The Year 5 teacher described how skewed results can impact classroom practice. 'I am having issues with a student at the moment that is not getting certain support because she did okay on the last tests, but I think it was guessing'. Teachers suggested further point-in-time testing issues which may impact data validity included bright students having a bad day, students feeling sick and those suffering test-anxiety.

Another concern raised was with regard to lower ability students, who teachers described as disadvantaged. They explained that the students who do not initially understand a new concept should be exposed to other ways to learn that concept, but this is not happening as there is not the

time available. School A's teachers explained that their principal expected improved student NAPLAN results and the easiest way to improve the classroom average is to target students who do not need to travel far to move from below to above the average line. At this crucial period of adolescence when cognitive processes are undergoing refinement (Pendergast, 2010) the teachers at School A considered spending time with low achieving students during test preparation to be a waste of time. Instead they reported their involvement in selecting students positioned close to, but just below state and/or national averages and targeting them with focused teaching in an attempt to elevate students' positions thus increasing class averages. The Year 3 teacher explained:

I gave my teacher aide the lows and I solely targeted the middle to high group and I did that every day. If any are going to get better results it will be those students...I know this is terrible, the really low ones who cannot read instructions to start with, there is no point me working with students that cannot read.

The care these teachers directed towards their students was obvious, but they described issues which caused them anxiety as they complied with changes to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices, which they identified as non-conducive to best classroom practice.

School B teachers

Four teachers at School B attended the focus group interview. NAPLAN implementation was described by these teachers as having had minimal impact on teaching and learning in their

classrooms and there was no pressure from the Principal to make changes. They reported spending less than an hour a year rehearsing for NAPLAN. As traditional paper and pencil testing was not common practice at School B, teachers claimed that their students of all ages would be uncomfortable in a formal testing situation. The unfamiliar structure of NAPLAN and extensive testing period were identified by teachers as their primary concerns.

School B's teachers explained that test material was integrated within existing curriculum, thus camouflaging any changes to lesson structure or content. The Year 5 teacher explained,

I linked it in with the main lesson...they were exposed to it and I made it real for them so they felt confident with it...I got one test like one practice test and we cut it into strips and I made it into a game, so it was fun which is good for relationship building.

School B's teachers reported an absence of pressure in relation to NAPLAN and reasoned that it reflected the low level of importance NAPLAN was afforded at School B. It would appear that very little change had occurred in relation to test implementation except during the actual testing. Group, individual or whole class activities where students were offered opportunities to learn from each other and discover solutions to problems using manipulative materials were commonplace in these classrooms. The Year 5 teacher explained, '[W]e are about the holistic child, not just about one test'. According to these teachers, teaching and learning which existed in classrooms at School B were conducive to effective learning and involved authentic instruction

(Lingard, 2003) which involves learning and teaching that excites students in twenty-first century classrooms by engaging them with work of intellectual quality (Horan, 2010; Lingard, 2003) where they are able to identify the links to their world. They suggested that placing students at the centre of curriculum presented opportunities for success and encouraged students to develop a love of learning. They added that assessment practices at the school were ongoing and in the main formative in nature which resulted in valid assessment of student achievement.

Teachers from School B agreed that NAPLAN did affect their students negatively by way of test anxiety and stress which could impact their demonstrations of achievement. They reported that some students were 'a bit stressed' and others, 'a bit scared'. One teacher described a parent pushing her daughter into the classroom to participate in the testing. The Year 7 teacher questioned how children who are stressed and scared could concentrate on the testing.

A further issue raised by the four teachers at School B was the varying levels of test preparation conducted in schools and therefore was the testing conducted on a level playing field? They were aware that some teachers at other schools were 'teaching to the test' and teaching to specific groups of students so as to achieve improved results. These teachers stated that they did not engage in such practices.

School B's teachers speculated that NAPLAN implementation may lead to the introduction of performance-based pay in the government sector which they feared would negatively impact the teaching profession including

far reaching side-effects such as teachers cheating, pressuring students to perform, knowledge becoming power, and massive public sector resignations. School B's teachers indicated that the way forward from this point was to continue with current structure, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practised at School B because NAPLAN was, 'Not the best way. In fact, it's possibly the worst way'.

Stage 3 - Classroom observations

Classroom observations were conducted early in the year and prior to NAPLAN testing. The purpose was to observe the alignment or otherwise of what was reported by the teachers. Important indicators of the key components of middle schooling principles and practices provided a lens through which to view the middle years classrooms involved in the study. Focussing observations through the signifying practices of middle years criteria allowed the observer to determine whether or not these middle years classrooms were democratic classrooms where knowledge was socially constructed, where the students had ownership of the classroom and were the centre of the curriculum, and where negotiation and integrated curriculum were common practices (Swain, 2015).

School A Classrooms

Classroom observations conducted at School A involved visits to Year 3, 5 and 7 classrooms. Furniture placement varied in classrooms observed at School A. Noted in all rooms was the lack of useable floor space while electronic whiteboard positioning dictated a definite front to each room. Wall displays in all participating classrooms included Literacy and Numeracy

posters and very few student work samples. Students' practice test results written next to students' names were displayed on the Year 7 classroom wall.

The whole class lesson observed in the Year 3 classroom identified curriculum intent as numeracy found on the national tests, however, teaching numeracy skills or concepts was not observed. Each practice test question was dissected, focussing on identifying clues in the question format which would assist students to discover correct answers and was not about solving numeracy problems. Instructions included such statements as, 'If there are two lines, then they expect two answers.' This further clarified lesson intent as 'test wiseness'.

Observation in the Year 5 class involved a Literacy test. Lesson content included strategies which aided students' attempts to identify the distracters supplied in NAPLAN multiple choice options for literacy. These included explanations such as, 'If a multiple-choice question ends in the word 'an' the answer must begin with a vowel. If you have no idea what the answer is, choose the longest one'. Other concepts covered during the lesson included: capitalisation; colouring small circles correctly; and 'the amount of spaces provided for the answer determines the length of the answer required'. Each question involved a different concept, no links were identified between concepts and there was no opportunity for students to consolidate each concept before moving on. Several students faced away from the teacher including a boy sitting alone at the end of the teacher's desk who received no teacher acknowledgement the entire lesson. Observed in this classroom was 'teaching to the test'

regardless of student engagement or disengagement.

The only classroom observation conducted in the afternoon session at School A was in the Year 7 classroom. Whole class instructions were given to students before they commenced working collaboratively identifying animal endangerment and its relationship with humans. Students reported that the previous two sessions had involved practice testing. Evidence of this was observed on entering the room to witness the teacher calling out students' names and students responding with their practice test results. As each result was supplied the teacher repeated it loudly to the whole class.

During the observation period no direct or indirect reference to NAPLAN was made in the Year 7 classroom. However, during the 45-minute observation conducted in Year 5 the word 'test' was recorded 17 times. Students in Years 3 and 7 were observed receiving verbal praise. In Year 5 verbal praise was forthcoming for students answering practice test questions correctly, however, those students who answered incorrectly were subjected to sarcasm and 'put-downs'. Student movement in these classrooms was limited.

Students were supplied with resources required to complete classroom tasks, but few other resources were observed in these classrooms. This is not to say that there were no other resources available to students attending School A, but these were the only resources observed in classroom settings. Year 3 students also demonstrated disengagement through talking and daydreaming, only three students produced any work. Children in Year 5

displayed negative responses towards the teacher and task. Five students engaged in the learning experience. The lesson continued regardless of varying levels of student engagement. In the Year 7 classroom students were observed working collaboratively. Their teacher continually prompted students to extend their thinking. This classroom was unique in that it was the only classroom where students were observed working collaboratively with other students and their teacher.

These classrooms were not learner centred. The learning environment portrayed little collaborative activity where students could develop quality relationships. Pedagogical practices in these classrooms did not provide opportunities for students to identify with a sense of self, nor were the activities rigorous, practical real-life and relevant.

School B Classrooms

Observations were conducted at School B in two Year 3 classrooms, 3A and 3B, one Year 5 classroom, and one Year 7 classroom. Classrooms at School B included double teaching spaces which allowed room for furniture arrangement while providing floor space for individuals, small groups or whole class floor activities.

All classrooms at School B contained student desks and shelving. Observed desk arrangements included rows and group format. Students were not allocated specific places to sit nor was there designated ownership of desks. Students were recorded moving freely around rooms addressing tasks through their selected mode of learning. A definite front of room only existed in the Year 5 classroom, where the desks positioned in rows faced

the blackboard at the designated front of the room. Demonstrations of student work constituted the majority of items displayed on walls of all classrooms observed at School B.

On entry to the classrooms at School B it was difficult to locate teachers as they constantly engaged with students and tasks. Students in the Year 7 classroom and 3B were observed negotiating tasks and learning environments confidently with each other and their teachers. Children in 3A engaged in reading while their teacher provided individual consultation when required. Lesson content in the Year 7 classroom involved research, design and problem solving as students investigated famous inventors and inventions through history. The Year 7 teacher consulted with each student and appeared to offer encouragement and ideas and prompted their research. Students belonging to 3B, positioned in a circle on the floor, revisited their social skills, their teacher, also a member of the circle.

The format of mathematics observed in the Year 5 classroom resembled that included in NAPLAN, as the mathematical tasks and questions were presented in multiple choice format. Mathematical problems were presented and strategies for solving problems were discussed. Students were asked to select and justify their preferred responses from a selection of four multiple choice answers. Manipulative materials were available for those students who functioned at the concrete operational stage. Students were also given the opportunity to consolidate concepts introduced in each mathematical problem before moving on to a new concept. Noted was an absence of direct or indirect reference to the tests. Consistent in

all classrooms observed at School B was encouragement and verbal praise directed towards students.

Available resources observed at School B included books, games and concrete manipulative materials positioned in labelled boxes situated around the perimeter of each classroom. Noted was the absence of computers in classroom settings. Students were instructed to relocate to the library if they required the use of information technology. Observations of 45 to 60 minutes are a snapshot of the classroom environment and do not offer an holistic view overall. During these observations the characteristics of best practice Middle Schooling (MYSA, 2008) were evident, and all students appeared to be engaged and motivated in the teaching and learning environment.

Discussion

The findings from Stage 2 focus group interviews with 7 teachers and Stage 3 seven classroom observations, provide a unique window to explore the effects on curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in NAPLAN classrooms in two school sites. Also, this stage of the data collection allowed for identification of any existing tension between the classroom practices at the two schools and the signifying practices of middle schooling (MYSA, 2008). School A allocated considerable class time to test readiness and emphasised the importance of NAPLAN while School B engaged in minimal preparation and did not highlight NAPLAN as an important aspect of the school experience.

The findings from the two stages of this study are now discussed via key themes that emerged from thematic

content analysis of transcripts from Stage 2. The analysis of the transcribed data followed Creswell's Six Stage Coding Process (2007) which allows clear identification of major themes through constantly revisiting the data, revealing five main themes:

- hidden agendas and top-down pressure;
- NAPLAN as diagnostic or holistic;
- curriculum, assessment and pedagogical shift to a NAPLAN focus;
- NAPLAN practices a positive or negative;
- NAPLAN equity and validity.

Hidden agendas and top-down pressure

School A's teachers suggested that NAPLAN was a tool for judging teachers and schools and not for the purpose of increasing student achievement. They suggested that their perception of a hidden agenda extended beyond politicians and that their principal judged his teachers as successful or incompetent according to their students' NAPLAN results. Furthermore, they indicated failure to demonstrate student improvement led to punishment by being moved to a non-testing year level the following year. Teachers at School B concurred with this view, describing the assessment program as not being about children, but about 'political point-scoring' and money. Teachers at School B identified performance-based pay for teachers and management in government schools as the hidden political agenda. They suggested that parents rated schools according to the school's NAPLAN results and governments would use similar methods to determine salaries for

government employees. This aligns with Au's (2011) conceptions of New Taylorism in terms of teachers' efficiency and productivity in the form of student success.

Data indicated a commonality between the two research sites in that study participants perceived the existence of hidden agendas in relation to the development and implementation of NAPLAN and how the data it produced might be used. School A's teachers recognised that their principal was pressured by superiors and this pressure was passed on to teachers, who in turn passed it on to students. Teachers at School B did not report experiencing top down pressure in regard to NAPLAN, as it was not prioritised at School B. Evidence of top-down pressure was not observed at School B which supported the teachers' accounts of occurrences at School B.

NAPLAN as diagnostic or holistic

One teacher at School A reported that testing and pre-testing had proven to be useful as a diagnostic tool for the identification of gaps in education of students. In this way constant exposure to problem solving strategies involved in practice tests had resulted in increased levels of student achievement. The remaining two teachers stated the only benefit students gained from constant testing and re-testing was related to familiarity of test format, processes and procedures.

The teachers at School B did not place value on NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool and did not choose to implement a constant test and re-test preparation focus as a tool for diagnostic assessment of student learning needs. They reported that teachers' judgments were a more reliable gauge of student

achievement. School B's teachers added that the time period between testing and results delivery made the assessment ineffective as a diagnostic tool.

The teachers at School A did not regard NAPLAN to be a valuable holistic assessment tool arguing that literacy and numeracy did not alone provide all skills and knowledge required for a complete education. They agreed that students' results for achievement in the wealth of programs which ran in classrooms after NAPLAN was completed in May were equally as important and were indicative of the value of education at School A. School B preferred overall assessment practices conducted by classroom teachers to gauge distance travelled by their students.

Curriculum, assessment and pedagogical shift to a national assessment focus

In order to address the perceived accountability agenda School A endorsed drastically altered curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in Years 3, 5 and 7 for four months leading up to NAPLAN and to a lesser degree of intensity, Years 2, 4 and 6 for six months in preparation for NAPLAN the following year. Teachers of Years 3, 5 and 7 at School A were instructed to replace their traditional curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices with a rigorous program of constant testing and retesting. Tests from previous years were used to identify student weaknesses, teachers then taught to the weaknesses before implementing further testing to evaluate student progress and to identify need for intervention. These practices align with Au's (2011) explanation of New Taylorism that high stakes

assessment directly impacts classroom practices, and not for the best.

Teachers at School A stated that the expectation was that they would comply with the assessment teaching focus and prescribed assessment tasks as they were not negotiable at School A. They reported that preparation for NAPLAN commenced in week one or two of each school year and curriculum and pedagogy focused on assessment which left no time for 'getting to know you' activities or for developing social skills, and classroom rules and expectations. Teachers reported that two-thirds of each day was devoted to completing practice tests, marking tests and analysing results which involved only concepts covered in NAPLAN. They explained that learning and teaching focussed around NAPLAN as not representative of effective teaching and suggested that it narrowed curriculum which reduced opportunity for pedagogical flexibility and furthermore stifled student creativity. Teachers reported introducing numerous concepts each day with no opportunity to teach them via appropriate scaffolding or to any real depth and no opportunity for concept consolidation. There was no entry point pertinent to students' cognitive level, 'if students fell behind, so be it'. These concepts were taught in isolation with no links to other concepts or connection to the real world. They reported that the focus on test preparation had been at the expense of other key learning areas. This approach is consistent with New Taylorism where teachers power is usurped and top down power applied.

Consistent with pedagogical

practices described by teachers from School A and recognising the limitations of 45 to 60-minute moment-in-time observations as not offering an holistic representation of events, a focus on NAPLAN was observed in all three classrooms visited at School A. This was further confirmed by classroom wall displays, resources and lesson content which revolved around preparation for testing. Lessons involved 'teaching to the test'. Although not observed in Year 7, students provided evidence which confirmed that this had taken place in the two sessions earlier in the day. The Year 7 teacher was observed requesting students call out practice test results in front of their peers; she also displayed records of students' test results on the classroom wall. Pedagogy involving opportunity for higher order thinking, collegiality, student negotiation and movement during learning experiences was only observed during the 45-60-minute observations in Year 7. Focus on practice testing was observed in the form of direct and indirect reference to testing. In one classroom the word 'test' was mentioned 17 times in one lesson. Teacher pedagogy demonstrated at School A was predominantly teacher directed and whole class, involving lesson instruction by teachers standing alongside whiteboards at the front of rooms. Furthermore, low levels of student engagement, low levels of teacher engagement, and curriculum and pedagogy non-conducive to best teacher practice as described by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers was also witnessed in classrooms at School A.

In contrast, the implementation of NAPLAN had minimal impact on curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices at School B.

According to School B's teachers, School B focused on student-centered pedagogy and did not introduce any form of alteration to curriculum, pedagogy or assessment practices until two weeks prior to testing. During this time students were introduced to the test format. School B's NAPLAN results were described as above state average and attributed this success to an educational philosophy that involved the whole child and refuted that any further focus on NAPLAN would see an improvement in students' results. They attributed successful student outcomes to formative assessment and reported the use of summative assessment for reporting and planning purposes only.

Teachers at School B reported no changes to their approaches to learning and teaching due to NAPLAN implementation other than that which was unavoidable. Limited test practice which did occur was camouflaged within existing curriculum. Their teaching included a variety of pedagogies such as, individual seat work, whole group instruction and the use of hands-on manipulative materials. They added that basic skills and critical thinking skills were taught and encouraged in their classrooms.

Observations in classrooms at School B supported the account of learning and teaching practices given by the teachers. Wall displays of numeracy and literacy concepts were shadowed by displays of student achievement. Learning in this environment involved sharing, discovering, problem solving and student negotiation of lesson content and pedagogy. Teachers facilitated while students freely moved from floor to desks when appropriate in rooms where generally there

were no whiteboards, blackboards, computers or designated front. There existed an abundance of hands-on manipulative resources and books, both fiction and non-fiction.

NAPLAN practices a positive or negative?

A benefit of NAPLAN preparation identified by School A's teachers was that it reduced student stress as students became more familiar with test structure and process. Furthermore, one teacher claimed that intense test preparation involving constant testing built positive student/teacher relationships based on trust as students were assured that their teacher would not 'let them down'. Observed were disengaged students and teachers 'teaching to the test' in an attempt to improve their results. 'Teaching to the test' and teaching 'test wiseness' made up the lesson content in three of the four lessons observed. This is a further clear example of what Au (2011) warns is a negative impact of high stakes testing regimes, where learning is sacrificed for process.

Those interviewed at School B reported that NAPLAN impacted on learning and teaching only during the two weeks prior to the testing where practice tests were introduced as a way of familiarising students with test structure to ease student anxiety. They did not see the purpose of further time being allocated to test practice and believed that constant practices only improve 'test wiseness' and therefore affected validity of results. Teachers report spending less than two hours a year rehearsing for the tests and believed that constant practice testing did not improve results. Only in one classroom observed at School B did there

appear to be engagement in test preparation. However, this did not include teaching 'test wiseness'.

National testing equity and validity

School A's teachers identified the pitfalls of teaching a national testing focused curriculum and identified consequential deficits to students' education. They were concerned about long-term effects of 'teaching to the test' and identified huge gaps in their students' education. They also raised issues related to Year 3 students' participation and believed that they were too young to be included.

The length of the testing period was raised by School A's teachers as a further issue. They reported that expecting students to sit in a test situation for lengthy periods caused them stress and the extensive amount of reading required to complete the tests increased stress for low achieving students when they failed to finish. They added that students still functioning at the concrete operational stage were further disadvantaged due to the absence of time for explicit teaching of concepts using hands-on manipulative materials.

Classroom observations confirmed that the practice of preparation for NAPLAN was inequitable. Witnessed were unattended lower achieving students, and teachers focusing attention on those few students deemed able to succeed. School A's teachers reported engaging in practices where teaching focused on students below, but extremely close to 'the line' indicating the national average, state average or like schools' average. They reported disadvantages involved in this practice and related negative

consequences to high and low achieving students who also had the right to teacher attention and educational development.

Those interviewed at School B suggested securing equity with regard to NAPLAN testing by 'levelling the playing field'. They reported that some schools spent an enormous amount of time preparing for NAPLAN and others like School B did not. They questioned who was advantaged or penalised by this practice. Evident during classroom observations was the whole child approach referred to by adults interviewed at School B.

School A's participants discussed NAPLAN validity and suggested that the opportunity for students to guess successfully or the impact of other influences such as sickness and test anxiety may skew results, rendering them invalid. Observations indicated questionable validity when students engaged in practices involving 'test wiseness' and not strategies for problem solving. If the intended purpose of NAPLAN was to gauge students' ability to pass tests, then this practice was successful. However, if NAPLAN was to gauge students' academic achievement, results may be invalid as they did not truly reflect data which was directly related to test purpose.

According to School B's participants NAPLAN did not constitute the best way of collecting valid student data. Regardless of their attempts to ease student stress they reported that students experienced negative effects such as test anxiety. Teachers further suggested that in order to achieve valid data, rigid restrictions related to student preparation, for example teaching to the test and test

wiseness, must be implemented. To achieve valid results, they suggested development of consistency in delivery of curriculum and rigid test guidelines to ensure a level playing field was provided for all students.

Teachers at School A reported using data collected from constant testing to show parents the distance travelled by their children and described this data as more valuable than moment-in-time test data produced by NAPLAN. School B's teachers reported not valuing NAPLAN results and in fact 'gave them very little time' instead placing greater faith in assessment conducted by teachers in classrooms.

Is New Taylorism evident?

This study set out to investigate the experiences of selected teachers at two school sites, exploring the effects on curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in their classrooms of differing approaches to NAPLAN. The findings reveal a range of similarities and differences in School A and School B. The school's approach to NAPLAN, and in turn the teachers at these school sites, had a major influence on the curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in classrooms. In School A where there was a highly intentional approach to NAPLAN, there was strong harmony with Au's (2011) concept of New Taylorism, where teachers lose pedagogical autonomy as leaders apply top down control to manage the assessment process, with school leaders making decisions and teachers losing autonomy, leading to effects such as narrowing of the curriculum, content drilling and an increase in test focused teaching methods. In School B the effect

on the curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in classrooms was minimal. However, the sense of political control and an external agenda reinforced the notion of New Taylorism, even in this setting. Au (2011) reminds us through the lens of New Taylorism, high stakes testing regimes such as NAPLAN may lead to teachers experiencing a sense of increased surveillance, loss of control over curriculum and classroom practice, and a shift of power from teachers to managers. This study confirms that in the two school sites in this study, NAPLAN has had this effect, to varying degrees.

The influence of the school's approach to NAPLAN is clearly evident in these two sites and provides a unique insight into the effects of NAPLAN in schools in Australia where annually more than 1 million students sit the tests. This study adds to the expanding understandings of the effects of NAPLAN in the Australian high-stakes assessment agenda, including the site-specific differences that occur.

Doctor Katharine Swain

College of Education,
Psychology and Social Work

Flinders University of
South Australia
Sturt Road, Bedford Park, SA 5042

Phone: +61 (08) 8201 3421

Mobile: +61 (0) 414 453 996

katharine.swain@flinders.edu.au

Professor Donna Pendergast

Head and Dean School of
Education and Professional Studies

Griffith University
Mt Gravatt Campus
176 Messines Ridge Road
Mt Gravatt Qld 4122

Phone: +61 (07) 3735 1082

Mobile: +61 (0) 466 130 479

d.pendergast@griffith.edu.au

References

- Ainsworth, L.B., & Viegut, D. J. (2006). *Common formative assessments: How to connect standards-based instruction and assessment*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press. Sage Publications.
- Au, W. (2011). Teaching under the new Taylorism: High-stakes testing and the standardization of the 21st century curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(1), 25–45.
- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2010). National assessment program (NAP): Why NAP? Retrieved from <http://www.nap.edu.au/about/why-nap.html>
- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2011). 2011 National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy Handbook for principles. Information for parents.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practise*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (2009). To appear Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*. 1(1).
- Broadfoot, P. & Black, P. (2010). Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice Redefining assessment? *The first ten years of assessment in education. Assessment in Education*, 11(1). DOI: 10.1080/0969594042000208976
- Brown, G. T. L., Irving, S. E., & Keegan, P. J. (2007). *An introduction to educational assessment: Measurement and evaluation*. New Zealand: Pearson Education.
- Caamela, S. (2018). Management theory of Frederick Taylor. Retrieved: 10 November, 2019 <https://www.business.com/articles/management-theory-of-frederick-taylor/>
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Educational research: Planning conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Educational Press.
- Cumming, J.J. (2012). *Valuing students with impairment*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Cumming, J.J. Kimber, K., & Wyatt-Smith, C.M (2011). Historic Australian conceptualisations of English, literacy and multimodality in policy and curriculum and conflicts with educational accountability. *English in Australia*, 46(3), 42-55.
- Donnelly, K. (2010, Aug 02). Flaws test Gillard's proud boast. The Courier - Mail. Retrieved from http://edstandards.com.au/index.php?education_standards_institute=103&archive
- Earl, K., & Giles, D. L. (2011). An-other look at assessment. New Zealand Journal of Teacher's Work, 8(1), 11-20. Retrieved from www.teacherswork.ac.nz/journal/volume8_issue1/earl.pdf
- Gronlund, N. E., & Waugh, K. W. (2008). *Assessment of student achievement*. Pearson Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Education, Inc.
- Haladyna, T.M., Downing, S.M., & Rodriguez, M.C. (2002). A review of multiple-choice item-writing guidelines for classroom assessment. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 15(3), 309-334.
- Harlen, W. (2005). Teachers' summative practices and assessment for learning: Tensions and synergies. *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(2), 207-223.
- Harlen, W., & Deakin Crick, R. (2003). Teaching and motivation for learning. *Assessment in Education*, 10(2), 169-208.
- Hardy, I. (2013). Testing that counts: Contesting national literacy assessment policy in complex schooling settings. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 36(2), 67-78.
- Hohensinn, C., Kubinger, K. D., Reif, M., Schleicher, E., & Khorramdel, L. (2011). Analysing item-position effects due to booklet design within large-scale assessment. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 17, 497-509.
- Lingard, B., W. Martino, and G. Rezai-Rashti. (2013). Testing regimes, accountabilities and education policy: Commensurate global and national developments. *Journal of Education Policy* 28.5: 539-556.
- Littler, C. (1978). Understanding Taylorism. *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 2 pp. 185-202.
- Lobascher, S. (2011). What are the potential impacts of high stakes testing on literacy education in Australia? *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 34(2), 9-19.
- Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA) (2008). MYSA Position Paper: Middle Schooling: People, practices and places. MYSA: Brisbane.
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (MCEETYA). (2008). Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Retrieved from www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne_declaration_25979.html
- OECD. (2008). *Assessment for Learning: Formative assessment*, OECD, Paris.
- Plank, S. B. & Condliffe, B. F. (2013). Pressures of the season: An examination of classroom quality and high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(5), 1152-1182. doi: 10.3102/0002831213500691
- Pendergast, D. (2010). Middle schooling. In D. Pendergast, & N. Bahr, (Eds), *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (2nd ed.)* (pp. 3-22). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D. & Bahr, N. (2010). *Teaching middle years: Rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (2nd ed.)*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. ISBN 978 1 74237 191 7.
- Polesel, J., Dulfer, N. & Turnbull, M. (2012). The experience of education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families – Literature Review. Sydney, The Whitlam Institute
- Popham, W. (2009). English national curriculum assessment: a commentary from the USA – or exhibiting kindness to the colonies. *Educational Research*, 51, 265-268. doi: 10.1080/00131880902891966
- Rowntree, D. (1987). *Assessing students: How shall we know them?* London, New York: Harper & Row.
- Shepard, L.A. (2003). Reconsidering large-scale assessment to heighten its relevance to learning. In J.M. Atkins, & J.E. Coffey, (Eds.). *Everyday assessment in the science classroom*. Arlington, VA: NSTA Press.
- Stiggins, R. (2005). *Student involved classroom assessment* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Stobart, G. (2008). *Testing times: The uses and abuses of assessment*. London: Routledge.
- Swain, K (2015). Middle years students' perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN: The student voice. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Griffith University, Gold Coast.
- Swain, K., & Pendergast, D. (2013). Competing interests: An investigation of National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and middle schooling assessment practices. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 13(1), 4-17
- Swain, K., Pendergast, D. & Cumming, J. (2018). Student experiences of NAPLAN: sharing insights from two school sites. *Australian Educational Researcher*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-017-0256-5>
- Turan, H. (2015). Taylor's "Scientific Management Principles": Contemporary Issues in Personnel Selection Period. *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, 3(11), 1102-1105.
- Wiliam, D. (2008, September). 'What do you know when you know the test results? The meaning of educational assessments'. Keynote address at the Annual Conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment, Cambridge.
- Wyse, D., & W. Torrance. 2009. The development and consequences of national curriculum assessment for primary education in England. *Educational Research*, 51(2), 213-28.

‘Teacher talk’: striving for engagement, not just compliance

Karlie Ross

karlie.ross@bdr.qut.edu.au

As a middle years teacher, one of my favourite things to do is to surprise students by presenting learning in unexpected ways. They look forward to class because they are eager to know what might happen. Will they walk in and see playdough on their desk? Will they not be able to enter at all and be sent on a treasure hunt around the school? The buzz of this excitement – rather, student engagement – is what always motivates me to think of learning in creative ways and to invite students into an *active classroom role*. In this article, I address the issue of student disengagement in the middle years by showing that ‘teacher talk’ (i.e. lengthy sessions of information-giving) pushes students to accept passive classroom roles, which can be one cause for students to disengage from their learning. To assist teachers in understanding how we can better share classroom active roles, I present some pedagogical considerations at the conclusion of this article.

A student’s desire for an active role was a key finding from my 2019 study which explored middle years disengagement, titled *Ghosts in the*

Classroom: Passive Disengagement and its Implications for Classroom Teachers. In this Master of Philosophy study, I investigated the issue of passive disengagement: that is, students who appear to be engaged but are disengaged from the learning task and typically go unnoticed by their teachers. I asked students from Years 8 and 9 about their experiences as they are experts on the issue of classroom disengagement and they helped me understand more about their experiences of classroom learning. One of their clear messages was that these 12 – 14 year olds most often disengaged during 50 minute lectures by their teachers. The students managed to sit still and appear as though they were listening by counting down time, pretending to take notes, and other compliant but passive disengagement strategies.

Implications for a disengaged student.

Classroom disengagement is characterised by students who, to some extent, do not feel they belong at school and/or who

have withdrawn from classroom activities (Chipchase et al., 2017; Willms, 2003). Disengagement has serious and lasting implications for students academically, emotionally, and socially. Research shows that students with high engagement throughout high school “continue their lives as happier and more successful individuals” (Kizildag, Demirtas-Zorbaz, & Zorbaz, 2017, p. 1). In particular, engagement in school is recognised as significantly contributing to student wellbeing, including emotional stability (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). Many studies have suggested that for every additional year of schooling, a correlational rise is seen in life-span and overall health and individual wealth (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006; Ruglis, 2011).

Disengagement in the middle years.

Research continues to report that student disengagement peaks during the middle years of school (Attard, 2012; Christenson et al., 2012; Goss, Sonnemann, & Griffiths, 2017; MYSA, 2008; Pendergast, Main, & Bahr, 2017;

Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). The literature on the issue suggests multiple explanations for this: some suggest pedagogical issues (Attard, 2012), while others note the psychological changes in this age group (Mahatmya, Lohman, Matjasko, & Farb, 2012).

Pendergast, Main and Bahr (2017), who are prominent middle years researchers in Australia, note that quality teaching practices can decline in this age group and that educators need better understanding of how to teach this age group. Attard (2013) emphasises that if students are disengaged during this phase they then develop a general disinterest in learning which may create a domino effect for their learning in senior years. Since disengagement has a snowball effect, practical insights into disengagement during the middle years phase of schooling are needed to ensure that educators have the opportunity to support student engagement during this phase and into their senior phase of schooling.

Research on Student Disengagement

To understand student disengagement, it is necessary to understand that disengagement has three parts: cognition, affect, and behaviour (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Willms, 2003). A student who experiences *cognitive disengagement* may have difficulty with self-regulation and may not have developed effective learning strategies which could look like procrastination (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). A student who experiences *affective disengagement* might have little interest and value

in the learning task and this can be displayed as boredom, frustration, anger, and alienation (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Finally, a student who experiences *behavioural disengagement* is often easier to observe because the student might be frequently absent, may avoid classroom participation, refuse or avoid classroom work and assessment, and may show defiance. Behavioural disengagement might also present passively, such as ‘giving up’, procrastination, avoidance, ‘pretending’, and lack of preparation (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

Importantly, these three dimensions – cognition, affect, behaviour – are always interacting within the student and with their environment which means that disengagement is fluid. No student can be categorised as wholly engaged or wholly disengaged. Reschly and Christenson (2012) put it this way:

Engagement is not conceptualized as an attribute of the student but rather as an alterable state of being that is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning. (p. vi)

This insight by Reschly and Christenson emphasises the responsibility that teachers have in a classroom environment to identify, manage and support students who experience frequent disengagement.

Research Design

Students who participated in this study were from a Prep to Year 12 college in regional Queensland, Australia. Two cohorts of students were invited to participate: the Year 8 cohort, and the Year 9 cohort during 2018. All student and teacher names used in this

article are pseudonyms to protect their identity. In the present study, middle years students participated in three phases of research which occurred over two school terms in 2018. These phases were: Focus Group (Phase 1) > the School Engagement Photo Technique (Phase 2) > Individual Interviews (Phase 3).

Phase 1 invited students from Year 9 to participate in a focus group which generated initial understandings of classroom disengagement. These insights were analysed against literature to help design a new visual instrument for Phase 2, named the *School Engagement Photo Technique (SEPT)*. The SEPT is based on the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) (Murray, 1943) which is a psychological instrument that uses a set of ambiguous images to help elicit thoughts and feelings. The SEPT inherits dimensions of the TAT and it uses features from similar visual methods like the ‘School Apperception Story Procedure’ by Jones (2001). The SEPT includes nine ambiguous images of classroom settings.

An example of one of the images is displayed in Figure 1. In keeping with the principles of the TAT, the image is deliberately ambiguous: whilst it is clear that the environment is a classroom, the students’ faces and their books are difficult to interpret. This image was designed to illustrate a student who is experiencing passive disengagement and their engaged peer. The female student on the left appears to have attentive posture, has a pen in her hand, and appears to be taking notes. The male student on the right appears to have slouched posture, is leaning on his arm, and is fiddling with his pen. The female’s workbook is full

of ‘notes’ and the male’s workbook is blank. This image may relate to students who experience either engagement or disengagement frequently. A frequently engaged student may relate to the female student and disregard the depiction

of their peer. Whereas, a frequently disengaged student may relate to the frustration depicted by the male in the image. Student annotations on this image are important to differentiate who they relate to in this image.



Figure 1.
Image C from the School Engagement Photo Technique card-set

In Phase 2 of the study, Year 8 students were presented with these SEPT images and were invited to individually rank the nine images according to how often they might experience a classroom scenario. Importantly, the students were not provided any information about what the images might mean or what it was that the SEPT was investigating. As the images are ambiguous, students were also invited to annotate their top three images, providing an interpretation of what they see in the image. Analysis of the SEPT responses helped to identify six students who experience frequent passive disengagement in the classroom. In Phase 3, the final phase of research, these six students were invited into individual interviews so that they could share more about their classroom experiences.

Analysis and Findings

Several analysis methods were used across the three phases of research. Thematic analysis (identifying the main theme in student responses) and subject-verb-object orientation (analysing parts of speech and the order of that speech) (Wertz (2011) were utilised. For example, Ziggy ranked the image from Figure 1, as her most frequently experienced. Image ranking alone could have suggested that Ziggy is a frequently disengaged student. However, Ziggy’s annotation read: “I like to get my work done and not mess around with it. I do struggle a bit in school so I like to listen to the teacher to make it easier on me.” Clearly, this annotation does not show that Ziggy interpreted the image as students who are disengaged. This annotation also

shows how the SEPT functions in eliciting thoughts and feelings from ambiguous images. In contrast, Lucy also ranked this as her most experienced scenario. She wrote, “I am always fiddling with things and somehow not paying attention.” When thematic analysis was applied, I could identify that her use of ‘fiddling’ and ‘attention’ suggested that Lucy might be experiencing frequent disengagement. Therefore, I invited Lucy to share more about her classroom experiences in an interview with me. During individual interviews, I came to understand that students were fiddling and ‘not paying attention’ because they were not offered an *active classroom roles* because their teacher was often “at the front talking” (Lucy, Individual Interview).

Across each of the three phrases of research, students from Years 8 and 9 frequently described their classroom learning as “boring” and often reasoned that they felt bored in class when a teacher is talking. When I analysed ‘bored’ using thematic analysis, I found that students were actually referring to *teacher pedagogy* as contributing to their boredom. To help narrow this issue further, I used subject-verb-object orientation to analyse what students perceive their teachers as ‘doing’ or ‘not doing’ which might be contributing to their boredom, and therefore their disengagement. I found that students view their teacher as holding an active role in the classroom and this is contrasted against their own perceived passive roles. An example of this analysis can be seen in Table 1 where I synthesised the main verbs that students used to describe their classroom experiences.

Table 1
Verb Identification to Show Passive and Active Classroom Roles

Student (“I” statements)	Teacher
Stare	Helps
Wait	Speaks
Draw	Explains
Doodle	Teaches
Sit	Talks
Look	Lectures
Zone out	Asks
Listen	Repeats
Write	Checks
Daydream	
Think	
Count down	
Fiddle	
Yawn	

The table shows a clear distinction between the ways that students perceive their role in the classroom (they must sit, look, and listen) versus their perception of their teacher’s role (who talk, explain, and lecture). In other words, teachers are the actors and students are the audience.

Discussion and Implications for Teachers
Language Overload

The issue of teacher pedagogy, specifically ‘teacher talk’, was the most stressed by students above any other issue in this study. In the individual interviews, students shared that teacher talk contributes to *language overload*. One student who shared some interesting insights on this issue was Sophie. She explained that her teacher’s overload of information-giving contributes to her feeling overwhelmed. Sophie used the

image in Figure 1 to explain that “I find that some teachers, they talk too fast and they give a heap of information when I...it’s too tiring to write it all down...it’s kinda’ impossible to understand it all...” She then commented that she ‘gives up’ at this point but still ‘takes notes’. Research by Tancredi (2018) with students experiencing language difficulties confirm this concept of *language overload*, finding that it is a significant barrier to student learning. Tancredi worked with Michael (pseudonym), a student with language difficulties, and he makes similar comments when describing his classroom instruction. Tancredi shared Michael’s recommendations, explaining that he prefers teachers to “explain using different words... simple words’, that instruction should last no more than 15 minutes, and that teachers should provide handouts” (p. 71). In practice, this means that for students like Sophie, it is important

for teachers to consider delivering content and instruction in various and shared methods, not just administered through teacher talk.

A justice issue

Student insights on teacher talk suggest that the teacher values their own ‘talk’ over their students’ learning. Brad, along with Holly and Lachy, each explained that their teachers often repeat the same thing, which sometimes “takes up the whole lesson” (Brad). In her interview, Lucy shared that it is “hard” to listen to some teachers as “some of them speak really fast and *finding* all of that information to get into your mind, you just go ‘ah this is too much for me’ and just get rid of it.” Lucy’s use of the word ‘finding’ is interesting to focus on. It infers that, amid the lengthy lectures of teacher talk, Lucy knows that there is information that is important to locate. Her comment infers a personal responsibility to locate the ‘right’ information and that this responsibility is “too much for me”. Therefore, Lucy’s statement about teacher talk might be a more meaningful comment on teacher responsibility, or a teacher’s contribution to student disengagement.

For Brad and Lucy, they felt a sense of injustice by their teachers’ way of structuring lessons where teachers would do “quite a lot of explaining at the start and sometimes that takes up the whole lesson” then “talks forever and tells us long stories and stuff” (Brad). Lucy said this way of teaching is not “fair”, and Sophie confirmed that some teachers “talk very slowly, they give you a heap of work to do but they are very slow in giving it and then if you don’t complete the work then they ask you to finish it for homework, even though they didn’t

give it fast in the first place.” Each of these students’ insights reinforces the authority position of the teacher whose power in the classroom affords them the freedom to talk for the entire lesson, forcing their students into passive roles, without a voice.

A pedagogical consideration

Fortunately, disengagement is malleable (Fredericks et al., 2004) which means that, for teachers, we have the opportunity to change our pedagogy so that we can offer students a more active role in their learning. This, I conceptualise, as ‘Participatory Pedagogy’. Participatory pedagogy is characterised in a teacher who emphasises active learning opportunities and is represented in class as interaction and action. A teacher who practices participatory pedagogy shares their active classroom role with students, thereby avoiding large segments of ‘teacher talk’ and lecturing their class. This pedagogical consideration is illustrated in the infographic (Figure 2) along with two other pedagogical considerations for addressing student disengagement. Since disengagement is multidimensional then we require pedagogies that address these dimensions: thus, Connective pedagogies addresses affective engagement, whilst Differentiated pedagogies address cognitive engagement.

Notably, participatory pedagogy should not be mistaken for tokenistic “interactive activities”. Rather, this kind of pedagogy should encourage students to drive their learning, to be in control of their environment, and this might involve simple learning tasks like writing. The key aspect of participatory pedagogy is in its name, “participation”; that is, students are offered the role of doers, of talkers, of writers, and of thinkers. This insight is similar to literature on the issue, particularly the work of Shernoff, Tonks, and Anderson (2014) whose research advocates that students indicate *higher levels of engagement when they are at the central point of the activity, rather than the teacher.*

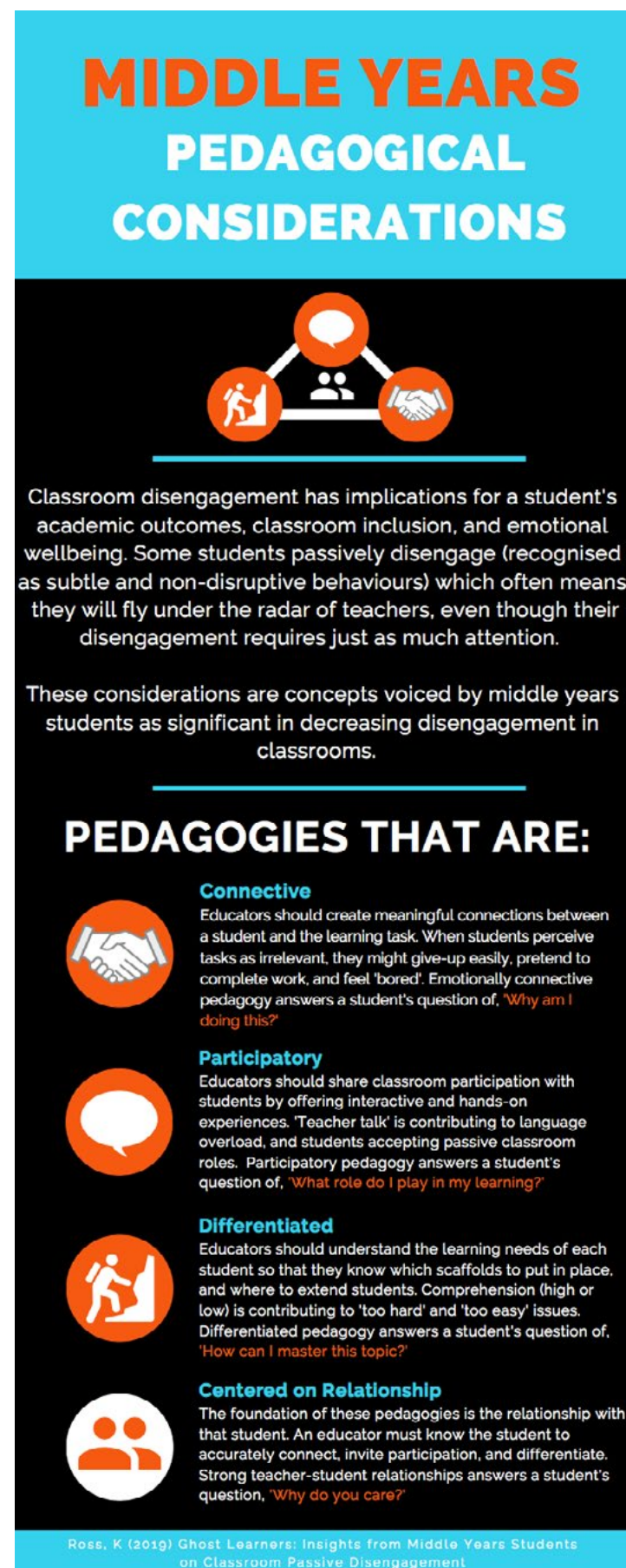


Figure 2.
Middle Years Pedagogical Considerations

Conclusions

Perhaps of paramount importance is that middle years teachers need to *know* their students in order to invite this participation. Therefore, healthy teacher-student *relationships* are the central concept for student engagement. Wubbolding (2007) confirms that strong teacher-student relationships play a paramount role in facilitating students' learning because, "the higher the quality of student-teacher relationship, the higher the level of students' interest in learning" (p.25). Moreover, Van den Berghe, Cardon, Tallir, Kirk, and Haerens (2016) emphasise that, for teachers, "it is important to examine the strength of the student-teacher relationship first

and then the level of challenge and interest in the instruction" (p.3). Therefore, like much of the literature on middle years teaching (Coffey, 2013), relationships are foundational to supporting student engagement during these years of schooling.

The findings from this study have reiterated that middle years classrooms should be buzzing with learning where students take active roles in their classrooms rather than seated at desks, counting down time whilst zoning out of another teacher-lecture. Further, it confirms that a teacher's relationship with their students is the most important issue so that teachers know how to invite participation from their students.

These insights have informed my own practice and I have challenged myself with some more active pedagogies. For example, I now aim to begin my lessons with activity rather than a 'talk'. If I do need to 'talk', I set a timer for how long I intend to speak and I stick with the rule of age = minutes (e.g. 12 years old = 12 minutes of talk). I do these things because I genuinely want an engaged class, not just a compliant one and I challenge my fellow educators to strive for the same.

Karlie Ross
karlie.ross@hdr.qut.edu.au



References

- Appleton, J. J., Christenson, S. L., & Furlong, M. J. (2008). Student engagement with school: Critical conceptual and methodological issues of the construct. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(5), 369-386.
- Attard, C. (2012). Engagement with Mathematics: What Does It Mean and What Does It Look Like? *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*, 17(1), 9-13.
- Attard, C. (2013). "If I had to pick any subject, it wouldn't be maths": foundations for engagement with mathematics during the middle years. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 25(4), 569-587.
- Caraway, K., Tucker, C. M., Reinke, W. M., & Hall, C. (2003). Self-efficacy, goal orientation, and fear of failure as predictors of school engagement in high school students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 40(4), 417-427.
- Chipchase, L., Davidson, M., Blackstock, F., Bye, R., Clothier, P., Klupp, N., . . . Williams, M. (2017). Conceptualising and Measuring Student Disengagement in Higher Education: A Synthesis of the Literature. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(2), 31-42.
- Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (2012). *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (1. Aufl.;2012; ed.). DE: Springer-Verlag.
- Coffey, A. (2013). Relationships: The key to successful transition from primary to secondary school? *Improving Schools*, 16(3), 261-271. doi:10.1177/1365480213505181
- Cutler, D. M., & Lleras-Muney, A. (2006). *Education and health: evaluating theories and evidence*. Retrieved from
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109.
- Goss, P., Sonnemann, J., & Griffiths, K. (2017). *Engaging Students: Creating Classrooms that Improve Learning* Retrieved from
- Jones, R. A. (2001). The School Apperception Story Procedure. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 29(1), 47-62. doi:10.1080/03069880020019000
- Kizildag, S., Demirtas-Zorbaz, S., & Zorbaz, O. (2017). School Engagement of High School Students. *Eğitim ve Bilim*, 42(189).
- Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student Engagement and Achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 262-273. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08283.x
- Mahatmya, D., Lohman, B. J., Matjasko, J. L., & Farb, A. F. (2012). *Engagement across developmental periods*: Springer US.
- McNeely, C., & Falci, C. (2004). School connectedness and the transition into and out of Health-Risk behavior among adolescents: A comparison of social belonging and teacher support. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 284-292.
- Murray, H. A. (1943). Thematic apperception test.
- MYSA, M. Y. o. S. A. (2008). *MYSA Position Paper: Middle schooling: people, practices and places*. Retrieved from MYSA, Brisbane:
- Pendergast, D., Main, K., & Bahr, N. (2017). *Teaching middle years : rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (3rd edition. ed.). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Pendergast, D. L., & Bahr, N. M. (2010). *Teaching middle years: rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (2nd ed.). Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin.
- Ramsdal, G., Gjerum, R. G., & Wynn, R. (2013). Dropout and early unemployment. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 62, 75-86.
- Reschly, A. L., & Christenson, S. L. (2012). Jingle, jangle, and conceptual haziness: Evolution and future directions of the engagement construct *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 3-19): Springer.
- Ruglis, J. (2011). Mapping the biopolitics of school dropout and youth resistance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(5), 627-637. doi:10.1080/09518398.2011.600268
- Shermoff, D. J., Tonks, S. M., & Anderson, B. (2014). The Impact of the Learning Environment on Student Engagement in High School Classrooms. *Teachers College Record*, 116(13), 166-177.
- Skinner, E. A., & Pitzer, J. R. (2012). Developmental dynamics of student engagement, coping, and everyday resilience *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 21-44): Springer.
- Tancredi, H. A. (2018). *Adjusting language barriers in secondary classrooms through professional collaboration based on student consultation*. Queensland University of Technology.
- Van den Berghe, L., Cardon, G., Tallir, I., Kirk, D., & Haerens, L. (2016). Dynamics of Need-Supportive and Need-Thwarting Teaching Behavior: The Bidirectional Relationship with Student Engagement and Disengagement in the Beginning of a Lesson. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 21(6), 653-670.
- Wertz, F. J. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York, N.Y: Guilford Press.
- Willms, J. D. (2003). Student engagement at school. *A sense of belonging and participation. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*.
- Wubbolding, R. E. (2007). Glasser Quality School. *Group Dynamics*, 11(4), 253-261. doi:10.1037/1089-2699.11.4.253

'Developing Steps to Freedom' – Perceptions of the Finnish Education System

Janetta Hargreaves

In October this year, for the second year running, Adolescent Success teamed with our sponsors, Latitude Group Travel <https://latitudegrouptravel.com.au> , to facilitate a five day tour of Finnish schools.

We linked with the Finnish educational learning organisation, Learning Scoop <https://learningscoop.fi> , who provided an exceptional program of background lectures, teacher presentations and classroom visits in and around the beautiful city of Tampere.

Of the sixteen educators who attended the tour this year, the majority were from schools in the South East corner of Queensland, with participants also from regional Queensland, Melbourne and New Zealand. The Queensland state system, Catholic, Anglican, Christian Outreach, and Independent Christian schools were represented, with half of the participants in middle or senior leadership positions within their schools.

I was grateful to attend as the representative of Adolescent Success, and wish to thank the Management Committee for granting me this opportunity. I also wish to acknowledge the deep professional insights that were generated through the participants' exceptional comradery, honesty and good humour. I know we would not have gained as much from this experience without our strength as a cohesive learning team.

Our group's key operating principle for the week was 'seek first to understand, rather than to compare.' This aligned with the operating principle of Learning Scoop, stated on day one of the tour, which is to open Finnish schools and classrooms for professional learning, without any implication that this is in order to direct others on ways to educate. We were privileged always to speak with honest and forthright educators and to visits classrooms that were never artificially 'on display'.

It was in this spirit also that the first presentation of the study tour, by Johanna Järvinen-Taubert, focussed on the context of the Finnish education system. Only later in the week did I fully appreciate that this was vital in reinforcing that schools in other countries cannot expect to 'cut and paste' policies and processes and expect similar outcomes. In Finland, as in all places, the educational parts cannot be separated from the societal whole.

As Järvinen-Taubert emphasised, Finland is a remote country with a harsh climate and environment, a distinctive language and a lack of natural resources. It has had a history of existential threats-invasion, colonisation and a bitter civil war. Since World War 2, Finland has had to rapidly develop from a predominantly rural economy to a technologically advanced society. Its proximity to the USSR meant that it had to excel at diplomacy and compromise and, with the collapse of the USSR and an attendant recession

in Finland, to prioritise ingenuity and enterprise. Finland is proudly a Nordic welfare state, with high taxation and a commitment to equitable access to all public services. It positions education as a life-long right for all and has the means to harness the talents of its greatest resource – its 5.5 million citizens.

Perhaps not ironically, it was the episodes of threat and challenge that created the education system which sees Finland ranking so successfully on measures such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) today. In particular, the need to rapidly modernise their economy from the 1950s and then to recalibrate in the 1990s, generated the key educational features that so impressed our group. I would like to discuss these features under three inter-related themes:

Less is more

In general, the Finns are a restrained people, polite but private. Fewer words are more carefully considered than in many other cultures. Perhaps because of a ready access to nature (their 'freedom to roam' the beautiful forests and lakes), ongoing connections to rural lifestyles, and a cohesive society

that provides consistent support from birth to old age, our group noted a calmness in the schools and classrooms we visited. Of course, the students were energetic, playful and active, and teachers were briskly and competently attending to their classes, but what was noticeable was a lack of wary monitoring and redirection of behaviour.

This was the case for students but, just as surprisingly for Australian and New Zealand educators, for classroom teachers as well. Centralised monitoring of schools through inspections and high stakes testing were abandoned as part of austerity measures in the 1990s and principals in schools neither expect to sight, nor understand the reason to sight, the lesson plans of their staff. Principals consistently expressed to our group that, while they were alert to the issues in their classrooms, they were confident in the professionalism of their teachers and their teachers' collegial teams. Both students and teachers are subject to less cautious oversight, less redirection and less coddling.

Finns have less schooling than many other developed countries. There is ready access to quality, affordable Early Childhood Education and Care Centres (ECECs), but voluntary pre-primary does not commence until the child is 6 years old. This program is four hours per day of predominantly play-based activities, with many of these activities spent outside in adventurous settings, such as the playground or nearby forest, regardless of the weather. This focus on socialisation, risk-taking and play as 'the highest form of research', to quote Albert Einstein, continues through the compulsory Comprehensive years (from 7 to 16 years old), guided by a formal national curriculum that is renewed each decade but which has seen less political interference, less media polemics and more policy consistency across changes of government than is the experience in Australia and New Zealand.

Students in the Comprehensive years spend fewer hours at school per day, have longer vacations, more frequent breaks outdoors

between classes and undertake less homework than do their counterparts in most other OECD countries. They may have fewer changes of teachers throughout their schooling; it is not unusual for teachers to remain with the same cohort of students for five years. Before entering upper secondary school, students in Finland will have undertaken no compulsory high stakes tests and by upper Comprehensive will have been attending classes at varying hours of the school day. By senior secondary, students will be selecting their class timetables and teachers. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities will experience earlier and better resourced support than is the case in many other developed countries. Students who elect a vocational path in their senior schooling will find this choice valued and exceptionally well-resourced. They will have more capacity to study a mix of both general and vocational subjects whilst in senior secondary and, in keeping with the Finnish motto of 'no dead ends', they will be encouraged to find articulation from a polytechnic college to a university.

Nearest is best

The best school in Finland is your closest school which, even in rural areas, is usually walking distance from home. A commitment to equity of access and resources has meant that learning outcomes do not differ significantly between schools. The Australian phenomenon of 'school shopping', with some schools being seen as more successful or prestigious, impacting enrolment patterns, teacher morale, community confidence and even house prices, is unknown in Finland.

There are no gender based schools and less than a dozen private schools in the country, all of which adhere to the national curriculum and receive government funding. All instruction, resources and a daily hot meal are free of charge in the Comprehensive years. School transport is provided if the student resides more than five kilometres from school.

Teachers transfer rates are low. The vast majority of teachers are happy in their work and happy to remain in the schools where they were first

appointed. The attrition rate of teachers in Finland is low also. A 2013 study indicated that about 90% of Finnish teachers remain in the profession for the duration of their careers; in 2016 researchers in Australia estimated our attrition rate in the first 5 years of teaching to be between 30% and 50%.

Trust and responsibility

These concepts are the foundation stones of Finnish education. The profession of teaching is highly respected in Finland, and entry into teacher education courses at university is rigorous and competitive. Only 20% of applicants are accepted into courses which require, not only the suitable matriculation result from senior schooling, but also specific entrance tests. All teachers obtain a research master's degree prior to commencing their career.

Once in the classroom, teachers follow the national core curriculum, augmented by local municipal elements, but pedagogical decisions



around implementation are the teacher's own, in collaboration with teaching teams. As mentioned earlier, inspections of classrooms or teacher planning, either at a systemic or school level, do not occur.

Here, in particular, was where our current Australian and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand approach collided with the bemused reaction of one principal as he answered a question in relation to this issue. He knows through the leadership skills of observation and listening – to students, parents and other staff – what is being effectively taught in the classrooms of his school. He trusts his teachers, in dialogue with their teaching teams, to adjust their pedagogies and assessment to the needs and interests of the students. In the same way, educational authorities trust

principals to make autonomous, contextual, evidence-based decisions. The successes of Finnish education arise from professional responsibility rather than complex systems of accountability.

Trust extends to trusting the lived experience in teacher decision-making, also. Classroom practices were in many cases clearly consistent with the findings of respected international researchers, and teachers and principals could cite these studies, but the impression our group gained was that knowledge of individual students, honed practice, capability and common sense guide teachers' pedagogical decisions. These decisions are generally trusted by administrators, the system and by parents. In cases where students are identified as requiring additional support, it is these pedagogical decisions that guide the placement and program. Research is employed to validate rather than dictate.

I reflect on our adoption of many systems of thinking, programs and procedures over recent years in Queensland education, of my experience of seeing talented teachers attempting to fit themselves within these parameters and second guessing their own skills and knowledge. I reflect on how this has contributed to increased stress levels in teachers, as they act at times against their own well-informed judgements. How do we regain the balance, that would see educators use research to inform, rather than prescribe, practices grounded in their own deep knowledge of individual students and in the context of their own distinct school communities?

Trust and responsibility guide teachers' interactions with students also. As previously mentioned, children, even as young as the toddlers we observed feeding themselves in highchairs in the cafeteria at Kalkunvuori ECEC, are granted more independence, responsibility, space to risk failure and to learn than has become the norm in our schools. It appeared that Finnish children are subject to less supervision, correction and hothousing than many other young people in similar societies.

While the latest iteration of the Finnish national curriculum shares similar features with those in other countries, with an increased emphasis on notions of transversal competencies, digital and phenomenon-based learning, what it has not discarded (as might be argued in relation to the Australian curriculum) is objectives that focus on promotion of equity, lifelong learning and a student's growth towards 'humanity and global citizenship' (Tommi Roininen, Hakkari Junior School, Lempäälä).



This ongoing project of Finnish education was endorsed by one of the students who addressed us at Ylöjärvi Upper Secondary School, whose motto is 'Trust – Courage – Action – Learning – Finding one's own path'. Tuomo (a pseudonym) is a student in their Entrepreneurial Education stream. He reflected that his schooling experience had been one of gradual admission into the adult world where trust is granted with attendant responsibility, an experience, he said, of 'developing steps to freedom'.

Tuomo's statement seemed the perfect summary of an education system for a nation of engaged citizens, who do not take their opportunities, indeed their very existence, for granted; a nation that can be generous and compassionate to others, because all contribute to and all share in the social capital that they have fought so hard to acquire.

Final Reflections

It proves difficult to return home from an educational study tour of Finland and not join the ranks of the 'Finnish evangelists'. Most educators are aware of Finland's sustained high ranking on international educational achievement measures and many endorse, indeed call for the adoption of, key features of the Finnish system that have contributed to this success.

Such a response, however, was not what was sought by our Learning Scoop colleagues. They emphasised that their achievements in the initial year of PISA (2000) and especially the 2003 PISA (where Finland ranked first on reading, mathematics and science literacy and second on problem solving amongst the OECD countries) was

a point of honour, but a surprise, within the country. Competitive ranking had not been the target of educational policy in Finland and is not its purpose now. I was struck in both the presentations and in the classrooms that a teacher's focus is always on the individual student, his or her well-being and future contribution to society – local, national and global. I was struck also by teachers' eagerness to share common insights, learn from us as visiting professionals and admit to areas of challenge, confusion and continuing need for improvement.

Many of the key features of this successful education system accord with the professional instincts of teachers in any country who place students at the centre of their practice – that is, the majority of us. The most inspiring aspect of the tour for me was not the admirable differences to be identified in Finnish schools but, in fact, the similarities.

What I observed was what I see in schools every day when we have the autonomy to do our best: teachers who see education and care as indistinguishable; small, everyday interactions of nurturing, joy, humour, concern, play and guidance between teachers and students; comradery and cold coffees in staffrooms; crowded bustle in hallways; and shouts, laughter and occasional tears in playgrounds.

From my observations in Finland, what I would hope for in our schools and what I see emerging from the work of innovative educators in brave school sites, is both a return back and a progression forward – to an organisation that questions rankings and competition; that allows for kids and teachers to

have more time to play and dream and experiment; that reconnects with nature as a vital learning environment; that esteems and values those who educate and affords them the trust their training should guarantee; and that ensures all students understand that their education is a privilege in preparation for engaged citizenship.

A note on sources:

This article is chiefly one of personal observation and contemplation. Whilst I gained greatly from the thinking of fellow tour members (in particular, thanks to Mitch Ulacco for sharing his insightful impressions with me as I prepared this account), my perceptions and opinions are my own. Each participant would emphasise different learnings, based on their role, sector, system and stage of career. The presentations of our Learning Scoop colleagues, which referenced PISA, the OECD, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and other sources, provided invaluable information and background to my experience.

There is no shortage of reports, news articles, studies and blogs on Finnish education and the features of its success. I would particularly recommend for initial reading, and as an insight into Finnish honesty and lack of self-promotion: Sahlberg, P. (2014). *Finnish lessons 2.0*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Janetta Hargreaves

For the Love of Learning

Marilyn Schmidt
Head of Excellence
CBC Fremantle

Introduction

“Where is the joy of learning, the love of learning?” was a question posed by a teacher with a tone of quiet desperation and a level of urgency. This became the leading question underpinning discussions around best teaching and learning practice at CBC Fremantle and was the catalyst for an innovative learning project for Year 8 students.

CBC Fremantle is a Catholic school in the tradition of Edmund Rice, for boys from Year 7 to 12 in the heart of the port city of Fremantle, Western Australia. At CBC Fremantle, teachers embark on a shared journey with parents in the development of their sons honouring the tagline “Today’s boys... Tomorrow’s gentlemen”. This journey has a fundamental academic component where the boys have opportunities and experiences to learn through explicit teaching and through critical reflection and engagement.

As teachers, we want our students to thrive and have a passion for

life-long learning, we want them to live lives of purpose and meaning, we want them to achieve personal excellence, *‘be hope-filled and free to build a better world for all’* (Edmund Rice Education Australia Touchstone: Liberating Education). Add to this the fact that the world is changing at an unprecedented rate, so we want to prepare the boys for an uncertain future where change is the only constant and where the world of work is predicted to be very different from what we know at present.

Most educators would agree with these ideals, however, the reality of our everyday experience was not quite so rosy. Year 7 students join the College eager to learn, curious and enthusiastic about their high school journey ahead. By the time, they are in Year 9 the general level of engagement drops significantly. Some boys become politely compliant, however many see learning as having no value and limited relevance to real life. Their curiosity and creativity fades with the minimal effort they make

to engage in the mainly teacher driven learning experiences. As one teacher reflected: *‘I feel we constantly chase some of these boys up. The lack of accountability is always band aided because we try to ‘fix’ up their irresponsible behaviour so they don’t miss out on whatever it is we want them to have!’*

In order to develop students who are engaged and curious learners, who take charge of their own learning and are accountable, the staff at CBC recognised the need to provide authentic learning experiences to develop critical and creative thinking skills, problem solving skills and collaboration opportunities that support and integrate all aspects of the curriculum. Skills that are essential prerequisites to develop a lifelong love of learning.

As teachers, we know that learning requires passion and interest, and is built around relevance and purpose. We know that it is not constrained by time limits and subjects. We know intuitively that it is

measured, not by marks and grades, but by our desire to want to learn more. Furthermore, technology is increasingly ubiquitous and access to data and knowledge continues to grow. The ability to connect, collaborate, to think critically and to problem solve is not an automatic response to this increased and easy availability of information.

Inquiry-Based learning is not a new trend nor is it without challenges. However, it is an approach which creates an integrated student-led learning journey, with the intention of encouraging engagement, innovation and curiosity. Inquiry-based learning provides opportunities to celebrate diversity and uncertainty which enhances the skills needed to thrive in our changing world. We decided this would be our basic approach and we identified the Year 8 cohort as being at an age who could benefit from our ‘experiment’.

We did have some experience to guide us. A small group of high achieving boys from Year 8 to 10 involved in the extra curricula Academic Excellence Program, in collaboration with Iona Presentation College Gifted and Talented girls, had spent a semester working on an inquiry based learning project. As we reflected on this, it became evident that this learning opportunity should be available to all our students as they need to be independent learners who love learning and who need the skills to face the future with confidence.

The Role of Leadership

The Academic Board at CBC Fremantle, which consists of the Heads of the various Learning Areas and the Deputy Principal of Teaching and Learning, is

a cohesive group who are at the forefront of embracing contemporary pedagogies to enhance the academic culture at the College. The College’s executive leaders granted the Academic Board the trust to run with ideas and to implement an inquiry based learning project, which had the potential to cause major disruptions in the day-to-day life of the school community. They supported and encouraged every step of the process and gave the middle leaders the freedom to experiment and the safety to fail and try something different. We were encouraged to model creativity, innovative thinking, risk taking and resilience just as we expect our students to embrace these kinds of skills.

Getting Started

The first five weeks of Term 3 proved to be different and somewhat challenging for our 136 Year 8 students. To establish an immediate real world purpose and relevance, the project was introduced to the students with an inspirational speaker from a local engineering company that designs urban developments on a game-based 3D digital platform. The boys were hooked! They were given the task to identify real world problems in their community which directly affected them and for which they wanted to find solutions. They could alternatively identify opportunities for innovation in the community. They were given time to brainstorm ideas in groups, to talk to their families and were given a worksheet to complete and submit. Fifty one (38%) students responded and handed in their ideas. The boys’ responses included some of the world’s biggest problems – ranging from plastic in the ocean to waste management to homelessness to urban sprawl.

Groups of three or four students were formed based on the common choice of problems the boys had identified as being most significant to them. The boys who did not respond were allocated randomly to groups. The groups were diverse in terms of academic ability.

The project parameters and expectations were carefully explained. To simulate teams solving real world problems, the students communicated and worked on a digital platform, Microsoft Teams, for conversations and collaborative space. The expectation was that each group had to research and then solve their problem in an innovative and creative way, compiling a digital portfolio of their work and the process they followed. An end product, such as a prototype or model, demonstrating their solution had to be produced and presented at an evening showcase that would be attended by their teachers and parents.

Every day the boys had two periods where the timetable was suspended when they could collaboratively work on their projects. The College campus is relatively small and there is no venue or space available for collaborative projects of this nature so four adjacent traditional classrooms and the library were used. The periods allocated changed daily so that the boys missed the same amount of time from each learning area. Rooming did cause disruptions for teachers and students in other year groups, however, teachers cooperated and embraced the challenges without any public dissent.

The Design and Problem Solving Process

The process used by the students was based on “*Solutions Fluency*” by Lee Watanabe-Crockett from the Global Digital Citizen Foundation.



1. Define

The students had to recognise that in order to solve a problem, it first had to be clearly defined. This proved easier said than done for many students who struggled to narrow down their broad problem to something specific.

2. Discover

The researching, gathering and analysing of information about the problem tended to consist of Google searches. Teachers and Online Coaches encouraged the boys to consult their parents or other experts in the community. A great deal of learning took place as students researched how others had tried to solve the problem and what their solutions were.

3. Dream

The boys identified this as being a challenging phase. Generating ideas, using their imagination and creative skills had many students feeling uncomfortable and some were quite anxious. Unlike Oscar Wilde who is quoted as saying “Nothing worth learning can be taught”, there is a strong belief at CBC that skills can and should be taught. At this stage an explicit teaching of creative skills and perseverance was arranged to support the students.

4. Design

This was the phase where the actual mechanics of the solution began

to take shape. A prototype or a proposal was designed and tested. The boys were encouraged to use resources available in the College such as 3D printers, laser cutters, heat press, mini drones, a green screen.

5. Deliver

The end products, solutions and the students’ digital portfolios were presented as the proposed solutions to a real and interested audience of parents and families.

6. Debrief

The students were given time to reflect on their learning and what they would do to improve their approaches in future situations. They also wrote peer feedback and notes of gratitude to their coaches and to the Academic Board.

Points of Difference

Many elements of the inquiry-based learning project at CBC are similar to those conducted in other schools, however there were also several points of difference.

1. Collaboration with the University of Notre Dame, Fremantle

An invaluable point of difference was the collaboration with the School of Education at the University of Notre Dame Australia (Fremantle). Third year education students studying Secondary Teaching volunteered to be

online coaches, or a ‘guide-on-the-side’, for each group of boys. CBC Fremantle has links to the University of Notre Dame which go beyond being in the same location and both being Catholic education institutions. Many of the CBC students go on to study at Notre Dame and many CBC teachers have studied there. However, this was the first collaboration of this kind.

The collaborative partnership with the University staff provided the College teachers with ideas and expertise. The online coaches broadened and enriched the boys’ learning experience. Furthermore, it raised the level of expectation in terms of the boys’ efforts and the work they put in.

For the University of Notre Dame the opportunity broadened their involvement with their local community. Their aspiring teachers gained experience working as facilitators and mentors with students in a non-traditional academic setting.

The Notre Dame students became actively involved and although there was no expectation to work with the boys in a face-to-face setting, they visited the College on numerous occasions to talk to and support their groups of boys. The Notre Dame Coaches modelled being ‘master learners’ alongside the ‘apprentice learners’. Their role included

- guiding the process with higher order questioning
- challenging the students to think critically
- encouraging innovation and creativity
- modelling collaboration and respectful communication skills
- guiding time management skills
- encouraging students to record the process and build their digital portfolio
- providing feedback and encouragement with realistic expectations
- encouraging persistence, grit and a growth mindset.

2. Digital Portfolio

The aim was for the students to develop an online portfolio of work that showed creativity, problem solving skills, collaboration and persistence. Microsoft Teams proved to be the best platform to use as an online collaborative space for boys to hold conversations with each other and their coaches and to save their work. The value of

an inquiry-based learning project was recognised to be in the process rather than the end product. Digital literacy skills were a welcome by-product as many boys had not worked on a collaborative space such as this before.

3. Culture shift for teachers

All Year 8 teachers were involved in supervising the boys as they worked on their projects. There was a genuine desire to be authentically involved on the part of teachers based on their shared vision of CBC students being committed, innovative and collaborative young men.

The reality for teachers is that they are responsible for managing and ‘controlling’ very full and content heavy curricula, assessment schedules, parental and government expectations and learning outcomes. This project gave the boys the opportunity, within a supportive environment, to manage their own time lines and learning. It took a certain amount of courage for teachers to stand back and let the boys do this. They found it difficult to gauge how much involvement and support they should offer.

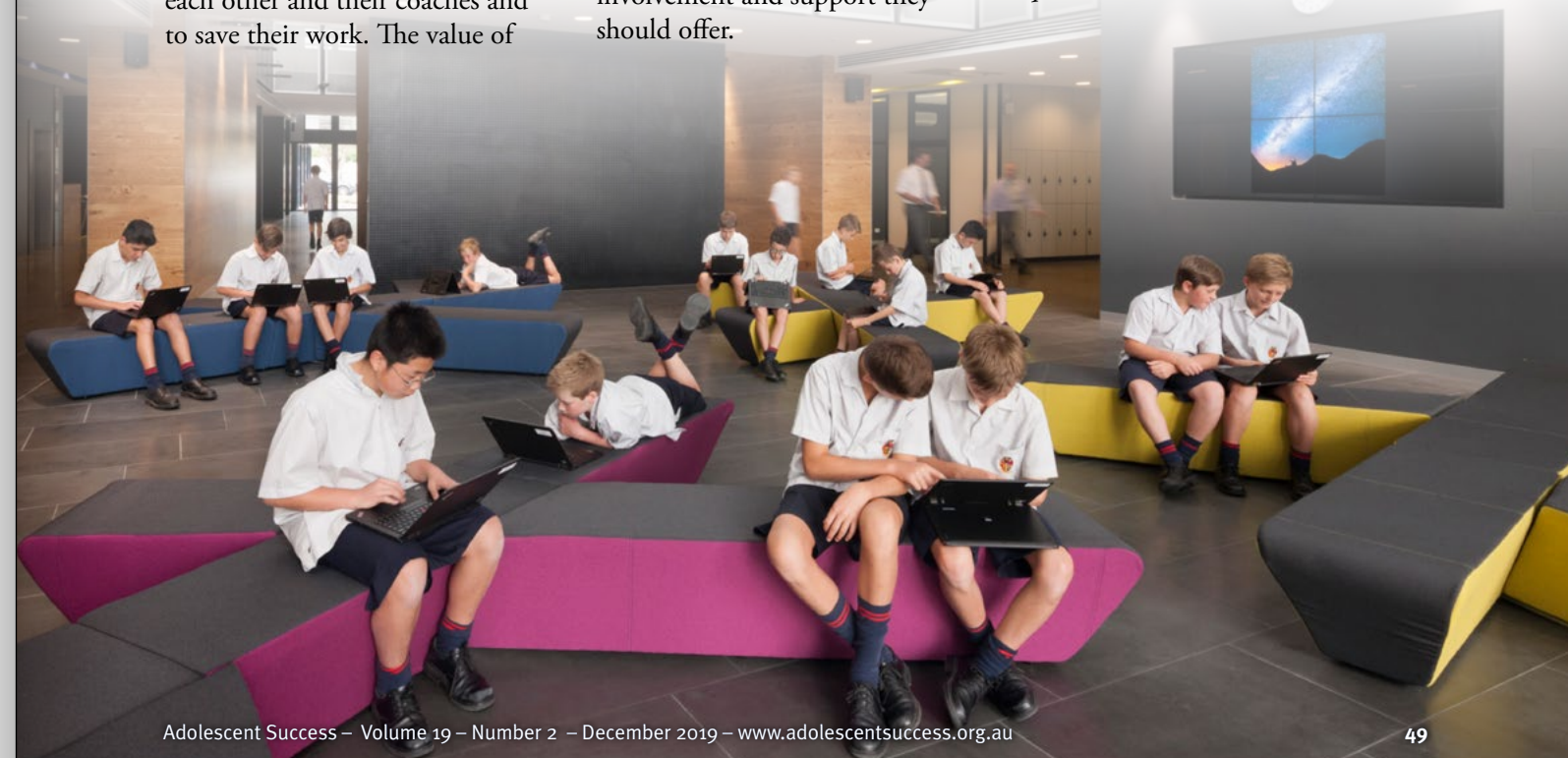
Some teachers were concerned because they were significantly behind on their teaching programs because of the project. A Maths teacher had the following feedback: “The interruptions to class time were manageable, but it feels like they lined up with other school events which meant I had a few big gaps of not seeing the kids.”

Another teacher voiced concerns about accountability:

“The bigger question is how do we “enforce” accountability - if they don’t do anything what actually happens? I really think there should be consequences.”

A Design and Technology teacher wrote:

“I must say, I was rather sceptical to the idea and it’s success in the beginning. Being a year 8 teacher I was involved in a number of the sessions and was just amazed! ...Most pleasing (and perhaps selfishly!) is the carry-over of these problem solving skills I’ve seen in the workshops. The boys are thinking through their problems and finding their own solutions. Such a welcome change from the old ‘what do I do now sir?’ question!”



4. Freedom of choice

The majority of learning experiences students are given daily are content driven and have clear assessment criteria. Many tasks are scaffolded so that very little divergent thinking or creativity is necessary to achieve success. During this project, the students had complete freedom to identify their own innovations to design and develop, and their own problems to solve. They could learn about whatever they wanted to, whatever was a priority to *them!*

The rationale behind this unlimited choice was the premise that if the problem was specifically chosen by the student and if it evoked an emotion, especially compassion, the students would be more likely to engage. Furthermore, one of the purposes of the project was to give the students the opportunity to be creative and innovative and not be restricted by a looming assessment or curriculum dot point. There were no right or wrong answers, problems were real, challenges were open-ended and the skills being learnt and applied were divergent.

This freedom of choice was greeted at first with disbelief and excitement. However, it soon became overwhelming for some students who said that they did not know what to do or where to start.

39% of the students responded that the most difficult challenge was to choosing what to work on. Boys comments include:

"At the start we had to break down the topic and gather information. It was challenging to choose what we were doing."

"It was challenging to actually find a proper problem and solution because there was so much we needed to consider

when creating our ideas."

"Trying to do something no one else has done."

5. Explicit skills teaching

"I learnt to take a big problem and put it in a funnel and ask questions until you decide what to solve"

Two explicit skills teaching sessions were planned. The first was on asking higher order thinking questions to find higher order thinking solutions. The idea that all learning starts with a question was explored. The boys practiced asking questions to analyse and evaluate a problem. By doing this, they learnt strategies to narrow a broad world problem into a specific problem, which they could directly relate to and investigate.

The second teacher directed intervention was a creativity skills workshop titled: How to think creatively, what to do when you are stuck and have no ideas! The timing of this workshop was crucial for optimal effectiveness and took place when students had started with the "Dream" phase of the design process.

Boys reflected on their learning with regards to creativity as follows:

"Most important thing I learnt was what to do when we were stuck and what to do when you are pressured."

"I learnt to be creative, to think outside the box and to not be scared of expressing an idea even if you think it's stupid or dumb."

"I improved my collaborative learning skill. I started to think outside the box. It was way more fun than learning in a class."

"I learnt to open your mind to different ideas."

"How to have a more unusual way of looking at a problem."

6. No Formal Assessment

Although the boys were told from the outset that the project would not be marked or graded, it was expected that they were engaged and be held accountable. This was met with some trepidation from teachers who felt that not all boys would produce meaningful work unless there was a mark or grade attached. However, it was argued that if marks and formal assessments were an extrinsic motivation factor to produce meaningful work then there should be no disengaged students in any class. Teachers were reminded of the purpose of the project: to engage students to become innovative and creative and to foster a love for learning.

Each of the 39 groups presented a project at the showcase evening. This exceeded all expectations on accountability. 103 students (76%) attended with their parents and families.

Showcase Evening: A Celebration of Learning

Parents at CBC Fremantle are recognised and honoured as the primary educators of their children. Parents were informed that the project may be challenging for some boys; those who may have become passive learners or those who may have become reliant on scaffolded activities. They were asked to encourage their sons to persevere if they were pushed out of their comfort zones. There was immediate positive feedback from parents who were excited that their sons would be challenged with learning that went beyond the curriculum.

Parents and families were invited to the showcase evening to celebrate their son's learning, to be part of the learning process and not mere observers. They were asked to fill in feedback slips for the boys. The feedback from parents was affirming and often challenged boys to think about how they could further develop their solutions.

"Well done boys, fantastic presentation on Air Pollution. We love your ideas with recycling carbon dioxide and making it into solid carbon for bikes etc... Let's hope your idea is reality one day. You should be very proud of your effort."

"Great job! Excellent idea! Question – How is the drone allowed to fly around the metro area? Do you have a special licence to do so?"

The following positive feedback came from one of the University of Notre Dame students:

"I felt the presentation evening was fantastic! The night ran very smoothly and the boys seemed to extremely enjoy presenting their hard work over the weeks... some of the boys concepts were jaw-dropping! Overall the project was a fantastic experience and should continue to be explored, for the boys and especially me as a University student! I would be more than happy to help out again!"

Another University of Notre Dame student identified and summarised the key elements of the project as follows:

"The program acted as a transition phase between being a student at university and a classroom teacher which was a valuable learning experience as a pre-service

teacher. The skills that they boys learnt themselves including effective communication and collaboration, problem solving, and innovation, are key real-world skills that will help them not only in their time at school but it will help them grow as young men moving into the professional world. I think now, it is important to take what has been learnt from this experience and apply it to everyday teaching and learning programs to encourage life-long learning. The program cannot be completed in isolation and needs the support of the administrators, classroom teachers, and family of the students to encourage their ongoing pursuit of learning skills that will put them ahead in future learning."

Student Reflection and Voice

The boys were allocated time the day after the showcase evening to reflect on their learning.

What were you most proud of about your project?

"The amount of research we did and that we were able to answer some more difficult questions people had on the presentation night"

"The amount of work we actually ended up doing without the teachers pressuring us to do it. Also the way we talked with confidence."

"I was most proud about my idea because it was taking a while and finally we caught onto a solution which felt awesome."

What do you think was the most important thing you learnt?

"To solve a problem, you need a problem."

"That working in a team can be hard and you need to help and contribute instead of relying on team mates."

"How to work with people that I don't often talk to."

"Probably not give up when things aren't going your way."

"We research about 20 different kinds of metals in your leg instead of titanium. I hope knowing about all these metals will help in the future."

What was difficult or challenging?

"Staying on task was the hardest part because when you are left alone you get tempted to get off task."

"The whole project. Finding things to make our design was hard because there were so many things but half of them had been done."

"It was challenging to design a working prototype."

"Working with others."

What would you do differently if you had to do this again?

"I would work harder and more efficiently and allocate tasks to group members to get us working."

"Communicate more"

"I don't think I would do anything differently because I loved the project."

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was the most positive and 1 the least positive:

- 76% of the boys rated the Presentation Evening as either a 4 or a 5.
- 61% rated the overall experience doing the project as a 4 or a 5.

- 54 % rated working collaboratively with their team as a 4 or a 5.
- 54% rated their improvement in skills and confidence as a 4 or a 5.
- 28% rated having an online coach as a 4 or a 5.

Feedback

The boys were asked to provide feedback to each other with the following rules:

Be polite, kind and courteous and help others in your team learn so that they can produce a better project next time.

Their feedback was insightful, honest and mostly constructive.

"You're a chill dude and really funny but maybe try and do something more in the group. If you could find something you were passionate about in the project it would help you."

"You researched about why deforestation is happening and gathered good notes and information. I feel like you could've brought some more innovative ideas to the table, but overall you were a good teammate. You were also great for marketing our Instagram."

"You did your best to participate but you could have included yourself more. It would also have been helpful if you turned up on the night."

"Cheers for carrying us on this project."

The perception that one of the boys did and should "carry" the others was mentioned on numerous occasions.

The boys' reflections suggest that there should be a third explicit skills teaching session planned on working effectively and collaboratively in groups.

This feedback and the parents' feedback, as previously referred to, was collated and given back to the boys. Valuable teaching moments and discussion centred on this feedback were lost due to not planning time for this to occur.

Way Forward and Future Challenges

It is our challenge to ensure that the skills the boys have learnt will develop and will become part of their skills repertoire to benefit their learning in all areas. We need to consider how to develop this learning experience for the boys in Year 9 and 10. Ideas to explore include collaborating with our local sister school and later with schools beyond our borders to simulate real world work situations. It is our hope and intention to continue to collaborate with the University of Notre Dame School of Education. This partnership has inspired us to be more accountable and to reflect critically on our teaching practises.

Advice for Other Schools

- Do not let the fact that you may not have designated innovative and collaborative spaces deter you. A venue and furniture do not guarantee learning!
- There is no need for a large budget - recycle and re-use what is available.
- There is no need for commercial programs and educational consultants. Trust yourselves to have a go! Recognise the experts in the school.

- You do need a supportive middle and senior leadership.
- You do need passion! Model risk taking and a growth mindset!

Conclusion

In his address to the College community at the showcase evening, the principal, Mr Dominic Burgio stated that all great inventions in this world were germinated as ideas, and all ideas were generated through inquisitiveness, curiosity and the urge to know more about things in the world around us.

Children are born with an innate curiosity and desire to learn more about the world. As teachers, we need to ensure that they never lose this and, if they do, that we give them opportunities where they can reclaim these traits so that they passionately embrace the concept that learning is a lifelong pursuit. As we strive to plan and provide learning activities for our students where they can experience the joy of learning, we kindle our own joy of teaching and our own love of learning.

"In times of profound change the learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

Eric Hoffer

Marilyn Schmidt

marilyns@cbcfremantle.wa.edu.au

Adolescent Success Research Roundtable

Dr Katherine Main

Introduction

As part of the Adolescent Success Conference and with the aim of continuing to build a strong research base in the middle years of schooling, we invited those who are currently or seeking to do research to present their work or fledgling ideas at a research roundtable. A number of submissions were received, and a small but lively group convened for the roundtable session. A common theme throughout the day was a focus on the wellbeing of young adolescent learners. This was evidenced through presentations directly related to the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills, promoting student voice, student leadership, and promoting student engagement. It was exciting to hear of a range of projects that have been undertaken and those are being planned that have direct relevance to classroom practice. We look forward to building this session of the conference over the coming years.



The establishment of a distinct Junior Secondary identity by Year 7 students during the transition from Primary to High School chronicled via student voice: A Mixed methods study.

Jason Hassard
Doctor of Education (part time)
Griffith University

Context

The development of a distinct identity by Junior School students (Years 7-9) is one of the guiding principles of Education Queensland's Junior Secondary [JS] policy. Distinct Identity is defined as students feeling a **sense of belonging** and **connectedness to their school** and to feeling safe and confident in this environment (ACER, 2012, p. 11).

Research Question

What are the Year 7 students' reported experiences of the establishment of a distinct JS Identity in High School?

Sub Questions:

- How and to what extent has a distinct JS Identity been established by Year 7 students in High School?
- What are the school characteristics that Year 7 students identify in High Schools with an established JS Identity?

Methodology

This longitudinal study utilised a convergent, parallel and mixed method design to explore junior students reported experiences of their transition from Year 6 in Primary School to Year 7 in High School in relation to the establishment of a JS identity. Student voice was foregrounded in the research as a key point of difference to previous studies on young people's transitions to high school. Data collection occurred in eighteen primary schools in 2017 and the same students were tracked into eleven high schools in 2018. Four hundred and eighty students completed surveys and drawings on IPADS and interviews were conducted with thirty of these students.



A. Online Survey		
Highest mean score (4.2 & up)	No 2 -This school is a place where I have really good friends	4.5375
	No 19 -There is at least one teacher or staff member that I can talk to if I have a problem	4.3167
Lowest mean score (3.9 below)	No 8 - Most teachers at this school are interested in me	3.5104
Not Sure (NS)	No 8 - Most teachers at this school are interested in me	39.0%
Highest SD (1.1 up)	No 16 - Teachers treat students fairly and respectfully at this school	1.1705
	No 23 - I can really be myself at this school	1.1255

GENDER Differences	OVERALL MEAN	BOYS	3.71935
		GIRLS	4.01741
	STANDARD DEVIATION	BOYS	.92633
		GIRLS	.98842

Girls feel more satisfied overall with Primary School than Boys although there is more deviation in their responses than boys.
Two biggest differences are; No 12 - Girls feel safer than Boys, No 14 – Boys enjoy more extra-curricular activity than Girls

B. Semi-structured interviews transcribed and analysed in Nvivo with case study participants (Thematic Analysis).
Initial Findings Emerging Core Themes: Teachers, Connectedness/Belonging, Friends, Extra Curricular, School Events, Trust, Student Voice, HS is harder, Leadership/Responsibility <i>"I feel really connected to the teachers because when I do well and if I'm struggling they always help me"</i> <i>"I like all the staff, they're all kind. They always make the learning fun. I enjoy coming to the school. I just enjoy my time at the school. "</i> <i>"I feel like I belong here and I make an impact on the school"</i>

C. Drawings completed on IPADS. Prompt: Q. Describe your experience of school life in Year 6 in Primary School?
Q. Add a short comment (1 sentence or a few words) to describe your experience of Year 6 in PS? # Analysis is currently underway with the establishment of inter-rater reliability being determined for the Coding sheet.

Supervisors
Prof. Donna Pendergast and Dr. Stephen Hay
Contact Details
Jason Hassard
Jason.hassard@griffithuni.edu.au
or jhass13@eq.edu.au

References

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). (2012). *Junior Secondary – Theory and Practice*. Brisbane, QLD: Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training.

Teachers’ perceived understanding of formative assessment and how it impacts their classroom practice: A case-study investigation

Hind Hegazy

Purpose

Curriculum, instruction, learning and assessment are the pulse of teaching and learning; driving everything teachers do (Heritage, 2008; Sadler, 1989; Popham, 2008). Effective assessment allows teachers to identify individual students’ learning gaps and consequently support them in reaching their full learning potential. Formative assessment at its core supports teachers in identifying where students are in their learning and allows them to focus on the learning needs and address the student accordingly by modifying the learning approach to best suit each student. Formative assessment offers a set of quality teaching practices that are ideally situated to optimise teaching and learning and engage students, especially in the middle years.

Nationally and internationally

educators and policy-makers stress the importance of providing middle years students with opportunities to reach their full learning capacity, since this is a unique developmental and learning phase that defines the future learning progression of a student. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine Junior Secondary teachers’ perceived understanding of formative assessment and how it influenced teachers’ pedagogical choices and practices in the classroom.

The research question

Three key questions steered the study:

- 1) What are Junior Secondary teachers’ perceived understandings of formative assessment?
- 2) What are Junior Secondary teachers’ classroom practices of formative assessment?

3) How do Junior Secondary teachers’ perceptions of formative assessment influence their practices in the classroom in relation to positive student learning outcomes?

Data collection & Analysis

The study adopted a qualitative approach to research using interpretive phenomenological and analytical approaches. Data were collected from three Junior Secondary teachers from one school through semi-structured individual interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. The data were analysed using Smith, Jarman & Osborn (1999) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework and Wiliam and Thompson’s (1998) formative assessment model.

Findings:

Five key themes emerged:

1. Junior Secondary teachers’ understanding of formative assessment is evolving and consequently their formative assessment practices are also developing;
2. Teachers need to effectively embed formative assessment practices in their lessons to ensure the success of all students;
3. Varying student levels meant that there is critical need to differentiate learning to meet individual students’ learning needs;
4. Developing common and shared expectations between systemic, school and classroom approaches to formative assessment and evaluation of students’ learning;
5. Time is an underlying theme that hindered the effective and consistent implementation of formative assessment practices.

Category	Theme	Sub-Theme
Themes relating to teacher’s perceptions	Developing understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defining formative assessment• Frequency and types of formative assessment• Understanding the formative assessment process
	Embedding effective practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on learning objective and success• Feedback• Group work
Themes relating to teachers’ Interpretation and Implementation of formative assessment pedagogical practices	Differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gauging class understanding• Varying students’ levels
	Shared expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Executive team expectations vs teachers’ expectations
	Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work Load• Planning expectations

Key themes identified with their related sub-themes

Conclusion & Recommendations

- Recommendations for school leaders and teachers
- Developing teachers’ formative assessment conceptual understanding
 - Developing pedagogical repertoire to meet identified student needs
 - Recommendations for policy-makers
 - Formative assessment is a promising practice in the middle years in unleashing learning potential
- Implementation of formative assessment as a teaching framework
- Establishment of a classroom culture that encourages students’ interaction and the use of formative assessment tools
- Recommendations for teacher professional development

Youth engagement capabilities

Neil McDonald, Donna Pendergast, Michelle Ronksley-Pavia,
Glenda McGregor, Jeanne Allen, Margaret Barber, Kath McCabe

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to identify core capabilities that assist principals and their teams to maximise student engagement whilst maintaining strong academic outcomes. Learner engagement has been identified as one of the most reliable predictors of academic achievement (Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014). According to the 2017 Australian Productivity Commission Report, approximately 40% of Australian school students are disengaged from education, increasing their vulnerability to later unemployment and civic and social dislocation.

The findings from this research contributed to the development of a Youth Engagement Capabilities Package which is intended to help schools build these capabilities. The engagement framework used for this project recognised that student engagement is a multidimensional construct and, moreover, that engagement is not solely about classroom behaviour/compliance or attendance, but about a strong connection with learning. This project used a framework whereby student engagement consists of three engagement dimensions that can be considered as a continuum, while noting that engagement across all three dimensions is closely interrelated as opposed to a strictly a linear progression. It is built on the model developed by Gibbs and Poskitt (2010) Three Engagement Dimensions Framework featuring behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement

The project aimed to:

- outline capabilities appropriate to both primary and secondary schools (P-12);
- focus on capabilities that are critical to implementing the practices underpinning youth engagement, retention and re-engagement, while maintaining academic performance; and,
- seek participant perspectives around the mechanisms and strategies (including professional development) that have been more effective to develop the identified capabilities.

Data collection & Analysis

The study adopted a qualitative approach using semi-structured focus groups and interviews with school leaders, teachers and students; and in addition individual interviews were conducted with principals. Each were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. Focus groups consisted of 3-11 participants and were approximately 60 minutes duration for adult participants, and approximately 30 minutes duration for student participants. Data were collected from 15 state schools in one sector in one state of Australia. The schools were identified by Deloitte Access Economics (2018) utilising departmental data, as having a demonstrated capacity and record of achieving student engagement while also achieving overall academic achievement. A general inductive analysis approach with in-vivo coding was utilised to analyse the qualitative data. The

process consisted of assembling the transcripts in two ways:

- according to each school site (within site analysis), and each stakeholder participant group within each site;
- across school sites to identify any consistent themes that were identified to support strong engagement and academic achievement.

Findings

Factors that were identified, in terms of whole school indicators across the three engagement dimensions, that can potentially support high academic achievement focused on: strong collegiality; open and timely communication and conversations; clear consistent processes and procedures; genuine care for all students; and, the importance of relationships; all coalescing to create an authentic, safe and supportive school culture and learning environment.

For each of the subject groups capability indicators were identified. These were constructed into an operational model.

Conclusion

This framework indicates three dimensions of engagement that need to be fostered by educators in schools and, as such, represents a robust framework for analysing and reporting the findings from the study in a way that potentially captures the essence of engagement strategies that schools are using. The model has been used to inform policy in the state.

References

Australian Productivity Commission. (2017). *Shifting the dial: 5 year productivity review*. Canberra, ACT: Author.

Deloitte Access Economics. (February 2018). *Memo: Engagement capabilities building – case study school selection*. Deloitte Access Economics: Melbourne.

Gibbs, R. & Poskitt, J. (2010). Student engagement in the middle years of schooling (Years 7-10): A literature review. *Report to the Ministry of Education*. Ministry of Education: New Zealand.

Ghost learners: Insights from middle years students on classroom passive disengagement (2019)

Karlie Ross

Research Problem

A student's disengagement from classroom learning has implications for their academic outcomes, inclusion, and emotional wellbeing. There has been much research on student disengagement more broadly, however, the bulk of attention has been directed at the more visible signs of disengagement. Passive disengagement is more subtle and remains under-researched, leading to a gap in the research and a problem in practice. Students who frequently passively disengaged go unnoticed by teachers or are not prioritised because their version of disengagement does not disrupt the flow of the lesson; they are essentially, ghosts in the classroom. Yet, passively disengaged students have the same detrimental long term outcomes as the students who actively disengage, such as early school dropout (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008), lower levels of self-esteem (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003), and lower overall health and wealth (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006; Ruglis, 2011). This M.Phil study investigated the concept of passive disengagement in the classroom through an ecological framework that problematized educational context.

Research Aims

1. Contribute an ecological view to current theoretical perspectives on passive disengagement as a construct; and,
2. Provide a new methodology to explore the phenomenon which accepts students as experts on the issue.

Methodology:

This study invited middle years students into three phases of research to explore the issue of passive disengagement. This included (1) a focus group, (2) an image sorting activity, and (3) individual interviews. In doing this, a new methodology was designed to help identify a student who might be passively disengaged and this method is called the 'School Engagement Photo Technique' (SEPT).

Findings to Research Aim 1

The study found that a student's entire ecology contributes to their experiences of classroom passive disengagement and that their disengagement is fluid. This means that student disengagement changes, depending on classroom issues like teacher-student relationships and pedagogy, as

well as personal issues like mood, physical development (tiredness, hunger, etc.), and outside factors like family and peers. This ecological perspective of the issue means that disengagement is not just something that students are responsible for and that their educational environment has an important responsibility for addressing and managing this issue.

Therefore, student insights from this study indicated that teachers, first and foremost, require strong relationships with their students. A student's perception of that relationship is fundamental because the study found that students view their teacher as either policing or supporting their learning. Insights also suggested that pedagogy was a key issue in (dis)engaging students. If disengagement is conceptualised as having three dimensions (affect, cognition, and behaviour) then teachers require pedagogies that address these. Therefore, the study posits that teachers need to practice pedagogies that are connective, participatory, and differentiated. Connective pedagogies are those which emotionally (and therefore affectively) connect students with their learning; it is characterised by teachers showing relevance of topics and creating meaningful learning experiences. Participatory pedagogies are those

which invite interaction (and therefore behaviourally engage) in the classroom and it ensures that teachers share their active role with students. Key to this category is that teachers avoid large segments of 'teacher talk' as this is contributing to language overload and manifests as students zoning out and shutting down. Finally, differentiated pedagogies are those which individualise learning for each student and encourages teachers to know when to scaffold for some students and when to extend others. These practical findings contribute to the Middle Years Pedagogical Considerations which was developed at the end of this M.Phil study and distributed to the staff of the research site. It is hoped that these Considerations are shared more broadly in future.

Findings to Research Aim 2

The School Engagement Photo Technique (SEPT) was designed and tested in this study. The SEPT is a context-specific and educational version of a TAT (Thematic Apperception Technique) which is a photo-elicitation method. The premise of the SEPT is that students are provided nine ambiguous images (each images represents a dimension of dis/engagement in classroom learning) and they are invited to rank them according to how often they experience a scenario. Students also provide an annotation to their top three images, explaining why they chose them. The ambiguity of the technique means that students interpret the images based on their experiences of either

engagement or disengagement, thus resulting in a discrete way to identify students who might be experiencing the more ghostly side of disengagement. The SEPT, as a data gathering method, is a contribution to methodology in educational research, particularly a way forward for investigating passive disengagement. A future direction for the SEPT is to design an online resource for teachers to use this technique with their classes so that educators can more easily identify the ghost learners in their classrooms.

Karlie Ross

karlie.ross@hdr.qut.edu.au



Regional Conferences

Thursday 12 March 2020

Kingswood College, Box Hill, **VIC**

Friday 13 March 2020

Mt Clear College, Ballarat, **VIC**

Friday 24 April 2020

Redlands College, Brisbane, **QLD**

Friday 8 May 2020

Georgiana Molloy College, Yalyalup, **WA**

Friday 5 June 2020

Highlands Christian College, Toowoomba, **QLD**

Monday 13 July 2020

Riverside Christian College, Maryborough, **QLD**

Friday 17 July 2020

St Philips Christian College, Newcastle, **NSW**

Saturday 1 August 2020

Burgmann Anglican School, Gungahlin, **ACT**

Wednesday 5 August 2020

Ascham School, Sydney, **NSW**

Friday 21 August 2020

Seymour College, Adelaide, **SA**

Monday 24 August 2020

St Margarets College, Christchurch, **NZ**

Friday 28 August 2020

Kristin School, Auckland, **NZ**

Friday 4 December 2020

St Patricks College, Launceston, **TAS**

• CONFERENCE •

Middle Years Junior Secondary

**MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, BRISBANE, TASMANIA, ADELAIDE, WA,
ACT, NZ**

*Join other middle years educators in a one day
conference which celebrates the success of middle years
pedagogies and gives practical advice that you can use in
your classroom tomorrow*



REFRESH

RENEW

REFOCUS

www.adolescentsuccess.org.au

Information for Contributors

Adolescent Success welcomes submissions for journal inclusion that reflect the aims of the Association and address issues relevant to the middle years of schooling. Possible topics include: the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents; family and community partnerships; varied approaches to teaching and learning integrated curriculum; authentic assessment; school leadership and organisational structures in the middle years; information and communication technologies and resources in the middle years; research findings and future developments in the middle years.

Contributions may take the form of:

- academic and research papers that make an original contribution of an empirical or theoretical nature
- literature reviews
- papers of a practical or applied nature
- reports
- viewpoints
- book reviews

Contributions

- The journal has two levels of acceptance of papers for publication: refereed and non refereed. Refereed papers will have two referees selected from relevant fields of study by the editor. Papers must clearly indicate if they wish to be considered for refereed status. Refereed articles will be included in a specific section of the journal.
- Contributions shall be submitted electronically via email to the MYSA email address, or on CD, as a Microsoft Word document. Articles must be double-spaced, without the use of styles, 12 point font Times New Roman. The submitted article and CD become the property of MYSA.
- All contributors need to complete an Author's agreement form to be submitted with the article.
- Papers should be between 700 and 5000 words in length.

- Each article should have a separate title page that contains the title, the names of all authors, their contact addresses, email addresses, and telephone and facsimile numbers. The names of the authors should not appear on the rest of the paper.
- An abstract of no more than 200 words must accompany each refereed article.
- All references should be placed at the end of text using APA (6th edition). For example:

Journal article

Rumble, P., & Aspland, T. (2010). The four tributes model of the middle school teacher. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 10(1), 4–15.

Book

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Chapter in edited book

Ajsen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: a theory of planned behaviour. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckman (Eds), *Action control. From cognition to behaviour* (pp. 11–40). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

- Footnotes are not to be used.
- Figures and diagrams should be professionally prepared and submitted in a form suitable for reproduction, indicating preferred placement.
- Photographs should be submitted separately (not

included within the text). All student photographs, art work, poetry etc must be accompanied by copyright release forms, which are available on the website or from the editor.

- If the material has been published elsewhere, details must be included on the author's agreement form.
- The Middle Years of Schooling Association Inc holds copyright for articles published in the Australian Journal of Middle Schooling, excluding those previously published elsewhere.
- It is the right of the editor to make minor editorial amendments without consultation.
- Upon acceptance of contributions for publication, the contributors will be advised of the likely issue and date of publication. A complimentary copy of the journal in which the article appears will be sent to contributors.

Address for communication:

The Editor
Australian Journal of Middle Schooling
Adolescent Success Inc
PO Box 2175
TOOWONG Q 4066





Adolescent Success
Adolescent Success PO Box 2175 Toowong Q
4066
ISSN: 14452928

