

Literature and Research review of curriculum issues in Middle Years of Schooling

While there is a large amount of research, action research and literature on the nature and issues of the middle years of schooling they tend to focus:

- on issues of adolescence, particularly alienation,
- on teaching and
- on implementation of a variety of middle schooling strategies through the structuring and teaching of existing curricula in different ways.

This review has concentrated on material from which ideas about future curricula can be drawn.

Adolescence

The consistent argument in all materials on middle schooling is that the period from late primary school or transition to the post-compulsory years (10-15) must be regarded as a stage in its own right addressing the needs and interests of adolescents. The general view is that this period of schooling has been historically treated as a period of post-primary education and then a precursor of post-compulsory education, and effectively a period of marking time. (Berkeley, 1994), (Hirsch, 1994) (Hargreaves and Earl, 1994) .

A number of projects in the 1990's have looked closely at the nature of adolescence and the effect on schooling. The Carnegie Corporation report *Turning Points* (1989) and the work of Hargreaves and Earle (1990) in Canada have been a stimulus for various pieces research followed by action and action research to address the issues. They include the work of Evers, Cormack and Barratt (1992) in South Australia, the Victorian Quality Schools project (Hill and Russell, 1999), the working party of the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (Fry, 1994) and the work of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association which culminated in *From Alienation to Engagement* (1996). These studies largely portray adolescents as disaffected with a school system failing to meet their needs (Hill and Russell, 1999).

Braggett (1997) describes physical, cognitive, social and psychological characteristics and needs of adolescents and their implications for school communities. These descriptions are reinforced by Barratt (1998) who goes on to outline values that should underpin middle schooling to be of value in addressing these needs.

Hargreaves and Earl (1994) note that adolescents are undergoing three sets of transitions which impinge on schooling, adolescence as a time of change, the rapidly increasing changes in society and changes in the nature of schooling. They see difficulties for adolescents in reconciling the needs for security and independence.

A number of writers (Cumming, 1994) and (Cormack 1996, 1998) caution against stereotypical definitions of adolescence as the basis for curriculum and teaching.

Curriculum based on adolescent needs

Large numbers of the writers in the area of middle schooling focus on an integrated curriculum approach to learning for adolescents in accord with the writings of the American James Beane and the US National Middle Schools Association. In doing so, they often make generalised points about the curriculum or issues that should be dealt with in curriculum. In a broad brush approach Kennedy (1997) argues that

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2 **A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies**

curriculum needs to be defined by setting directions rather than mandating what is taught for the 21st century.

Barber (1999) makes a number of points about the nature of pedagogy for the middle years but includes three specific curriculum areas in his discussion. These are the need to guarantee cultural literacy, to teach thinking and encourage citizenship. He also includes the creation of skills of teamwork. McGuiness (1999) and Otero (1999) also argue for explicit teaching of thinking skills. Kennedy (1997) also argues for the inclusion of key competencies which he defines not in terms of discrete skills but as 'a matter of integrating knowledge, skills and values in such a way that competent performance results'. Cumming (1994) also argues for the need to develop generic competencies to equip students for the world of work as well as enhanced aesthetic and cultural understandings.

Pascoe (1998) and Holland (1993) argue that the distinction between academic and vocational elements in curriculum are no longer helpful. Holland argues that each subject should have elements which are theoretical, practical and generic.

Braggett(1997) in his chapter on Curriculum details skills to be developed through a middle years curriculum. While arguing for an integrated curriculum, Brennan and Sachs (1998) maintain the need to teach 'ways of knowing and understanding the world'. Similarly Edwards (1994) argues that learning should be structured around 'big' ideas or primary concepts.

Cormack (1998) argues that 'authentic' assessment is a key element in curriculum implementation

Curriculum based on the future

The UNESCO report *Learning: The Treasure Within* establishes a view of four pillars of lifelong learning – to know, to do, to live together and to be.

Beare and Slaughter maintain that present-day education is based on a pre-industrial paradigm and argue for curriculum to include new ways of thinking and consideration of what constitutes knowledge in a 21st century global context.

Durant and Green (1998), Lankshear et al(1997), Green (1999) and Snyder (1993) argue for the inclusion of technology in curriculum especially in learning technology, learning through technology and learning about technology and the new literacies, including writing, generated by technology.

Annotated References

Barber, Michael, 'Taking the Tide at the Flood: Transforming Education in the Middle Years', *Keynote Address, The Middle years of Schooling Conference*, Melbourne 28th March 1999.

In this paper, based on the British perspective, Barber outlines three broad problems together with a series of solutions to issues in the middle years of schooling. The broad ranging discussion primarily deals with implementation issues but some pertinent remarks are made about curriculum.

He argues that we now have understanding and processes for the solution of the issues of primary and upper secondary education including the issues of literacy and numeracy. The three problems he outlines for stage 3 (11-14 year olds) are:

- the wide range in the basics they bring with them from primary school
- the problems of transition including mutual distrust and lack of mutual awareness of primary and secondary teachers in terms of curriculum and levels of assessment of achievement
- the failure of lower secondary teachers to capture the excitement and interest of young adolescents and the consequent disaffection and 'turning-off'. This includes a low level of expectations for middle years students and a sense of 'marking time' between primary schooling and upper secondary schooling.

His solution to the 'basics' problem is in the detailed literacy and numeracy program being implemented in Britain, the features of which he lists. One implication for curriculum in this list is 'the removal of barriers to implementation (especially a huge reduction in prescribed curriculum content outside the core subjects'.

His solution to the transition problem involves a metaphor of five bridges:

- the bureaucratic (interaction between primary and secondary teachers),
- the social bridge (induction programs and student interaction between primary and secondary schools)
- the curriculum bridge (exchange of information between primary and secondary about what they taught and in some cases some co-ordination of it between schools)
- the pedagogic bridge
- the management-of-learning bridge.

Barber's solution to the third issue is the curriculum issue for the middle years of schooling. He argues that given the above two sets of solutions are in place in the middle years:

We should **MAKE THEIR HEADS SPIN**. The middle years of schooling should be so busy, so demanding, so active, so adventurous, so spectacular that young adolescents should barely have time for brooding introspection or watching Australian soap operas. They should learn, in the middle years, not only about the academic curriculum but also about how to relate to and work with others. They should learn that education and learning are not separate from life but integral to it. As they get older, they should see learning, work and leisure being woven into a single plait, in which the three separate strands are identifiable but also united to give strength, pattern and purpose.

Barber lists eight actions that have curriculum and implementation implications:

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- expect high standards
- reinforce the basics
- guarantee cultural literacy – seen as a critical viewing of cultural heritage
- individualise
- offer hope
- teach thinking – drawing on the work of John Edwards and Carol McGuinness he outlines necessary features as
 - quality of thinking given high priority
 - a shared vocabulary which enables thinking to be discussed
 - thought processes behind an activity or piece of work made explicit
 - teaching and feedback on approaches to thinking
 - emphasis on transferability of thinking skills from one domain to another
- encourage citizenship
- create teams.

Barratt, Robyn, 'Who Counts? Young adolescents: the centre of attention?', paper delivered to Australian College Of Education Conference – *Education: Who really counts?*, Canberra, 27-30 September 1998.

This paper focuses on the findings of the National Middle Schooling Project. It begins by defining the particular needs of 10-15 year olds and the need for a directed curriculum that is neither a demanding version of a primary curriculum nor a watered-down post-compulsory version.

The paper describes a number of the particular physical, intellectual and psychological features of the group while noting that it is not homogenous. It also looks at particular risks the group faces including dropping out, experimentation with drugs, alienation and marking time. In summary it finds that a significant number of students in years 5-9 not deriving benefits from schooling

It defines values, which should underpin middle schooling in Australia, if it is to be effective and these include:

- Learner-centred: coherent curriculum is focused on the identified needs, interests and concerns of students, and with an emphasis on self-directed and co-constructed learning
- Outcome-based: progress and achievement are recorded continuously in relation to explicit statements of what each student is expected to know and be able to do
- Flexibly-constructed: arrangements are responsive to local needs and circumstances, and reflect creative uses of time, space and other resources
- Strategically-linked: a discrete phase of schooling implemented as a stage within a K-12 continuum and connected to the early and later years.

Barratt details the work already underway in different Australian systems ranging from reports and agendas to specific reforms. And outlines a number of reports which highlight key issues including focus on the students as the starting point for change; developmentally appropriate educational experience, students at risk of alienation, suicide or dropping-out and not making successful transition to adult life, literacy and numeracy plateaux.

Beane, James A, 'Organizing the Middle School Curriculum', National Middle School Association <http://nmsa.org/cmorganizing.htm> (21/12/99), n.d.

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2 A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

In this short article Beane outlines the history of the notion of an integrated curriculum and his definition of various types of curriculum:

- Separate subject curriculum - curriculum organised by disciplines
- Multidisciplinary or Multisubject curriculum - correlation of two or more subjects in relation to an organising theme or topic
- Interdisciplinary curriculum - curriculum design that attempts to combine two areas to create new field in which the individual fields are necessary but not sufficient e.g Art History, Environmental studies
- Curriculum integration - organisation of the curriculum around significant problems and issues collaboratively identified.

He concludes in favour of curriculum integration but argues that many teachers will be more comfortable along a spectrum towards it.

Beare, Hedley & Slaughter, Richard, *Education for the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London, 1993.

The authors argue that education is built on assumptions based on a paradigm which is pre-Industrial Revolution and argue the “central importance of changes in values, in ways of knowing, in assumptions about meanings” have too often been overlooked in educational discourse. They analyse new ways of thinking leading into the C21st including critical, vocational, environmental, spiritual, technological and what constitutes knowledge all situated in, at least, a global perspective. While their solutions involve drastic restructuring of education, the issues raised remain important in a consideration of curriculum for the future.

Berkeley, George, ‘Middle years of Schooling - A Schools Council Perspective’, *Unicorn* Vol 20 No 2 1994, p 5.

In this article the writer summarises phase 2 of the School's Council work on the compulsory years of schooling dealing with years 6-10. The work notes a neglect of consideration of these middle years and concurs with Evers (1992) that there should be two broad goals for the education of young adolescents:

- success in a core of knowledge and competencies / skills valued by all parties
- positive and sustained personal and social development.

Berkeley argues the importance for young people to continue to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally and to see the connection between schooling and their future lives.

Ten issues are raised. These include the need to consider the characteristics and nature of adolescence; clearly-defined and future-orientated outcomes and acknowledgement of the middle years as an educational stage in its own right.

Braggett, Eddie, *The Middle Years of Schooling: An Australian Perspective*, Hawker Brownlow, Australia, 1997.

The author engages in a broad sweep over middle years of schooling issues primarily focusing on ways of implementing appropriate teaching and learning structures to cater for the particular needs of young adolescents, particularly in transition from primary to secondary schools.

The two chapters of particular relevance to curriculum considerations are:

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- a) chapter 3 *Young Adolescents: Characteristics and Needs* which details an array of physical, cognitive, ethical, social and psychological characteristics of young adolescents and their implications for schooling.
- b) chapter 6 *Curriculum & Classroom Management* which details a number of curriculum issues, many of which are concerned with delivery of the curriculum in teams, teaching strategies, integrated curriculum, etc. The author does list key skills and attitudes to be developed through the curriculum as:
- communication skills
 - computer/keyboard skills
 - research skills
 - critical thinking
 - discerning relationships
 - predicting / hypothesising
 - problem solving
 - reflective thinking
 - group skills and co-operative learning
 - autonomous learning
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In discussing the notion of an integrated curriculum, the author notes the need for a curriculum evaluation to analyse the degree of content overlap that exists between subject areas.

Brennan, Marie & Sachs, Judyth, 'Integrated Curriculum', in *Extending Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling: Challenges and Responses*, Jim Cumming (ed), Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Belconnen ACT, 1998

In this article the authors define and argue for an integrated curriculum based on their work carried out during the Middle Years project. This definition is contained in the following:

.... How best to teach the skills needed for developing ways of knowing and understanding the world. Rather than using a separate subject approach, the integrated curriculum introduces questions, problems and activities that will best serve as relevant learning experiences. In working in these learning situations both students and teachers are required to access both knowledge and learning strategies drawn from various disciplines and subject areas in order to discover the relevant information. In this way both the teacher and the student become challenged by and integrated into the learning process.

Cormack, P, *From alienation to engagement: Opportunities for reform in the middle years of schooling: Theoretical constructions* (Vol 2), Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Belconnen ACT, 1996.

Student Alienation During the Middle Years of Schooling was initiated as a project of national significance in 1994 to focus on 'hidden' alienation in Years 5-8 and to generate understanding of what it means to be disengaged from learning in the middle years of schooling. Volume 2 deals with four sets of theoretical constructions of student alienation:

- critical theory perspectives that look at the social construction of adolescents. As a response to these views Newman's (1981) six criteria for meaningful work are suggested as criteria for evaluation of any school reform: voluntary choice, small size, integrated work, clear and consistent educational goals, participation and extended and cooperative roles.

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- psychological views which highlight either a frustration-self esteem model or participation identification model. The response to these is to focus on ways of reinforcing success, positive engagement and a sense of belonging to school.
- post-modern perspectives – these highlight the impact of recent developments in society, particularly the technological third wave. Bigum, Fitzclarence and Green (1994) are quoted suggesting that the nature of schooling itself may be irrelevant to some student lives:
 - Schools, the product of second-wave industrialism, are experiencing collisions with third wave change.

The writer tentatively suggests Giroux's (1994) solution for a cultural studies approach to teaching which notes:

- Traditional subject distinctions can no longer account for the diversity of cultural and social phenomena we confront
 - Electronically mediated culture has shifted the ground of schooling from traditional disciplines to more hybridized ones
 - A critical questioning of knowledge, historical and social accounts
 - Teachers as promoters and supporters of learning rather than sources of knowledge
 - Study of how texts are produced and read in our society.
- Feminist perspectives that focus on gender as a key to explaining adolescent alienation. Again the model of response is tentative but looks towards the study of how student lives are constructed through media and popular culture.

The final part of this document contains an extensive bibliography for teachers on student alienation and responses.

Cormack, Phil (1998) *Middle Schooling: For Which Adolescent?* Curriculum Perspectives Vol 18 No 1 p 56.

In this article Cormack develops a critique of the US Carnegie report (1989) which gave much impetus to the middle schools movement in the US and Australia, and a South Australian pamphlet. He uses these to argue the dangers of a simplistic definition of adolescence, especially in binary or normalising terms as a basis for middle school reform. He concludes:

Middle schooling can no longer be based on a view of adolescents as either people like 'us' or people like 'them', nor will models of adolescence built on the rational western male making the right 'choices' suffice. Such models take us back to a future of schooling that will fail increasingly large proportions of the student population.

Cormack, Phil et al, 'Authentic Assessment in the middle years', in *Extending Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling: Challenges and Responses*, Jim Cumming (ed), Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Belconnen ACT, 1998

This article, based on action research through the Middle Years of Schooling project argues for 'authentic assessment exemplified through the following six issues:

- Connecting assessment to the curriculum
- Involving teacher, student and community judgment
- Looking beyond the school for models and sites of action

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- Promoting complex thinking and problem solving
- Encouraging student 'performance' of their learning
- Engaging with issues of equity

In respect of curriculum, the authors make the following comment:

...what should constitute the curriculum. In contemporary Australia, the stated goals of schooling have been significantly re-shaped in ways that reflect the need for differently skilled workers and citizens in the new millennium.

Through national developments like the Key Competencies and Statements and Profiles these new goals of schooling have penetrated local school curricula and are now reflected in many school programs, including those of the schools involved in this Research Circle. The challenge for these schools has been to develop assessment technologies that capture the range and complexity of this 'new' learning. Their initial attempts to do this provide insights into two features of assessment approaches that connect to the curriculum, namely assessment should be:

- contemporary by addressing the 'new' broad goals, aims, and objectives of the curriculum such as problem solving, collaboration and integrated knowledge; and
- comprehensive by covering the wide range of knowledge, skills, and processes embodied in the curriculum.

Cumming, James, 'Catering for the needs of all adolescents: Towards an integrated approach', *Unicorn*, Vol 20 No 2, June 1994, p 12.

This article articulates the need for specialised approach to the middle years of schooling through analysis of the impact on this group of issues in education, health, welfare, justice and employment. Cumming argues that

The middle years of schooling offer a unique opportunity in which to introduce new models of collaboration and co-operation. With greater freedom from the pressure of basic literacy and numeracy skills acquisition in the early years, and the dominance of determining post-school pathways in the senior years, teachers and other professionals can be more flexible in responding to the developmental needs of young adolescents. The challenge is to empower today's teenagers by helping to establish their independence through self-directed and self-managed learning, while simultaneously providing necessary support through adaptive structures and integrated services.

Cumming, Jim, 'Educating Young Adolescents - An ACSA Discussion Paper', *Curriculum Perspectives*, November 1994, p 36.

In this ACSA discussion paper Cumming briefly details the origins and background to the middle school movement in Australia. He lists the central background studies from the early nineteen nineties and then discusses issues through some central studies:

- Young adolescents - Cormack's (1991) review of adolescents in South Australia and the work of Hargreaves and Earle (1994) in Canada
- The effects of a changing society on adolescents - the Schools Council Report *In the Middle: Schooling for Young Adolescents* (NBEET 1993) and the issues paper of the Board of Registration in Queensland *Preparing Teachers for Working with Young Adolescents*. (1994). There is a listing of the negatives of young adolescent behaviour often perceived by media including violence, sex and drinking but he also notes the positive aspects of part time work and broad community involvement.

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- Current patterns of learning outcomes - he relies on Professor Peter Hill's study in *Victoria School and Teacher Effectiveness in Victoria* (1993) that there may be a decline or plateauing in certain areas, particularly literacy. He notes that if this characteristic is generic across subjects and applies to more than just low-achieving students then it is the prime argument for reform of middle schooling. He also notes:

Learning outcomes for young adolescents, however, extend beyond an ability to demonstrate intellectual capacity in key learning areas. The need for all young people to develop generic competencies that will equip them to enter the world of work, for example, is also important. In addition to developing appropriate academic and vocational expertise, young adolescents need to focus on personal and social development (for example, through enhanced cultural and aesthetic understandings) that will enable them to participate individually and collectively at local, national and global levels.

- Focus for improvement - he relies on ACSA research through 1993-4 to list the ten perceived priorities as critical in a review of middle years schooling:

1. Adolescent needs
2. Learning
3. Teaching
4. Curriculum
5. Training and professional development
6. Partnerships and support
7. Structures and organisation
8. Resourcing
9. Outcomes
10. Assessment and reporting

- Towards a Policy on the education of young adolescents. Cumming lists a number of considerations for policy development a number of which relate to curriculum issues:
 - To what extent do early adolescents constitute a group of young people with particular characteristics and needs that are not always adequately addressed in the context of a traditional primary-secondary structure of schooling?
 - It is acknowledged that student learning outcomes will be increased when teachers and participating adults- other-than-teachers are not only knowledgeable about, but also committed to young adolescents. How can this knowledge and commitment be developed most effectively?
 - For a range of reasons, some students (for example, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal students and non-English speaking background students) find the adolescent phase of development more problematic than others. What kinds of strategies and responses are required to improve educational opportunity and the quality of outcomes for these students?
 - How should the purposes of schooling for young adolescents be defined so that all students (including those who have been identified as being 'at-risk') will derive significant benefit from their experience in the middle years?
 - To what extent would the formulation of a collective vision and the negotiation of a comprehensive set of strategies increase the

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

effectiveness of school communities and education systems to achieve significant learning outcomes for all young adolescents?

- What kinds of cooperative strategies can be employed by those with responsibility for young adolescents (for example, education, health, welfare, sporting, business, religious, cultural and other community groups) to maximise learning opportunities and outcomes for all?
- Self, 'peer' and 'cooperative' forms of assessment have been advocated in the middle years as a means of students acquiring a sense of achievement and continuous progress. What kinds of assessment and reporting techniques are most effective in terms of increasing the self-esteem, confidence and motivation of young adolescents?

A feature of many 'youth participation' and 'action research' projects is the generation of products and/or services for audiences beyond the teacher and the classroom. To what extent do these and other projects/initiatives empower young adolescents to accept greater responsibility for their own learning?

Delors, Jacques et al, *Learning: The Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, UNESCO, Paris, 1998.

This report argues that education throughout life is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

- Learning to know, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life
- Learning to do, in order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams. It also means learning to do in the context of young people's various social and work experiences which may be informal, as a result of the local or national context, or formal, involving courses, alternating study and work
- Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence – carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts- in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace
- Learning to be, so as to better develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect of a person's potential: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills.

Formal education systems tend to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning; but it is vital now to conceive education in a more encompassing fashion. Such a vision should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to contents and to methods

Durrant, Cal and Green, Bill, 'Literacy and the New Technologies in School Education: Meeting the L(IT)eracy Challenge?', *Unpublished paper*, 1998.

The authors advocate a more flexible view of literacy which moves beyond print to incorporate a range from print to digital-electronics. The article analyses the new Australian and world contexts for technological literacy and advocates that technology must be embedded in curriculum and not added on. The model advocated requires learning technology, learning through technology and learning

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

about technology. This occurs through an integrated model that considers cultural, critical and operational dimensions. The authors also advocate making schools and classroom “worldly, socially meaningful and relevant places...engaged [in] production of social texts for real purposes’.

Edwards, Betty, ‘Constructivist Education and Middle Level Curriculum, *Curriculum Perspectives*, Vol 14 No 3, 1994, p 52.

Drawing on much of the research and material from the US middle schools movement this article details principles on which the author believes curriculum should be constructed. In particular it calls for 'valuing of student questions, inputs and reflections'. It advocates a move from a system focused on teaching to one focused on learning with an emphasis on knowledge not on 'information, isolated skills or discrete facts which have often formed the basis of local curriculum'. It argues for real world learning and uses principles developed by Brooks and Brooks (1993) to argue for experiences that address student learning needs as:

- Pose problems of emerging relevance to learners.
- Structure learning around 'big' ideas' or primary concepts.
- Seek and value students' points of view.
- Adapt curriculum to address students' suppositions.
- Assess student learning in the context of teaching.

The article also argues for interdisciplinary construction of curriculum.

Fry, Neville, 'Meeting in the middle: Preparing teachers for working with young adolescents', *Unicorn*, Vol 20 No 2, June 1994, p 21.

Fry outlines the characteristics, needs and modern social context of early adolescence as detailed in reports by the Carnegie Council in *Turning Points* (1989), Evers et al (1992), NBEET (1993a) and others. He argues that some aspects of schooling are at significant variance with these features. He sets out features he regards as imperative for a supportive school environment for young adolescents including:

Using the interests of young adolescents and their developmental tasks as the basis for coherent and relevant curriculum; providing for flexible and varied pathways for progress through the curriculum; facilitating mastery, promoting excellence.

Gates, Anne, 'The Coalition of Strategic Schools: Reforming the Middle Years', *Curriculum Perspectives*, Vol 14 No 3, 1994, p 48.

This article outlines the principles adopted by the Sydney Metropolitan West Disadvantaged Schools program in its project of educational reform addressing middle school issues:

- targeting student outcomes objectives is the necessary first step in effective curriculum reform
- all long-term objectives should be based on equality of educational outcomes
- all students are guaranteed access to learnings regarded as core or essential for understanding and participating in the social processes which shape their lives
- teaching/learning is thematic, integrated, participatory, begins from real life contexts and is varied in sites and styles

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- pedagogy will draw on the understanding of those issues and processes which characterise the shaping of adolescence
- contexts for teaching/learning include those which help explain the social nature of advantage and disadvantage and how these relate to students' lives.

The purposes of this reform are to:

- reconceptualise the functions of middle year curriculum in terms of contemporary and emerging society
- guarantee a balanced curriculum which meets the academic, pastoral and vocational needs of all students
- equip students with the skills and knowledge essential for active and informed citizenship.

Hargreaves, A & Earl L, 'Triple Transitions: Educating Early Adolescents in the Changing Canadian Context', *Curriculum Perspectives*, Vol.14 No.3, 1994.

The authors note that students in the middle years are undergoing three transitions through adolescence. Through changing societies and educational reform of secondary schools. They detail three studies that analyse the effect of middle school reform on Ontario, Canada schools. The effectiveness of reform is mixed but in the course of the article they adopt three basic assumptions for future policy:

- Programs and services for adolescents should primarily be based on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents. They should not mainly be determined by historical tradition or by the senior secondary years to follow
- The different aspects of schooling (i.e. curriculum, instruction, guidance, assessment and staff development) should be dealt with as an integrated whole, not as isolated sub-systems
- The development and implementation of any changes should be based upon and take account of existing theories of educational change.

There is a clear dilemma in reconciling the needs for security and independence in the middle years.

The authors also argue that traditional subject based curriculum is often irrelevant, lacking in imagination and not challenging to students. While the article then broadly ranges over the effectiveness of implementation, the authors return to their standpoint of arguing for an integrated curriculum approach.

Hill, Peter W and Russell, V Jean, 'Systemic, whole-school reform of the middle years of schooling' *Keynote Address, The Middle years of Schooling Conference*, Melbourne 28th March 1999

Hill & Russell use the findings of Stage 1 of the Victorian Quality Schools project confirmed by other research to make a number of observations about the characteristics of adolescents and learning:

- a plateau of any growth in reading, writing, speaking and listening during the middle years
- negativity in attitude to schooling (more pronounced in boys)
- decline in student enjoyment
- lessening of engagement

They outline the consequences of these characteristics as:

- early school leaving or 'dropping-out'
- truancy

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- habitual lateness
- dislike of teachers
- anger and resentment towards school
- disruptive behaviour in class
- delinquent behaviour
- suspension and expulsion
- failure to complete work or do homework
- low self-esteem
- social isolation
- peer conflict or gang behaviour
- substance abuse
- unsafe sexual practices
- self-injury.

The authors draw on the work of Hargreaves and Earl (1990) and Evers, Cormack and Barratt (1992) to detail particular adolescent needs including those which have implication for curriculum development including the growth towards independence, development of values and identity, the ability to respond constructively to the social and political world and the establishment of relationships.

They outline some of the work over the last decade that has looked to address these characteristics and needs in Australia and the US, and then summarise the guiding principles that have been proposed in this work as:

- educational provision based on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents;
- a holistic, integrated approach to change, involving all aspects of schooling including curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, school organisation and school culture;
- establishment within schools of a sound philosophical base and a shared set of theoretical constructs and beliefs about middle years reform;
- partnerships with students in the development of the curriculum, the ways learning is organised and monitored and in other aspects of the life of the school community;
- a close relationship between students and teachers, so that teachers know and understand each student and students feel supported and connected to the school;
- collaborative work by teachers in the planning and teaching of groups of young adolescents;
- flexible use of time, space and other resources, replacing the rigidities imposed by existing structures such as traditional timetables and room allocation which run counter to the learning needs of young adolescents;
- use of an outcomes-based approach, with ongoing recording of progress and achievement in relation to explicit expectations of students;
- continuity between the three phases of schooling: the early, middle and later years, while giving recognition to the different needs of each phase;
- involvement of parents and the community in productive partnerships in relation to the education of young adolescents;
- fair and adequate share of resources, especially in terms of staff, facilities, technology, equipment and materials;
- implementation of new approaches through strategies based on theories and understandings of change.

In general, the take-up of these principles has been piecemeal, localised, short-lived and poorly evaluated. Their proposal is:

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

Any serious reform of the middle years involves a more student-focused approach to teaching and one less driven by the imperative to cover curriculum content. This does not mean abandoning curriculum content nor under-valuing specialist subject knowledge. Rather, it means being explicit about the aims of secondary education in the middle years, ensuring that there is a clear specification of core knowledge that all students acquire, and making time for in-depth learning and having a curriculum that emphasises thinking and autonomous learning. It is thus suggested that schools and curriculum agencies over the next few years will provide advice regarding curriculum essentials in the middle years to facilitate new approaches to teaching.

The authors use Caldwell and Spinks (1998) notion of *strategic intentions* to list 20 patterns for action. These include two intentions specifically targeted at curriculum essentials:

1. Attention will be given to articulating aims of education specific to the middle years of schooling that better reflect:
 - developmental characteristics of young adolescents; and
 - changing educational needs of students in the light of broader changes in society and the economyand to ensuring that these aims become part of the shared beliefs and understanding of all staff.

2. Action will be taken to
 - curb uncontrolled expansion in the breadth of the curriculum for students in the middle years;
 - identify a manageable core of knowledge appropriate to this stage of schooling; and
 - allow greater opportunity for sustained personal endeavour, in-depth learning and the pursuit of excellence.

The balance of the address deals with the balance of elements required for comprehensive school reform. One element of this is the setting of specific targets against system-wide standards. The authors argue that:

Within the Australian context, national collaboration among the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments has meant that content standards exist that specify what schools are expected to teach students in the middle years. At this stage, however, only preliminary work has been done on defining appropriate performance standards in the middle years..... further work is needed to ensure that low expectations of students in the middle years are not built into schooling through a failure to benchmark standards against best practice.

Another element that has implications for curriculum is classroom teaching strategies (*and therefore curriculum*)

... attuned to the characteristics and needs of young adolescents include student involvement in classroom decision-making about curriculum, including the ways learning is organized, monitored and assessed; learning that connects with and is relevant to students' personal and social concerns, and their out-of-school experience and culture; active learning experiences;

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

engagement in complex, higher-order and critical thinking activity; and co-operative as well as independent learning.

Hirsch, Donald, 'Schooling for the Middle Years: Developments in Eight European Countries', *Paper presented at the 'Frontiers in the Education of Adolescents Conference*, Marbach Germany, Nov 3-5 1994, Carnegie Corporation, NY, 1994.

Stimulated by the Carnegie Report *Turning points* (1989), this booklet describes how eight European countries; Czech republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Switzerland structure educational provision to middle schooling. Hirsch notes:

Europeans, like Americans, have started to grapple with this situation, even if an ideal solution seems elusive. An important difference between the United States and most of the countries examined in this paper is the ability of the latter to change educational structures systematically from the national level. So while the movement to reform middle-grade education in the United States has been a bottom-up approach (albeit with strong leadership from the state level; the recent introduction, for example, of a core curriculum in the Netherlands, of a more humanized pedagogy in the Czech Republic, and of greater help for students in difficulty in France have all been legislated from the center. Even in Germany and Switzerland, both federal countries, states tend to legislate the content and structure of schooling in greater detail than their American counterparts.

Hirsch raises a number of common key issues being faced by these countries. They include:

- the status of the middle years: Extension of elementary, preparation for secondary, or a stage in its own right?
- should the middle years be a common experience, or adapted to different needs?
- Academic instruction or educating the whole person?

He argues that the dilemma faced by these countries is the issue of the middle school as a graded preparation for higher study or 'education for the needs of young adolescents (which) may include preliminary preparation for this task, but also include the development of confidence, skills and attributes that will help them to learn and develop in a balanced way'.

Holland, Susan, 'Schooling for the Twenty-first Century', *Curriculum Perspectives*, Vol 13 No. 3, 1993, p 57.

Holland argues that it is no longer helpful to make a distinction between 'academic' and 'vocational' components in the secondary curriculum. She argues that a more appropriate notion is to recognise that each subject has at least three characteristics: theoretical, practical and generic, which vary from subject to subject:

It would be more appropriate, honest and therefore more useful to prospective students and their parents if available course information clearly indicated the range of skills and capacities expected as the outcomes from respective subjects, particularly if these were characterised in terms of whether they were 'theoretical', 'practical' or 'generic' Until the assumptions underpinning the perceived hierarchy of subjects are challenged, it is unlikely that schools can reorganise their curriculum patterns to meet adequately the economic and social needs of the twenty-first century. (58-9)

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

Kennedy, Kerry J, 'Constructing the School Curriculum for the Twenty First Century: Searching for Boundaries in a Global Society', *Invited expert paper, 6th OECD/Japan Education Seminar, 'Schooling for Tomorrow'*, Hiroshima 5-7 November 1997.

Kennedy argues that in the twenty-first century curriculum will have to be defined through a leadership mentality rather than a control mentality – from mandating details to setting directions given the future of information and communication technology. He suggests the areas in which such action can be taken are:

- Theoretical impetus underlying the school curriculum
- Definition of key competencies – not 'behaviouristic notions of performance and attempts to build competence from discrete bits of behaviour', but a 'matter of integrating knowledge, skills and values in such a way that competent performance results'.
- The role of citizenship education
- Ethical behaviour and moral education

King, Ann, 'Reflections on one school's efforts to become a learning school', *Connections*, October 1996, p 6.

This article details one school's response to restructure learning experiences to meet students new and changing needs through the development of clear purpose and the use of collegial cross-faculty teaching teams

McGuinness, Carol, 'From Thinking Skills to Thinking Classrooms', Research Briefs Research Report No.115, U.K. Department for Education and Employment – <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/report115.html>, (6/1/2000), 1999.

This report outlines McGuinness' review and evaluation of research into thinking skills. Major conclusions of this review include:

.....the need to make thinking skills explicit in a curriculum; teaching thinking through a form of coaching; taking a metacognitive perspective; collaborative learning (including computer-mediated learning); creating dispositions and habits of good thinking; generalising the framework beyond a narrow focus on skills to include thinking curricula, thinking classrooms and thinking schools. Considerable evaluation work remains to be done in order to link the critical features of the framework to learning outcomes in different contexts.

Newmann, Fred M & Wehlage, Gary G, 'Successful School Restructuring: A Report to the Public and Educators' Centre on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Wisconsin, 1995 - <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archives> (22/12/99)

This report is of research conducted between 1990 and 1995 on data from 1,500 elementary, middle and high schools through the U.S. The researchers conclude that restructuring schools can improve student learning if focused on four key factors:

- Student learning
- Authentic pedagogy
- School organizational capacity, and
- External support.

In respect of student learning the authors write:

In successful schools, the planning, implementation and evaluation of new approaches focus on enhancing student learning. Teachers agree on a vision

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2

A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

of high quality intellectual work, and they communicate clear goals for high quality learning to students and parents. The core activities of the school -- including curriculum development, instruction, assessment, scheduling, staff development, hiring and student advising -- aim toward that vision of student learning.

The Center developed a particular vision of high quality student learning, "Authentic Student Achievement." This vision has three parts:

Construction of Knowledge - Students learn to organize, interpret and analyze information, instead of merely reproducing specific bits of knowledge from a textbook or classroom lecture. They learn to apply knowledge, not just collect facts.

Disciplined Inquiry - Using established knowledge in science, mathematics, history or literature, students develop in-depth understanding. They express that understanding in an "elaborate" way, such as writing an essay or engaging in a substantial discussion of the topic, instead of merely checking boxes or filling in the blanks on a test.

Value Beyond School - Students produce work, or solve problems, that have meaning in the real world. A student's accomplishments in school have value beyond merely proving that he or she did well in school.

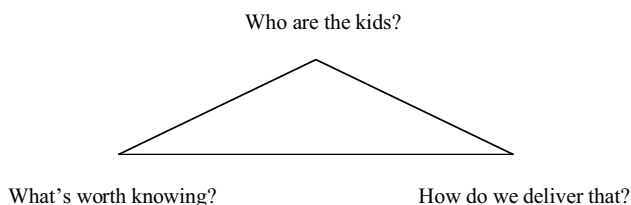
The Center's research shows that when schools restructure around this kind of vision, it works: Students learn more.

Otero, George G, 'Learning Ain't What It Used To Be: Student Engagement Strategies for 21st Century Schools', *Keynote Presentation, The Middle years of Schooling Conference, Melbourne 28th March 1999*

Otero argues that 'Our views of teaching and learning must change if we hope to engage middle years youth effectively'. Our current schooling is designed for an older context. The current social context requires response to

- rapid pervasive change
- increasing interconnectedness.

He defines learning as a social discipline of broadening and deepening one's understanding of the world rather than passive receipt of somebody else's useful past experiences. He refers to theorists including Alvin Toffler, Margaret Wheatly and Howard Gardner for some ways of thinking about learning. He poses three question to guide the teaching / learning model:



The balance of Otero's paper deals with motivational ways of implementing curriculum but he concludes with a statement of themes that should guide educational experience:

- developing perspective consciousness
- pursuing multiple perspectives

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

- valuing diversity
- increasing state-of-the-planet awareness
- understanding world issues and trends
- living peacefully with others
- building the capacity to change
- expressing our creativity.

Pascoe, Susan, 'What Counts as Essential Learning', *paper delivered to Australian College Of Education Conference – Education: Who really counts?*, Canberra, 27-30 September 1998

In this wide-ranging paper Pascoe defines a number of issues relevant to essential learning. She argues that the Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia declaration and the focus on outcomes-based education provide a sound basis for learning. She draws on Brady and Kennedy (1999) to define the purposes of the curriculum:

- cultural – to ensure the foundations of society are transmitted to the next generation
- personal – to provide for the intrinsic needs of individuals and groups
- vocational – to ensure students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to participate actively in the world of work
- social – to enable society to function for the benefits of all; and
- economic to ensure that the productive capacity of individuals and the nation as a whole is taken into account.

Other factors in essential learning include divisions into:

- stages of schooling including the middle years of schooling (Years 5-8) which: present their own challenges. This is the time for introducing students to new knowledge, concepts and skills, and to consolidating their early learning. It is a time for embedding deep understandings of disciplines of knowledge and for teaching students to access, organise, analyse and evaluate information. The onset of puberty with its issues of identity, authority and emerging adult behaviours means that schools devote considerable time to pastoral programs. These pastoral approaches are critical in supporting the social and emotional development of adolescents, but are not often recognised in catalogues of essential learning.
- essential learning in which she acknowledges that despite their arbitrary nature, key learning areas do 'provide a common basis for the provision of curriculum to students across Australia'. She views positively the moves to define essential learning outcomes within each KLA as the 'essential knowledge and skills required for students to be able to progress to the next level within that discipline'. She argues that this helps 'free up central prescription and provides scope for local priorities and emphases.'
- vocational dimensions in middle and final years which, she argues, must be incorporated into existing academic curricula.
- education for democracy as a core provision and an essential component of a liberal education

Roberts, Joanne, 'Student Questions Leading Middle years Reform', *Perspectives*, Vol 18 No 1, 1998, p 71.

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

Roberts argues from experience in her National Schools Network program that 'even conscientious and cooperative students in Years 5-8 are often not motivated by the work they are asked to complete. She outlines integrated curriculum work that she and her colleagues have been trialing through the integrated curriculum methodology originated by Professor James Beane. From a curriculum perspective she importantly argues that this work is possible and mappable within existing curriculum frameworks, in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia.

MIDDLE YEARS LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2
A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

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A report prepared for the NSW Board of Studies

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