

Australian Journal
of Middle Schooling
Research
Special Edition



Australian Journal of Middle Years of Schooling

Supported by the New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling





Editorial

Never before have teachers seemingly had more information about the children that they teach. Results from standardised tests such as Naplan, as well as information obtained from direct interaction in the classroom, should see teachers well placed to make judgements about appropriate strategies to optimise the outcomes for each student they teach. Nijhawahan (2017) points out that when directly asked for advice about potential solutions to overcome classroom issues, teachers frequently point to anecdotal evidence such as “This has generally worked for me”. The recently released report from the Department of Education and Training colloquially entitled “Gonski 2.0” however found that one of the critical requirements for continued improvement, was access to “valid and reliable evidence of effective teaching practice” (p.xiv). This finding points to the lack of a “scientific essence” (Nijhawahan, 2017, p. 11) in the accumulated knowledge teachers acquire from their classroom practice. The gap between theory and practice seems alive and well. The informal ‘research’ that teachers undertake daily is perhaps not considered to be of a sufficiently rigorous standard. Nijhawahan (2017, p. 10) notes that:

The use of standardised research tools generating a multitude of data sets for complex statistical analysis has triggered sweeping responses by policy makers. In contrast, methods that enable educators to directly intervene into educational contexts and thus consolidate theory with practice remains a flash in the pan within this discourse.

Bridging the gap between research and classroom practice therefore remains problematic. Classroom teachers need research findings presented in an easily accessible format. Researchers need to be mindful of the diversity of their potential readership.

As mentioned in previous editions of this journal, Adolescent Success is working hard to help to address the gap between research and practice. In August 2017 the first Research Symposium was conducted for researchers with a particular interest in the middle years. The symposium provided an opportunity for researchers to both share their current work as well as to explore potential future research collaborations. It was clear from the presentations that the participants were working directly with schools and were keen for their research to have impact at the school level. Their intention was not to engage in research simply for the sake of conducting research. All were keen for their findings to be of assistance to teachers and school administrators.

This edition of the Australian Journal of Middle Schooling is presented as a “Special Edition” to showcase the contributions of each of the contributors at the Research Symposium. Each participant was asked to present a “one-pager” about their research. It is these documents that are presented in this edition. Three purposes will hopefully be served by publishing these documents. Firstly, it will provide readers with an idea of the different research projects being currently undertaken in the Australia in the middle years. Secondly, it will ‘introduce’ the researchers to readers. This will enable readers to follow up with the researchers

should further contact or information be sought. Finally, readers may have some ideas for research or be undertaking further study. Having an avenue for readers to make contact with current researchers may lead to new collaborative projects being discussed and pursued.

Adolescent Success is the peak body in Australia representing the interests of middle years students and those working with them. The Australian Journal of Middle Schooling is one of the mechanisms by which practitioners share their practice. We are very keen to publish articles, both refereed and non-refereed, that highlight the vast array of initiatives taking place in Australian schools. The guidelines for contributors have recently been reviewed and appear at the end of this journal as well as on the Adolescent Success website. Readers are strongly encouraged to consider submitting an article for publication.

Dr Anne Coffey
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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.

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Adolescent Success Conference: Research Round Table – Report

*Dr Katherine Main,
Griffith University, co-convenor, AARE Middle Years Special Interest Group*

In collaboration with the Australian Association for Research in Education Middle Years Special Interest Group (AARE MY SIG), an inaugural research symposium was held at the 10th International Conference for Adolescent Success held at the Brisbane Convention Centre, 24-26 August, 2017. The aim of the symposium was to provide an opportunity for researchers to share the results of their research as well as to gain feedback on proposed research projects, to network, and to highlight the synergies across the group's areas of expertise. The research symposium marked a significant milestone for those who research or are interested in current research around young adolescent learners and the middle years of schooling. The day provided a unique opportunity for researchers to meet and discuss their work and look for potential collaborations in small groups or as a collective.

The structure of the day included a Keynote address by Professor Donna Pendergast, Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, entitled: Making great middle years teachers.

Professor Pendergast's presentation considered the question - what makes great middle years teachers? She highlighted global education megatrends as a context for reflecting on the importance of teaching quality in schools as well as the changing nature of students using generational theory as a broad brushstroke lens to characterise the young people in classrooms today. Linking the trends with the changing needs and demands of students and learning, the presentation unpacked the four intentional practices necessary to create great middle years teachers. The importance of great teachers was highlighted throughout, and a connection was made between great teachers, quality teaching and student achievement. Student voice was a critical part of her presentation with a summary emphasising students' opinions of what makes great teachers. Professor Pendergast's open presentation set the tone for the day with a lot of thought provoking questions and animated discussion amongst participants.

The second section of the day included the round table style presentations. The room was

set with three tables that hosted three presenters for 30 minutes each. The presentations ran simultaneously whereby a presenter was seated at one of three tables and was given 20 minutes to present their research paper as well as being given an additional 10 minutes for those in attendance to ask questions. At the end of the time there was a five-minute change-over and the next group of three began their presentations. There were 11 presenters in total, with two groups sharing their 30-minute time-slot. Throughout the sessions, other delegates attending the general conference were welcome to sit in and listen and contribute to the research sessions. Throughout the day a number of conference delegates took the opportunity to join in the research agenda. Each presenter was also asked to provide a one-page summary of the work they were presenting. Researchers who were presenting on completed projects or planned projects have generously given permission for their research summaries or abstracts to be published as part of this report. Those who presented included: Dr Gabrielle Baker, Queensland University of Technology, Dr Anne

Coffey, University of Notre Dame, WA, Dr Tony Dowden, University of Southern Queensland, Mr Jason Hassard, Griffith University, Ms Dana Leidl, Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use, NSW, Dr Katherine Main, Griffith University, Professor Donna Pendergast, Griffith University, Dr Michelle Ronksley-Pavia, Griffith University, Dr Rebecca Seward-Linger, University of Southern Queensland, Dr Kelly Sharp, Scotch College, Adelaide, and Dr Katharine Swain, Flinders University, SA. Contact details for each of the researchers are provided in their individual summaries.

The third session of the day was a Town Hall Meeting that involved all of the research delegates. The Town Hall Meeting was facilitated by Professor Donna Pendergast. The meeting opened with delegates invited to "voice" (by writing on a sticky-note) the most important take-home messages from the day. The collation of these thoughts distilled down into three main areas, being (a) Bridging the research-practice nexus through collaboration, (b) student voice, and (3) student-centred pedagogy/ responsive pedagogy. With a focus on these topics, a group discussion was held and guided by the following questions:

- What do we know?
- How do we know?
- What can we do individually and collectively about what we know? and
- Where to from here?

The following is a summary of the points made during the Town Hall Meeting:

1. What do we know?

- a. There are research/ school partnerships that support the research-practice nexus;
- b. We know teachers are passionate and want to share – they have their fingers on the pulse;
- c. Teachers often lack the confidence and skill to be researchers – they know what they know; they know some of what they don't know but there are also things that they don't know that they don't know;
- d. There is a repository of research aimed at school improvement (e.g., work of Fullan / Hargreaves);
- e. Teachers are key factor in implementing change in schools as they are both the subjects and agents of change;
- f. Student voice needs to be considered and teachers can make a difference by ensuring change is relevant and connected to the needs of students;
- g. The scalability of reforms, working through systems and gauging impact. There is a need to build the collective strength through research and school collaborations as too much is happening that is random, ad hoc and piecemeal;
- h. Look for good practice from macro to micro systems (OECD, National Systems, Research systems, School systems (national, state and local), enacted in classrooms) – how do we link the levels and ensure the flow of information?
- i. Need to avoid single champions of change – need systemic reform – large scale – with

distributed leadership to ensure sustainability;

- j. Avoid USA's boom to bust experience of middle schooling practices through the use of evidence-based practices, evaluation and ongoing professional development;
- k. Need to teach teachers to be researchers of their own practices to develop an continuous improvement cycle;
- l. Sustainable – ensure that data literacy and researching practices are valued and embedded as a key feature of initial teacher education capstone courses;
- m. Need sustainability of reform and good practices which can only be mediated by government education policies. We need to change the position of teachers to ensure they have agency and are empowered to implement change

2. How do we know?

- a. Research literature provides some evidence / we have experience / anecdotal evidence.

3. What can we do individually and collectively about what we know?

- a. It is about building teacher efficacy through effective professional development and effective initial teacher education programs that adequately prepare teachers to teach in the middle years;
- b. Mentoring – empowering and supporting teachers; and
- c. Building a professional learning community of researchers around middle years education.

4. Where to from here?

- a. Consider your individual position / responsibilities. Where do you see yourself as part of the solution to the puzzle?
- b. What role do you want to play?
- c. How can you be supported?
- d. How can you support others?
- e. What do you need to be successful in your research moving ahead?
- f. How can you be part of the scalability of middle years research across Australia?

A follow up email was sent to all delegates with the summary of the Town Hall Meeting with the hope that individually and then collectively that the group can begin to plan and action the questions in Section 4. It is envisaged that this was the first of regular opportunities for middle years researchers to be able to meet and share their research and look at ways of collaboration to support those who teach and ultimately improve the educational experience and educational outcomes for middle years students. Planning is currently underway to run a similar day at the New Zealand NZ Association of Intermediate

and Middle Schooling (NZAIMS) Conference in Auckland, New Zealand, 16-18 May, 2018.

As convenor (Dr Tony Dowden) and co-convenor (Dr Katherine Main), we would like to sincerely thank AARE for their generous sponsorship, Adolescent Success for their support of the middle years research agenda and including it in their Conference Program and for Professor Donna Pendergast for giving up her time and delivering both the Keynote address and for facilitating the Town Hall Meeting.

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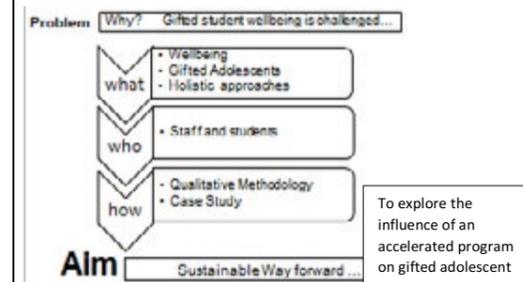


Gifted adolescent wellbeing: an Australian case study.

Gabrielle A. Baker

Research Questions:

- 1. What guiding principles informed the development of a gifted program?
- 2. In what ways did the program contribute to gifted adolescent wellbeing?

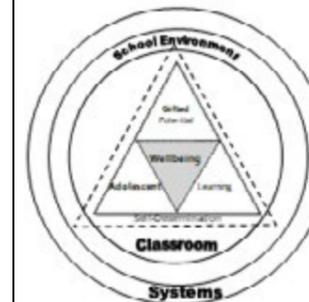


Wellbeing is a comfortable state of physical and mental health gained by the satisfaction of needs

(... and for a gifted adolescent ...)

and balancing self-determination.

A gifted adolescent is curious with keen observation skills, enjoys intellectual activity with minimal repetition, and has exceptional cognitive processing for complex problems from an early age.



Scope: single setting 6 cohorts 2005-2010, 24 students, 8 staff 140 archived docs.

Significance: Links wellbeing to education, participant voice, Australian.

Theoretical foundations:

Maslow (1993) Needs differ.
Seligman's (2011) PERMA
Deci and Ryan (2008) Self-determination theory – Competence, Autonomy, Relatedness (Connectedness)
Bronfenbrenner (2006) viewed influences systemically as networks
HPS (WHO, 2013) from 1996 Ottawa Charter – framework to group influences on students.

Concern: nebulous nature of wellbeing and giftedness, identification of gifted students, asynchronous development, balancing academic & social-emotional development, program sustainability, whole-of-school ethos/ inclusive practice?

Phase I	Phase II
Archival Data	Contemporary Interview Data
Analyse Documents Dates & key words.	Analyse Transcripts Themes & triangulation.
Constructs (objective) • Academic, • Co-curricular, • Health	Constructs (subjective) • Eudemonia • Motivation • Giftedness

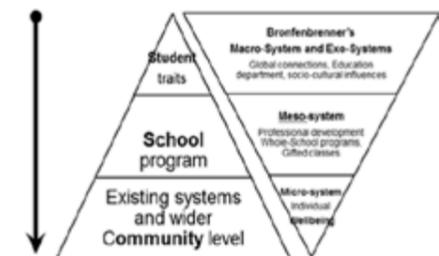
Gifted Adolescents benefit from ability-grouping

-being identified using a balanced test battery

-empathetic teachers who use gifted traits to advantage, instill a positive attitude toward learning, autonomy and social connection (SD)

- programs that compact, accelerate & grade-skip IF a supportive school environment provides support for inclusive practice

New systemic orientation



Recommendations:

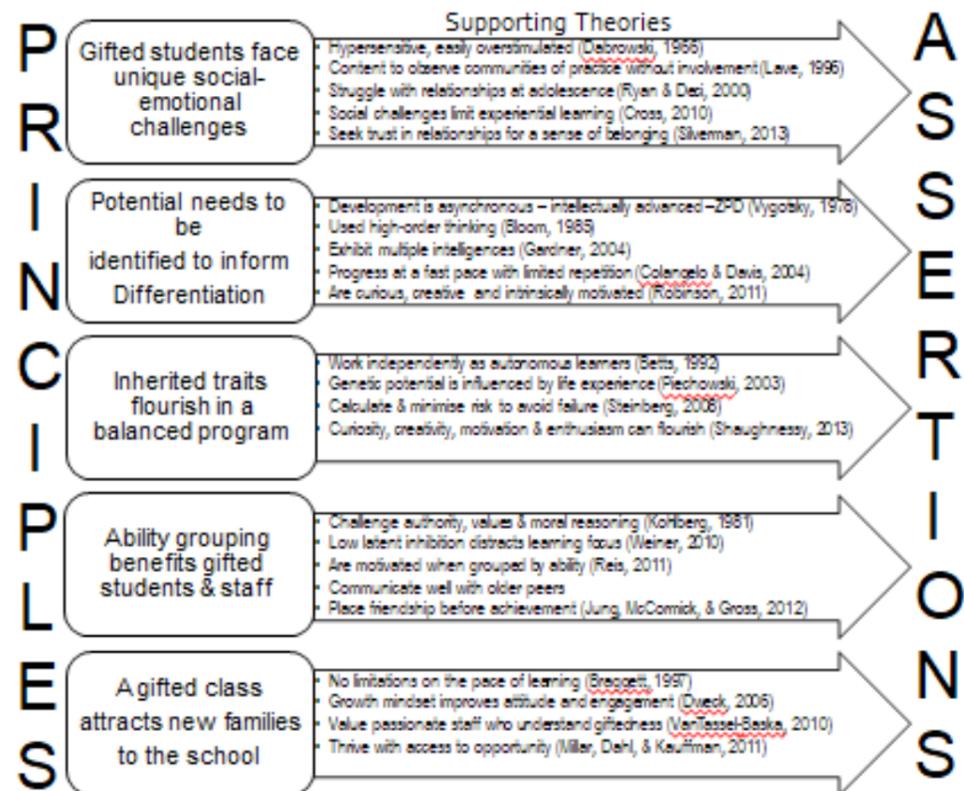
- 1. Gifted class
- 2. Whole-of-school approach
- 3. Professional development for staff

Embedded Health Promoting School framework



Ms Emerald (176-178) pointed out: “interest can be measured in any subject. The best measurement though is counting the number of minutes and hours a student spends on an activity voluntarily”

Needs	Student Responses	Staff Responses	Themes
Physiological	All basic commodity needs were catered for at Sandy School		
Safety	“I felt safe”, “I didn’t want to stand out”	“peers could be very cruel when students excelled”	Like-ability grouping class.
Belonging and Connectedness	“just being together” “I was happy to sit alone” “I didn’t want to mix with anyone outside the class”	“others did reject them” “asynchrony caused serious social problems” “attempts to integrate were challenging”	Encourage co-curricular engagement. Socialisation skills.
Self-esteem	“having friends at last” “trying new sport was a challenge” “we just want to be accepted as normal”	“Achievement did matter”, “They mastered new tasks for their own self satisfaction” “students rarely sought recognition”	Ownership of tasks. Tasks with purpose.
Self-actualisation	“I was far more confident in myself” “I felt like I knew where I was going at last”	“They were so creative” “Can they ever achieve inner peace?”	Recognition of potential.



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Student Leadership in the Middle Years: A Snapshot

Dr Anne Coffey

Research Question: In what ways is student leadership promoted and developed in the middle years?

Purpose: The underlying purpose for this study into ways middle school student leadership is promoted in secondary schools was twofold. First, it was to provide a snapshot of middle school student leadership structures in six secondary schools. Secondly it was to explore those opportunities middle school students might have to exercise leadership.

Conceptual Framework: Two theoretical constructs:

- Student leadership in general – literature focuses predominantly on senior secondary (what student leaders do, way they are supported, benefits and concerns of student leadership.
- Student leadership in middle years – less well understood and focused more on age-appropriate opportunities, holistic development of students and formal/informal settings in which it occurs.

Schools:

1. **A:** A boys school in the Uniting Church tradition established in 1897 - students from Years 1-12
2. **B:** A co-educational Independent Public school established in 2001 -students from Years 7-12.
3. **C:** A co-educational Independent Public School established in 1978 - Years 7-10
4. **D:** A co-educational Independent Public School established in 1967 - Years 8-12

5. **E:** A Catholic co-educational school established in 1983 - Years 7-12
6. **F:** A Catholic girls school established in 1938 - Years 5-12

Data Collection & Analysis:

- Qualitative, interpretivist paradigm
- 7 Participants/6 audio-recorded semi-structured interviews which focused on the perception of student leadership in general, student leadership structures, form of student leadership in middle years and role of adult teacher leaders (mentors).
- Content analysis

Results:

Three key themes emerged:

Role of teacher leaders – modelling leadership from the “front, middle and behind.”; supporting and overseeing student leadership structures; having direct contact with middle years student leaders and identifying leadership potential; selection of the right staff; leadership is different in the middle years If you look at the wider picture of building confident students then you have to do it across different year levels so it is going to look different from year 7 to 12. At year 12 we are preparing them to move onto further study or work and see themselves as an adult and take that responsibility on. In year 7 you are only introducing that as an idea to them”.

- Student leadership structures – formal and informal structures; ‘those without a badge have the right to be heard’, all schools had a designated leadership program with most having Year 12 leaders; middle years was different “we don’t want student leadership in the middle years to be seen as a bunch of jobs”; informal opportunities present in the classroom “every kid a chance to lead in some way”.
- Holistic development of middle years students – growing leaders “leadership in year 7 is about turning them into good citizens, respectful, to have empathy, to be people who have a positive outlook on life; opportunities need to be provided “to be involved as opposed to being a bystander”; student leadership is valued but not seen as important as it needed to be; focus on all students “There’s got to be a chance for everybody to shine because what can happen is the same leaders go through from year 7 to year 12”;

Conclusion & Recommendations:

- Student leadership is different in the middle years
- Support is critical for leadership opportunities to be provided
- Adult conceptions of leadership have dominated research therefore student voice is needed

“You might think of leaders as those who represent the school but what about the kid who turns up every day to (help out with) the school performance, even though they are not very talented. They show absolute resilience in turning up every day and taking on a role and perhaps they are encouraging everybody else... They need to know that everything they do is important so that in later life they still need to make a contribution because (life) is all about contributing.”

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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

The development of a distinct identity by Junior School students is one of the guiding principles of Education Queensland's Junior Secondary [JS] policy. The Shaping Middle Schooling in Australia Report identified IDENTITY as one of seven collective views of the specific needs of young Australian adolescents (Barratt, 1998). School context plays an important role in student identity development (Lannegrand & Bosma, 2006).

The purpose of this study is 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. The study will use a mixed methods approach. Data will be collected via an online survey, student drawings and semi-structured interviews with case study participants and will be analysed using SPSS and Nvivo software for quantitative and qualitative data respectively.

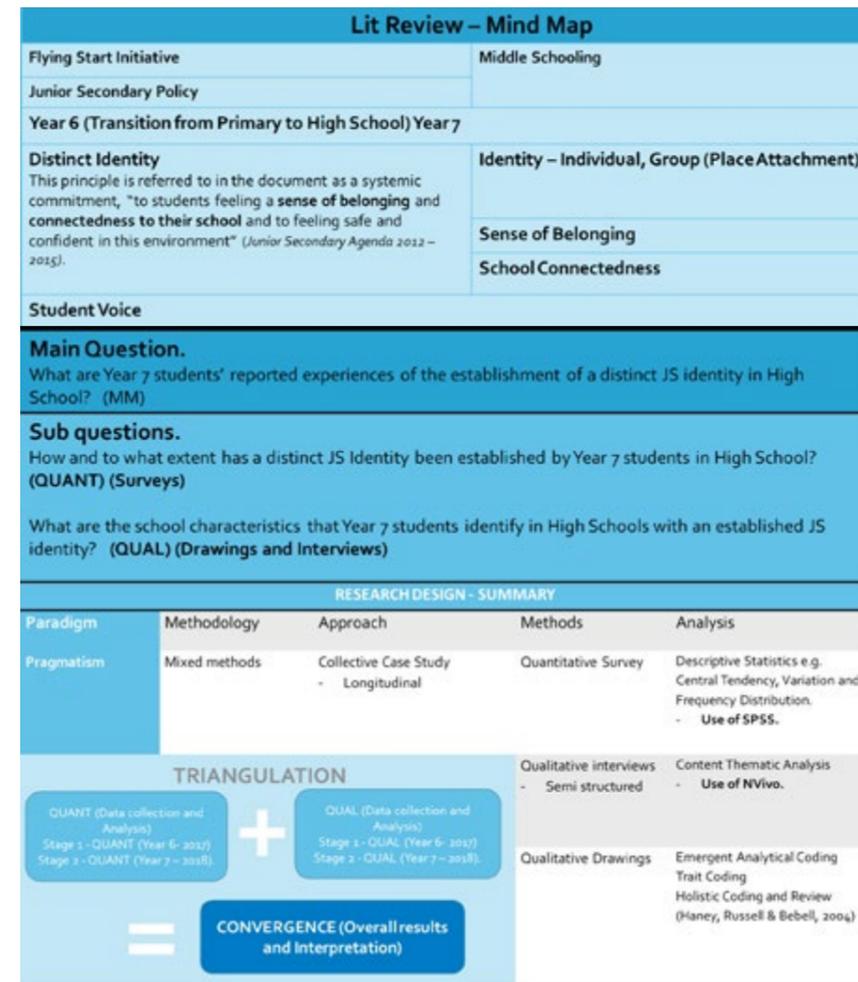
Student voice will be foregrounded in the research as a key point of difference to previous studies on young people's transitions to high school. The study will aim to inform policy, the work of administrators and practitioners related to JS policy and the establishment of student identity.

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Integrating social-emotional learning: Enhancing teachers' capacity to embed social-emotional learning in the curriculum

Dr Katherine Main

Early adolescence marks a developmental period where young people experience rapid and complex social, emotional, physical, and cognitive changes. During this time, social allegiances begin to shift and require young people to learn how to develop and sustain more complex relationships. At the same time, their study load and difficulty of the work increases and they are also expected to take more responsibility for their work. To successfully negotiate these relationships and changing work demands young people need to be able to effectively use social and emotional and self-regulatory skills to manage their own behaviour. There is also empirical evidence to show that failing to develop such social and emotional competencies (SECs) can result in poor outcomes in several

domains including personal, social, and academic outcomes. Although the role teachers play in explicitly teaching and supporting young adolescents' social and emotional competence has been recognised, teachers have reported a lack of confidence in knowing what and how to teach these skills. This presentation reports on a teacher education course that embedded social and emotional skills into the curriculum. It aims to demonstrate how to teach preservice teachers how to embed social and emotional skills (SEs) when teaching the curriculum including how to identify the skills within curriculum descriptors and how to embed the skills within daily lessons.

The project was set within the

Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education in the core course 7801EDN Issues and Practices in Junior Secondary Education. As part of this course students were provided with learning experiences in their tutorials that exposed them to strategies around building their own social and emotional competencies, in particular, responsible decision making, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. The aim was to model and explicitly teach students how to embed the teaching of social and emotional skills within their daily activities. Table 1 shows the social and emotional skills that were focused on throughout the semester with the links to the various activities that students were encouraged to undertake.

Social and Emotional Skills	Tutorial Activities and Supporting Information
<p>Responsible decision making:</p> <p>Being able to make flexible and responsible decisions and problem solve through a process of weighing options and considering the consequences. This competency also includes being able to create and execute a plan, make an evaluation of its effectiveness considering the facilitators and barriers and then revise the plan to achieve the desired aims or objectives.</p>	<p>Responsible decision making: Being able to make flexible and responsible decisions and problem solve through a process of weighing options and considering the consequences. This competency also includes being able to create and execute a plan, make an evaluation of its effectiveness considering the facilitators and barriers and then revise the plan to achieve the desired aims or objectives.</p> <p>Key skills in this category: imagining alternative ways of doing things, applying learning in new contexts, enterprising, innovating, remaining open to new ideas, Planning and Problem Solving – navigating resources, organising, setting and achieving goals, decision making, researching, analysing, critical thinking, questioning and challenging, evaluating risks, reliability. The following may help you to work on your own responsible decision-making techniques. Link to https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_88.htm and to Griffith University's research support page (researching, navigating resources).</p>

continued overleaf

continued

Social and Emotional Skills	Tutorial Activities and Supporting Information
<p>Self-awareness: Being self-aware means having the ability to reflect on and to accurately identify one's emotions and thoughts and to recognise how these emotions and thoughts can influence behaviour. It is also recognising personal growth (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional) and change and making adjustments to ensure continued connectedness with others.</p>	<p>Responsible decision making: Being able to make flexible and responsible decisions and problem solve through a process of weighing options and considering the consequences. This competency also includes being able to create and execute a plan, make an evaluation of its effectiveness considering the facilitators and barriers and then revise the plan to achieve the desired aims or objectives.</p> <p>Key skills in this category: imagining alternative ways of doing things, applying learning in new contexts, enterprising, innovating, remaining open to new ideas, Planning and Problem Solving – navigating resources, organising, setting and achieving goals, decision making, researching, analysing, critical thinking, questioning and challenging, evaluating risks, reliability</p> <p>Links to SMART goals activity and Ted Talk on Goal setting</p>
<p>Self-management: Being able to recognise and regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviours appropriately in a range of different contexts. It also includes being able to manage stress and being able to set and achieve a range of personal and academic goals, and being persistent.</p>	<p>Self-management: Being able to recognize and regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviours appropriately in a range of different contexts. It also includes being able to manage stress and being able to set and achieve a range of personal and academic goals, and being persistent.</p> <p>Key skills in this category: self-discipline, self-management, self-motivated, concentrating, having a sense of purpose, persistent, self-controlled.</p> <p>Do you procrastinate? What distracts you?</p> <p>Links to Rescue Time App and Pomodoro Technique</p>
<p>Social awareness: Being able to have empathy and consider the feelings and perspectives of others, being non-judgemental of others, and being assertive when necessary. Students often confuse being assertive with bullying behaviours.</p>	<p>Social awareness: Being able to have empathy and consider the feelings and perspectives of others, being non-judgemental of others, and being assertive when necessary. Students often confuse being assertive with bullying behaviours.</p> <p>Key skills in this category: reviewing, self-awareness, reflecting, self-regulating, self-accepting, Good communication – explaining, expressing, presenting, listening, questioning, using different ways of communicating.</p> <p>Links to an effective communications resource and self-assessment survey on self-regulation</p>
<p>Relationship skills: Being able to initiate, establish, and maintain positive relationships with others, including those from diverse backgrounds. Relationship skills also include communication skills, negotiation skills, conflict management skills as well as being able to seek and offer help when needed.</p>	<p>Relationship skills: Being able to initiate, establish, and maintain positive relationships with others, including those from diverse backgrounds. Relationship skills also include communication skills, negotiation skills, conflict management skills as well as being able to seek and offer help when needed.</p> <p>Link to quiz to self-assess your interpersonal skills.</p>

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Engaging middle years students: The importance of a sense-of- belonging-at-school

Professor Donna Pendergast (Presenter)

Dr Michelle Ronksley-Pavia

Associate Professor Jeanne Allen

Dr Glenda McGregor

➤ **Purpose:** The literature around student engagement points to the need for students to experience—among other requirements—a sense-of-belonging-at-school (SOBAS). When the need for belonging is thwarted there may be significant consequences including an impact on intellectual functioning and performance, and hence, learning potential may not be achieved (Baumeister & Dwall, 2005). We set out to critically examine the literature related to young adolescents, engagement and SOBAS. We then conducted a series of focus groups with students, and interviews with their teachers and school leaders to explore the importance of, and challenges associated with, creating a sense of belonging for students, particularly those with high needs, in middle level education.

➤ **What is SOBAS?** Riley and White (2016) describe sense of belonging “an individual feels accepted, appreciated, and understood” (p. 211) in relationships with other people. Somers (1999) describes SOBAS as:
the need to be and perception of being involved with others at differing interpersonal levels ... which contributes to one's sense of connectedness (being part of,

feeling accepted, and fitting in), and esteem (being cared about, valued and respected by others), while providing reciprocal acceptance, caring and valuing to others. (p. 3).

SOBAS has been shown to provide students with a powerful source of resilience to strengthen them against their vulnerability to disengagement (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

➤ **Systematic Literature Review:** Explored the importance and challenges for schools in creating SOBAS for students in middle level education. Searches were conducted across three databases: Griffith University library journal database; ERIC; Expanded Academic. The parameters included publication 2007-2017 and the use of qualitative, and/or quantitative methodologies for empirical research. A total of 21 publications met the parameters of the search.

➤ The analysis generated six broad and overlapping themes: 1) School climate; 2) Social belonging and relationships; 3) Students' personal attributes; 4) Academic belonging; 5) School transitions; and, 6) Other factors (e.g., gender, socio-economic status).

➤ The systematic review reveals SOBAS is a multidimensional construct of importance to middle years' students and their engagement in learning. There is agreement that SOBAS is a protective factor for students' social wellbeing, health and educational outcomes. The nurturing of receptive, school-based interpersonal connections with students which are characterised by being both social and academic was consistently identified as being a major influence for laying the foundation for middle level students' SOBAS. This was particularly important in the transition from primary school to high school where, in particular, social support served as a major protective factor against students' development of depressive symptoms during this time of transition.

➤ **The Study:** 89 stakeholders were interviewed (Table 1) at 5 school sites comprised of 3 Year 7-10 middle schools; 1 K-Year 10; 1 Year 11-12 College with a Year 10 at-risk program attached to it.

Table 1 Participant details

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	# Schools
Students (self-nominated/nominated by schools as representative samples of disengaged/at-risk students)	25	5
Teachers (self-nominated/nominated by school based on their experience with at-risk and disengaged students)	25	5
School leaders (e.g., principals, deputy principals, specialist teams)	39	40

The interviews resulted in 43 transcripts which were analysed for emergent themes. This revealed five themes relating to SOBAS for the three stakeholder groups.

Table 2 Themes relating to SOBAS identified from the data analysis mapped against the literature review findings

5 emergent themes relating to SOBAS from the interviews and focus groups	Mapped literature review SOBAS themes					
	School climate	Social belonging and relationships	Students personal attributes	Academic belonging	School transitions	Other factors
Relationships in school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School climate factors	✓	✓		✓		
Pedagogical practices	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Other issues	✓					✓

Conclusion:

The critical insights from the literature review and the confirmatory data from the student focus groups and interviews with teachers and school leaders, reveals that SOBAS is, indeed, a key element of emotional engagement, sitting firmly between the behavioural and cognitive indicators of student engagement (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). SOBAS is relevant for all students, no matter their diversity, and especially for students from marginalised groups in society.

References

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Student Engagement Continuum: Engaging Young Adolescent Students

Associate Professor Jeanne Allen

Dr Glenda McGregor

Professor Donna Pendergast

Dr Michelle Ronksley-Pavia (Presenter)

In 2016, a comprehensive qualitative study was conducted in one education jurisdiction in Australia to develop a continuum of educational support to enable the engagement of 'at-risk' young adolescent students in Years 7-10.

Background literature:

- **Types of engagement:** Three main dimensions of student engagement: behavioural, emotional and cognitive - need to be nurtured by teachers (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010).
- **Adolescent transition and disengagement:** Transition from primary to high school places all students at risk in highly individualised ways (ACER, 2012).
- **Factors leading to school disengagement:** Drop in academic achievement - "the middle school plunge" (West & Schwerdt, 2012) - impact of this plunge is greatest in vulnerable groups - may not have mastered key skills in primary school; negative effect on students' social and emotional wellbeing.
- **In-school support:** Key pedagogical approaches - connective instruction - students see the relevance of learning - made meaningful to them; lively teaching - students more actively engaged when learning - they perceive learning as fun, inspiring and challenging; and, academic rigour - teachers' expectations of high levels of cognition and focus among students.
- **Alternative Provision:** short-term alternative programs, - provide a variety of behavioural and educational experiences - attempt

to respond to the learning and personal needs of students; approaches that focus on the difficulties of student; often not sufficiently recognise inside-school factors that lead to disengagement.

- **Methodology:** Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews - gather views of stakeholders on the range and numbers of students at risk and disengaged in high schools (Year 7-10) in the educational jurisdiction, and types of educational services required to meet their needs:
- **Focus groups:** n=26 school leaders; Multidisciplinary teams n=7; **Individual telephone interviews** (participants drawn from focus groups): School leaders n=10; **School site visits:** n=5 schools; **Individual interviews** - School leaders n=6; Students n=3; Parents n=2; Teachers n=2; **Focus Groups** - teachers n=21; Students n=21; Community Agencies n=6; **Individual telephone interview** n=2.

Findings: Terms "at risk" and "disengaged" - subjectively interpreted by participants - diverse indicators: non-attendance, school failure, non-compliance, non-participation, trauma, mental illness, social anxiety, and conflict. **Indicators used by school leaders:** Suspension data, attendance data, school grades, tests of literacy and numeracy levels, behaviour issues and academic progress.

- **Students:** School factors identified as reasons for their disengagement - limited intellectually challenging work; stigma of alternative programs; teacher-directed 'busy work' - valued workplace experience.

- **The Student Engagement Continuum Model** (Figure 1): The Model is conceived as a layered ecosystem of over-arching dimensions, sub-dimensions and components of provision of educational support. The Model outlines a framework for best practice approaches to educational engagement for high school students.
- **Layer 1** - Overarching dimensions - provide focus of student engagement; **Layer 2** - Sub-dimensions - provide the focus of student engagement; **Layer 3** - Components of provision - **Component 1:** Five core elements for high school student engagement; **Component 2:** Flexible learning provision support; and, **Component 3:** Alternative provision.

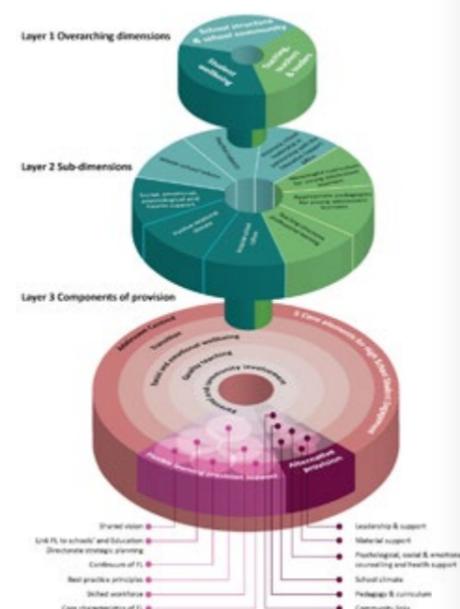


Figure 1. The Student Engagement Continuum Model (SEC)

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A Case Study on Building Capacity for Middle Years' Reform

Dr. Rebecca Seward-Linger

Over the past two decades, middle years' reform in Australia has mostly occurred at the grassroots level, predominantly in independent schools (Bahr & Crosswell, 2011; Chadbourne, 2001). This has meant that the adoption of middle years' approaches has largely occurred at the discretion of individual teachers and school communities (Bahr & Crosswell, 2011; Main & Bryer, 2004; Merifield, 2007). Direction for schools wanting to adopt middle years' approaches and develop appropriate curriculum for the middle years' has been scarce (Bahr & Crosswell, 2011; Dowden, 2007, 2014). The question of how schools can build capacity for successful, sustainable and meaningful middle years' reform remains an important point of inquiry for middle years' research in Australia.

This PhD research took the form of a qualitative case study and examined the notion of capacity building for successful and meaningful middle years' reform. The context for the study was an independent secondary college that instigated separate campus Year 9 reform in an attempt to improve Year 9 education and create a new whole-school structure. The study was conducted over a 2½-year

period with the primary researcher gaining full access and participation in the reform as a teacher employed at the case school. The study was underpinned by constructivist inquiry and used multiple data collection tools including: full participant observations recorded in a reflective journal; semi-structured interviews with teachers and leaders; school document analysis; and Email dialogues with teachers and leaders. The study drew on Mitchell and Sackney's (2011) theory of capacity, which separates capacity into the three distinct, yet highly interrelated categories of personal, interpersonal and organisational capacities.

The findings of this study revealed that the case school made efforts to build both organisational and interpersonal capacity throughout their reform. The notion of personal capacity however, was neglected. Personal capacity is associated with the values, beliefs, assumptions, knowledge and skills of individual teachers (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011). The teachers who took part in the case school's reform were not formally involved in the initial stages of the project where diagnosing the school's needs and opportunities as well as establishing a

vision for the reform took place. This resulted in teachers not having clear understandings of the aims or vision of the reform nor the middle years' philosophy that tacitly influenced the reform. The lack of consideration of personal capacity also meant that teachers were unsure of how their own personal professional learning and development [PLD] related to and influenced the reform.

In conclusion, this study highlights the need for more structured, research-guided approaches to middle years' reform that involve teachers at every stage. It also recommends that capacity building for middle years' reform take a three-fold approach where personal, interpersonal and organisational capacities are duly considered and developed as part of reform efforts. In particular, it is important that teacher PLD is recognised as a central and critical element of building personal capacity for holistic and meaningful change in the middle years.

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Leading Learning for Student Engagement: Translating Research into Context Specific Practice

Dr K Sharp

Middle Years students are choosing to increasingly disengage from their learning, which could be attributed to curriculum and pedagogy that do not adequately cater for diverse learning needs. A desire for independence (Twenge, 2006) and peer approval (Kellough & Kellough, 2008), a developing identity (Scales, 2010), a need for a sense of connectedness (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2009) and developmental differences (Scales, 2010) all characterise a Middle Years learner. To respond to this unique period of development, Middle Years teachers must adopt pedagogy that recognises the characteristics of adolescent learners and responds appropriately.

This study used an action research approach to investigate how Professional Learning (PL) could influence the ways in which teachers understood and practised differentiation, and their attitudes towards this, in a Middle School context. Whilst sometimes considered in schools as a practice related specifically to support student readiness for a learning activity (often termed 'ability'), in more contemporary literature, differentiation is considered a proactive, principles based, student centred approach to teaching and learning that considers all areas of a student's development (Tomlinson, 2017).

Over a two-year period, data were collected using qualitative methodology, with the researcher

acting as Participant/Observer within the research setting. Data sought focused on evidence of how teachers understand differentiation, how they practice differentiation in Middle years classrooms and their attitudes towards this as an approach to teaching Middle Years Learners. As typical of qualitative research, data collection methods enabled the researcher to explore and understand the participants and their experiences; a variety of open-ended instruments, along with general observations were used to cross-reference findings (Cresswell, 2002). This methodological triangulation, obtained by comparing data from structured observation, semi-structured interviews, journaling and surveys, ensured that the data were trustworthy. The researcher acted as a primary instrument of data collection within this project, ensuring data familiarisation

The findings of this research informed two initiatives that aimed to change the way that teachers catered for the unique needs of Middle School students in this setting. One was a model of PL that was about individual differentiation within the developmental stage of the Middle Years, at a classroom level. This Action in Learning model of PL was research based, immediately applicable, context specific and embedded in what teachers were already doing, which are components of an effective PL model (Scoggins & Sharp, 2017). The principles of this PL focused on

the provision of flexible grouping strategies to maximise opportunities for meaningful collaboration, the provision of clear learning objectives, the provision of more or less support, depending on readiness for the task, the use of ongoing, flexible assessment that promoted experiential learning, and the establishment of a positive learning environment that promoted critical discussion, but not criticism (Scoggins & Sharp, 2017; Tomlinson, 2014).

The second outcome of this research was the development of a curriculum program that specifically responded to the needs of Middle Years learners at a Year 9 level; the year most regularly cited in literature as the peak of school disengagement for Middle Years learners (DEECD, 2009). 9@Scotch, a compulsory, year-long, Year 9 subject offering, is characterised by experiential learning opportunities, targeted activities to develop resilience, a focus on real world issues which are critically analysed and debated, and a learning program that guides students to expose inherent bias in their own and other's values and beliefs, helping to shape a growing understanding of their developing identity. The underlying themes of this program, resilience, independence and connectedness, align with developmental characteristics of Middle Years learners.

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Drawing on the NAPLAN:

Giving voice to student in the middle years of schooling about the impact of NAPLAN through drawings

Dr Katharine Swain



MARYVALE		SILVERSTONE	
Managers		Managers	
Teachers		Teachers	
Parents		Parents	
Students - Year 3		Students - Year 3	
Year 5		Year 5	
Year 7		Year 7	

DATA COLLECTION
1. NAPLAN preparation – focus groups/words and drawing
2. NAPLAN participation – words and drawing
3. NAPLAN completion – words and drawing
4. NAPLAN results – words and drawing



FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS
Data collapsed into 8 themes:
1. Change
2. Students' perceptions of teachers
3. Students' perceptions of NAPLAN tests
4. Time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation
5. Students' physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN
6. Recrimination
7. Preferred assessment practices
8. The right to speak

STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO NAPLAN		
	Maryvale	Silverstone
Emotional Reactions		
Frightened	X	X
Sad	X	
Anxious	X	X
Panicked	X	
Isolated	X	
Insignificant	X	
Bored	X	
Nervous	X	X
Don't want to attend school	X	
Confused		X
Strange		X
Being stalked		X
Excited		X
Happy		X
Ready		X
Physical Reactions		
Watery eyes	X	
Tiredness	X	
Sick	X	X
Sleepless nights	X	
Uncomfortable	X	
Eye strain	X	
Sore hands	X	
Headaches	X	

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	Further study: Impact gradual administration of NAPLAN testing. e.g. the 3 components implemented over 3 months not 3 days
2	Further study: Impact of removing time constraints, allowing students to continue until finished
3	Further study: Impact of allowing small groups of students access to adult assistance with reading, comprehension and question expectations.
4	Further study: Impact of allowing students to become familiar with the text topic prior to the test.
5	Further study: Impact of involving students in the test construction may eliminate current questioning issues.
6	Further study: Hear what the students are saying when they consider that appropriate assessment involves demonstrations of their learning including

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- papers of a practical or applied nature
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- viewpoints
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- Leave 2 lines after the title
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- Up to 300 words in length
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 - 4.1. Mode of Inquiry (with supporting rationale)
 - 4.2. Context
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4.5. Data analysis

4.6. Limitations

5. Findings

6. Discussion of Findings

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8. References

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- Photographs (Non-refereed manuscripts)
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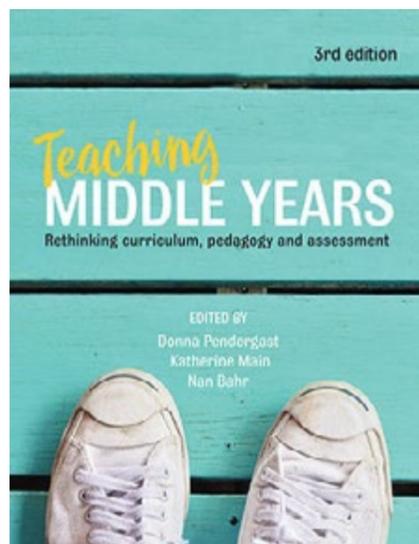
Prof Donna Pendergast

Professor Donna Pendergast is Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University. She has an international profile in the field of middle years' education. Her work focuses on school leadership for middle years' reform, pedagogical change and professional learning, along with developing capabilities to enhance teacher self efficacy. Donna has published more than 100 publications in the field including Teaching Middle Years, which is now in its third edition and is widely used in Australia and internationally.



Dr Katherine Main

Dr Katherine Main is a senior lecturer and program leader in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University. She has an international profile in the field of middle years' education. Her work focuses on middle school/junior secondary reform and the need for targeted professional development to build teacher efficacy, including the collective efficacy of teacher teams. Most recently, she has been researching the importance of social and emotional programs for young adolescent learners.



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