10% OF THE POPULATION, 100% OF THE FUTURE: EMERGING ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Emerging adolescents are an amazing group of people. While adults have trouble adjusting to the accumulation of a couple of kilograms of body mass every decade, teenagers’ abilities, minds and bodies undergo a total revolution in just a year or two. They can be eager, fresh and refreshing; they can be sullen and withdrawn. They can be genuine; they can be annoyingly honest. They have new capacities unfolding all the time but rarely enough energy to do the dishes. They are energetic supporters of causes and they find their heroes in the strangest places. (Peterson, 1991)

And what can we say about the school context for the emerging adolescent? There is a stark contrast between the schooling that they need and the schooling we deliver to them. At an age when students acquire new abilities to critique and deal with complexity there is a fragmentation and "dumbing-down" of the curriculum. As the emerging adolescent becomes agonisingly self-aware, and pre-occupied with relationships, links are shattered with adult role models. Just as student interest in the "big" issues of life is stirred, deep discussion and reflection becomes difficult to maintain. Schooling for 11-16 year olds makes little impact on their lives and learning (Scales, 1996).

And society ignores this situation at its peril. As John Lounsbury, editor for the National Middle School Association notes:

“No other age level is of more importance to the future individuals, and, literally, to that of society; because these are the years when youngsters crystallise their beliefs and firm up their self-concepts, their philosophies of life and their values — the things that are the ultimate determinates of their behaviour.” (Manning, 1997)

Hung between the essential foundation of the early primary years and the anxious intensity of high school graduation, the middle years of schooling have been called the wasteland of school education. There seems to be little hope for change in the programs, structures, attitudes and experiences for those in the middle years. There are too few resources available for reform, too little energy to drive it and insufficient commitment to sustain it.
Recent research confirms that the middle years are desolate in terms of student learning (Victorian Quality Schools Project) and student attitudes (Middle Years Research and Development Project, Russell & Hill, 1999). In contrast, the most substantial longitudinal study to date, of Illinois middle schools, reveals that sustained reform has a powerful impact on the learning and attitudes of students and the discipline climate within the school (Felner, et al, 1997).

Here and there, in Australia too, people are working to make a difference. At the recent First National Middle Years of Schooling Conference, held in Melbourne last March, Prof. Robyn Barratt from Deakin University noted that there is a ‘groundswell’ of teachers and school communities anxious for change, and that it was time this concern was matched by government. She urged that State and Territory governments inject resources into the middle years, and so give official recognition of the status of middle year’s reform.

At the same conference Prof. Peter Hill, Director of the Centre for Applied Educational Research at Melbourne University, noted that in the main, “reform efforts have been piecemeal, localised and shortlived.” Further they were, “conceived as ‘add-on’ projects, rather than comprehensive whole school approaches’, and that, “few have been properly evaluated.”

Middle year’s of schooling reform is too important to have it falter. Many otherwise promising schooling reforms experience early failure and as a consequence school reform suffers a bad reputation; any contemplation, or consideration of reform can be greeted with tired scepticism. What then is a worthwhile reform? This paper contends that a worthwhile reform of the middle years will be need to be more than a significant improvement in the learning and welfare of middle years students. To prove worthwhile a reform must be sustained; and to be sustained it must inspire successive generations of teachers and wider school community to persevere with the reforms and so secure ongoing benefits for successive generations of students. Worthwhile reform should be capable of being sustained beyond the life of an initial zealous team.
2. **TEACHERS: THE KEY COMPONENT IN MIDDLE YEAR’S RENEWAL.**

*Sirotnik (1999) defines renewal as being, “about process, not about anticipated outcomes, a framework within continuous innovation, renewal, and rebirth can occur.” (p.607.)

Goodlad (1999) contrasts the terms reform and renewal saying that, “The language and ethos of renewal have to do with the people in and around schools improving their practice and developing the collaborative mechanisms necessary to better their schools. A growing literature reporting satisfying experiences for teachers, principals and parents includes references to schools as gardens, to students as plants to be nourished and to the importance of appropriate nutrients.” (p. 575).

*From this point in the paper the term “renewal” will be used rather than the term “reform”, where the notion of a continuous process of creative activity which refreshes and renews both the school setting and its participants is appropriate.*

A lot is known about the needs of the emerging adolescent and the failure of the high school (Williamson & Cullingford, 1998; Sullivan & King, 1998). Research is now revealing the characteristics of successful middle schools (MacIver & Epstein, 1991; Felner, et al, 1997). In Australia, the tide seems to be turning toward a re-evaluation of the way we educate emerging adolescents. Numerous reports have highlighted the need for change (Eyers, V, 1992, Schools Council (NBEET), 1993, Cumming, 1996), parents generally concur with the necessity for change, and governments are sponsoring efforts to bring about change. Many of the puzzle pieces are being assembled to make sense of the middle school riddle.

However, seemingly favourable conditions like these have existed in earlier times in Britain and North America. Yet middle year’s of schooling reforms in Britain and North America have been severely hampered by an inability for school communities to implement the changes thought necessary to achieve thorough middle year’s renewal (Hargreaves, 1986, Johnston, 1998). Commentary in the American popular press is currently very critical of middle year’s reform attempts. An article which is typical of this, titled, “Educators Rethink Middle School Reforms” (Whitmire, 1999), reports on declining academic achievement in middle schools and the low level of implementation of key reforms. The writer quotes Douglas MacIver, a leading proponent of middle year’s reform (MacIver & Epstein, 1991) (here referring to the Turning Points Report of 1989 which identified eight key recommendations for middle year’s reform), “We’re paying the price for some of the recommendations that were ignored ten years ago.” We would do well to learn from those experiences in order to congregate the most cogent mix of resources to bring about effective middle year’s schooling.
Many factors external to the teacher and teaching are necessary to enable thorough middle year’s reform to proceed. However, once external conditions are secure, teachers then shoulder responsibility for implementation in the daily life of the classroom. The key operator in realising the needed reforms is the teacher in the classroom. And little if any work has been done on the ways teachers might find the personal and professional resources to implement and sustain the elusive hope of middle year’s reform. The teachers attempting middle year’s reform confront insurmountable difficulties and here lies a debilitating constraint in regard to the implementation of middle year’s renewal.

Garvin (1992), notes that there is a tendency to, “(treat) lightly the magnitude of individual change for those within middle school.” Further he observes that,

“Most educators who have been through a transition to a middle school concept will testify that the most important obstacle to overcome is that of changing the attitudes of individuals, not organisations.”  (p.193)

It is my contention that unless we attend to the needs of teachers and ensure that they too have opportunity for renewal and growth in the process of middle years reform they will be unable to deliver the educational experiences that bring those same opportunities for their students (Lee, 1991; Battern et al, 1981). The fortunes of the teacher and student are inextricably linked. If the teacher experiences success and renewal in a process of middle year’s reform, chances are the student will too. Without the enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers involved, any attempts to reform the middle years over the longer period is futile. And this enthusiasm and commitment will be short-lived unless we can deliver: the necessary training and support; a viable, professional, collegial working environment and; a sustainable and satisfying middle year’s teaching career.

A strong research base is needed: to determine the best preparation for teachers of the middle years; to find ways the profession can be re-configured so that teachers take charge of the contours of their daily teaching, and; to discover those elements of middle years reform essential to teacher health and growth. As noted in a recent article in the journal of the Curriculum Corporation, EQ, “The key area of research, and probably the most elusive, is to investigate the best means of supporting an ethical and passionate life for teachers within such a program.”  (White, 1999)

Any attempt at sustained middle year’s renewal needs to secure key elements of reform that relate to teachers’ needs. In this way teachers can derive the necessary benefit and energy to sustain and extend the renewal process. These key elements can be seen as constituting an optimal “plateau” level of
reform. Securing these elements conveys teachers beyond scrambling up a steep and greasy reform “precipice”, battling insurmountable difficulties with insufficient resources. They are transported to a “plateau” where teachers can take in the view. Here they can flourish; be energised, learn the necessary skills and develop commitment for ongoing renewal. The absence of these key elements results in a situation that the teacher finds unsustainable and the renewal process falters through sheer exhaustion.

3. **THE CURRENT STUDY**

The research this paper reports constitutes a pilot study of one site of sustained and thorough middle year’s renewal. The pilot study focuses on teachers’ experiences in a particular school community that has experienced radical and sustained middle year’s renewal over a twenty five year period. The school is an independent school of about 400 students located on the suburban fringe of a major capital. It was established by a group of parents in 1973 as a K-6 school and then grew by a class each year until in 1979 it offered all thirteen years of schooling.

The study seeks to find out about the experiences of teachers who had worked with Years Seven, Eight and Nine as class, or “core” teachers, over these years. The goal is to find those elements of this reform situation, which enabled these teachers to secure and sustain middle year’s renewal.

This study tests the hypothesis that, “Thorough-going middle years renewal can deliver the environment needed for teachers to derive the energy, skills and commitment to sustain the reform.” So for the hypothesis to be supported three phases of study need to be undertaken which:

1. Validate the claim that this case is one of thorough and sustained renewal;
2. Establish that the teachers derived the necessary energy, skills and commitment to maintain middle year’s renewal as an outcome of teaching at the school;
3. Describe those elements of the school environment that supported teachers’ implementation of middle year’s renewal.

This study seeks to determine those factors which secure sustained middle year’s of schooling renewal. A snapshot of the first few energetic years is not sufficient. For a reform to be lasting, successive generations of parents, teachers and students need to derive inspiration to embrace and further develop the innovation. An appropriate research methodology then needs to look at a site of middle year’s innovation over time to ascertain whether renewal has been secured and then to discover those factors that brought this about.
Accordingly, the research methodology employed is “retrospective case study”. “Retrospective” in that teachers were asked to recall their experiences of the school and in particular the contribution those experiences may have made to their personal and professional growth. The retrospective mode of case study is particularly valuable in investigating sites, which have proven with the passage of time to be worthy of investigation. Retrospection also gives opportunity for the players to distil their experiences, apply the lessons learned in the past to new situations, and so to test the validity of that learning and to adjust their perceptions of those experiences.

The case study method invites the explicit exploration of the researcher’s pre-conceived ideas through a careful process of study design that identifies the relevant hypotheses, the related logical linkages and predicts patterns of data that would support or refute those hypotheses within a framework of researcher fallibility.

Another dimension to the methodology is the particular stance of this investigator. I am far from being the “aloof” and impartial recorder of other people’s stories. I taught in the school myself for 12 years, alongside all the people interviewed bar one, and I had been her teacher. Being a participant and researcher in research can bring problems and at the same time enrich the project. Cavanagh (1992) coins the term “insitrospection” to describe the deliberation and retrospection of the participant-researcher and suggests that it can be a rich source of data. The study can be enriched by nuances not accessible to the uninvolved researcher. In order to address potential problems, a further step was introduced into the research design. This step, which is in progress now, is the circulation of interview transcripts back to the teachers interviewed with the invitation to comment on the various themes I have identified. This opportunity to revisit the data introduces a check on my bias and a further episode for reflection for those teachers, leading to refinement of the data.

4. STUDY PHASE ONE: Validate the claim that this site is a case of thorough and sustained reform.

In order to demonstrate that this school is indeed a case of thorough and sustained middle years reform two complimentary approaches were developed. Firstly a checklist of middle year’s renewal recommendations was utilised and secondly, the opinions of the teachers involved were obtained by interview.

The checklist is one developed by the Illinios study (Felner, et al, 1997) introduced earlier. The Illinios study is the most extensive study to date of sites of middle school reform. It examined, among other matters, whether, “…(as) schools move from more traditional structures, norms, and instructional
practices to increasing levels of comprehensiveness and fidelity in their implementation of *Turning Points* recommendations, are there parallel (gains for students)?” Researchers then tracked some ninety schools over time, noting those middle years reforms that effectively implemented the *Turning Points* recommendations. Each school was then assessed as either a partially, intermediately, or highly implemented school.

Sources used to assemble the relevant characteristics of Manningvale School include archival material (papers, diaries, timetables, staff lists), descriptions of the school setting by the teachers interviewed and the researchers own knowledge and experience of the setting. The following table (over page) lists the eight *Turning Points* recommendations and notes the relevant characteristics of the middle years reform at Manningvale School:
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<tr>
<td>1 Small communities of learning within larger school buildings</td>
<td>Regular common team planning times</td>
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<td>2 A core academic program for all learners</td>
<td>110-120 students in the middle school</td>
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<td>3 Success experiences for all students</td>
<td>“Advisories” held each day</td>
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<td>4 Empowerment for teachers and administrators to make educational decisions for their specific group of students</td>
<td>Cross-curricular core program for about 50% of the students’ week</td>
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<td>5 Teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents</td>
<td>Non competitive assessment</td>
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<td>Descriptive reporting</td>
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<td>Negotiated assignments</td>
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<td>Student led parent conferences</td>
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<td>6 Improved academic performance fostered through health and fitness</td>
<td>Whole school approach to curriculum design</td>
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<td>No external curriculum constraints</td>
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<td>7 Families re-engaged in the education of young adolescents</td>
<td>Teachers spend most of their week with one team of students</td>
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<td>Lightweight, flexible curriculum</td>
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<td>Emphasis on team planning and reflection (20 days planning time per year)</td>
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<td>Teacher teams</td>
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<td>Regular team meetings</td>
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<td>8 Schools that are reconnected to their communities</td>
<td>Opportunity for further study and in-service</td>
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<td>Outdoor education program across the school</td>
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<td>Weekly physical education</td>
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<td>Curriculum addresses issues relevant to adolescent physical and psychological health</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Families own and operate the school</td>
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<td>Regular parent nights where students demonstrate their learning</td>
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<td>Committees of parents and teachers regularly review the operation of the school</td>
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<td>Curriculum emphasis on active response</td>
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<td>Students learning in the community</td>
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<td>Work experience programs beginning in Year 8</td>
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<td>Regular excursions into the local community</td>
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Regular visits from members of the community
The table indicates that Manningvale School has sustained the implementation of key reforms in all eight areas of *Turning Points* recommendations over a twenty five year period. These reforms are in each case fundamental changes, indicating that the school is a site of high implementation of *Turning Points* recommendations.

During the interviews with the seven teachers involved they were asked their opinions as to whether they saw Manningvale School as a place which implemented middle year’s renewal. Jean, who left the school some 17 years ago remembered the close relationships she enjoyed with the students and the boon this was for student learning,

“I have always talked very positively about the system we used at Manningvale to the staff at the schools I’ve taught at. How you just have so much opportunity to get to know the kids and really get to know their thinking.”

Teachers recalled the sense of adventure as they tackled secondary education in new ways. Albert, who spent some ten years there as a class teacher said, “There was a real buzz, a sense that we were doing pioneering…” Specific aspects of the reform environment were also mentioned and these were related to the experiences of students and teachers. Terence, who spent five years at the school in the early to mid-eighties remarked:

“The structure was so simple that we didn’t have any of the problems that the normal small secondary school (names his present school) has because the time table was so simple. All secondary schools are run by the timetable and it restricts so much of the way things are done and you’ve got teaching loads, etc. The structure at (Manningvale) wasn’t like that. You had one class at each level going all the way through to Year 10. It was a bit idyllic really. The structure for teacher support was unique having study weeks where you had time to plan and talk to teachers.”

Structures are seen to be responsive to students’ needs also:

“(There) … was a recognition that young adolescents needed a different educational structure than was on offer generally. And so structures were open to challenge… So the use of a home room, core teachers, curriculum that was cohesive and contextualised were all motivated by seeing that middle school students have different needs and those needs need to be addressed.” (Albert)
So to summarise, the teachers interviewed have no doubt about this being a site of middle year’s reform. Key aspects of the school including student grouping, curriculum, close relationships between students and teachers, teacher teaming, timetable, core teacher role are radically different from those in what we know as a “junior high school setting”. A more recent innovation (1993) has been the introduction of multi-age grouping of students in Years Seven to Nine. While there have been considerable changes at Manningvale over the years the original vision, developing approaches that are responsive to the needs of emerging adolescents, appears to be maintained over time.

5. STUDY PHASE TWO: Establish that teachers derived the necessary energy, skills and commitment to sustain middle year’s renewal as an outcome of teaching at that school.

All seven teachers interviewed were in a similar stage of life when they began teaching at Manningvale. Six of the seven teachers were in their “twenties” and five were married. The other two married while teaching there. Five had young children growing up at home during that time.

Albert was in his mid-twenties when he began and he recalls the encouragement he received as part of the teaching team and the energy this brought. He described his arrival there as:

“It was like a ‘conversion’ experience. There was something really happening there and that meant that burn-out wasn’t an issue, because it was like becoming part of a fire and you glowed along with the fire. You weren’t left with your own resources running out of steam; it wasn’t like that.”

Colin talked about the new ways that he was able to develop the curriculum and how that framework became part of his life:

“Towards the end of my first year, Don, Harriet and I ...(decided to),.. run a ...(topic of study).. as a cooperative unit. A topic like plants, we then worked through the different aspects of plants; their biology, social aspects, and all of that sort of stuff. That was good in terms of building up a framework for taking something that was thematic, breaking it up into bits, that you had kids struggle with, then put it all back together. That sort of framework for dealing with issues in life has stayed (with me) as a way of pulling things apart, analysing them and then putting it back together in some other way. From that perspective the experience was really important.”
When asked if she thought she had learned much from her experience teaching at Manningvale Joy talked about the skills she gained from team-teaching alongside other staff members:

“Yes, I think I did. Because I’d only been teaching for three months I was pretty much at that stage where I would look a lot at other teachers and see the way others taught. I’d make a point of hanging round to see how he taught and pick up on a few different methods. I guess I did because I was particularly looking to improve and the middle school situation was new I was looking around at other teachers and hoping to pick up a few things from them”

For a number of the teachers their experiences at Manningvale were seen as “touchstones” by which all subsequent educational experiences were judged:

“I suppose that following the five years I had at (Manningvale) I always looked back at that as the most fulfilling, interesting, relevant, stimulating, creative, enjoyable teaching that I’ve ever been involved in.” (Terence)

When asked whether he learnt and grew through his experience teaching at Manningvale Terence commented:

“….people have the opportunity to really grow, to get over a selfish attitude and learn to work in community. They’ve got plenty of opportunity to learn from the role models around them who were only too ready to help and be mentors too. I do really believe that people blossomed professional and personally. They matured - sometimes it doesn't happen because the cost is something they don't want to pay.”

The teachers interviewed were unanimous in their opinion that their experiences in the middle school at Manningvale gave them what they needed in terms of skills, energy and commitment to implement and develop alternative schooling appropriate to students in their middle years.

6. STUDY PHASE THREE: Describe those elements of the school environment that supported teachers’ implementation of middle year’s renewal.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured with the conversation focusing around eight themes identified in advance. Around each theme focus questions were developed to prompt responses if this was judged to be necessary. Three themes were introductory in nature, probing the respondent’s first
impressions of Manningvale, their life apart from school and the way the school was structured. The next four themes then explored issues more central to the implementation of middle years renewal: the student’s experience; the staff team; the curriculum and their own experience as a teaching professional. The final theme considered the total school environment as it related to effecting middle year’s renewal.

Ten themes emerged from the teachers’ interviews. These themes have been grouped within three key areas of concern for the purpose of this discussion.

**KEY AREA 1: TEACHERS’ WORK**

**Stress and satisfaction**
Two complementary topics, the teachers’ perceptions of stress and satisfaction, were explored as part of the teachers’ experiences as teaching professionals. These issues proved effective in eliciting the respondents’ own recollection of the major factors that contributed to, or frustrated, their work as teachers of the middle years.

The large body of literature on teacher stress and satisfaction suggests that teaching is a highly stressful line of work (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978, Cormick, 1997). However the seven teachers’ response to the question of stress was unanimous; they did not see their role as a middle years class teacher as stressful. When asked about the stress he experienced, Don gave a typical response: “I’d go to work looking forward to the day.” He went on to elaborate:

“No, it was demanding. I didn’t see it as stress. Now I can’t find any other terms to use than that. There was a tremendous sense of actually achieving something, of seeing things develop and blossom and the kids starting to unwind and relax. There were demands but I don’t recall feeling stressed.”

**Teachers’ sense of efficacy**
Don’s response touches on a key issue. The teachers felt that they were making progress in terms of student learning. They were seeing the students learn and progress and this seemed to help overcome any perception that the work they were doing was stressful. A teacher’s sense of self-efficacy (the sense that being effective in their teaching) is seen as critical to the levels of stress a teacher experiences. Quaglia, et al, (1992) notes:
“…persons scoring high on both efficacy factors (personal and general) will act with assurance and tenacity, and people low on these variables will generally give up teaching quickly if they do not achieved (sic) expected results.”  (p.208)

Two factors appear to account for the teachers’ perception that students are making progress.

**Student Engagement**

Firstly, teachers perceive that students are engaged with the various curriculum topics that are being explored and responding positively to the way school is structured.

> “Basically they (the students) were very good. There was a sense of being team and working together on the educational task. The kids felt that.” (Don)

> “Even the Year 8’s found it relevant! And school, at that stage, is not necessarily something you want to do. I think for them the events or episodes as we called them were important. They were things that brought relevance. “ (Albert)

Teacher efficacy is not only a matter of teachers feeling happy; a happy teacher has teaching assignments that they find fulfilling. High-performing classrooms with high levels of student engagement are a key indicator to teachers that they are being successful in their work and so foster a sense of efficacy for the teacher (Quaglia, p 166.)  Teacher efficacy is intimately linked with student efficacy; each feeds off the other.

Quaglia, et al, (1992) note,

> “Teachers with a well developed sense of efficacy are important, not merely for improved teacher morale and satisfaction, but efficacious teaching is critical if the complex needs of students are to be met.” (p.166)
Close relationships with students

The other factor that contributes to teachers’ sense of efficacy relates to the teacher – student relationship itself. Teachers know their students well and are able to diagnose, monitor, chart and appreciate their progress:

“The class teacher is in charge of the student's pastoral care, like a primary class. They’re responsible for you and they're there in the morning and when you go home and that sort of thing. And I think the fact that we do a lot of creative things as a class….. You are together (every) day and you're always doing something together with that teacher. They also might be your teacher for individual subjects” (Sally)

Not only do the students appear to make good progress but also their teachers notice and appreciate such progress. Teachers know their students’ strengths and weaknesses and involve them in negotiating aspects of their learning.

Focussed responsibility and teacher initiative

Teachers at Manningvale have a clear focus for their work. The class teacher role accounts for almost all each teacher’s load, so the job focuses around just one group of students and their total school education. This means that the teachers’ work is manageable and energised by the strong relationship they enjoy with students. The middle year’s class teacher also defines an area of responsibility within which the teacher can exercise high levels of flexibility and initiative.

“As a class teacher you were with the kids for 80% of the week – there was a real sense of commitment between you and that group. (the principal) said – this was your “kingdom” and in lots of ways that was true. ……..All that flowed out of the relationship you develop with kids and that grew as the year went on. The curriculum and the structure were important.” (Terence)

Research suggests that control is an important factor in determining worker stress and health. (Johnston et al, 1996 – quoted in Dinham and Scott, 1998, p. 376). Raudenbusch et al, (1992) encourages those pursuing school renewal to enhance teachers’ sense of efficacy by increasing teachers’ control over their working environment. Issues intrinsic to the teacher’s classroom (where high levels of control are (generally) available to the teacher) and most especially the progress their students make, give the highest levels of satisfaction. Small school size, participatory decision making and collegial working
relationships have potential to increase the level and perception of control at the wider school level also. At Manningvale teachers feel in control of the contours of their daily teaching life and so are able to effect improvements needed in their classrooms and have an effective voice in decisions involving the whole school.

To summarise:
An emerging theme then is the impact of thorough middle year’s renewal upon teachers’ work. There appears to be a linkage between the number of students a teacher sees in a week, the tight focus this brings to the teachers’ work, the depth of relationship they can build with those students, the learning outcomes that flow from a close and congenial relationship and the sense of achievement and satisfaction which then follows. Being able to take charge of a group of students, and for those students to become a major part of their responsibilities, reconstitutes the teachers’ working life into a manageable and invigorating experience. Teachers experience lower stress levels as they enjoy positive relationships with their students, and experience satisfaction as they see them progress toward the educational goals they have set (a sense of efficacy). Increased energy levels and commitment are then available to the teacher who then, in turn, is better equipped to more fully realise further educational goals. In this way teachers’ work becomes a self-sustaining cycle of success and re-invigoration.

KEY AREA 2: STAFF TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

Another important factor supporting teachers’ implementation of middle years’ renewal is the nature of the relationships among the teaching team:

“The staff environment, the relationships I enjoyed with other staff was such that this (stress) never was an issue for me.” (Terence)

The most common aspect of the school talked about by respondents is the quality and support of the staff team. The close working relationship among the team is seen as an essential ingredient for making the middle year’s renewal work.

“I think the team teaching they've got is the secret. It's deliberately in there and I think that's a really important part of it. I think if you're left to be by yourself and work in that structure it would be really difficult. But you've always got someone who's taught it before and that really makes a big difference. Lots of teachers have said that.” (Sally)

There is a body of evidence that team teaching produces positive benefits for students (Erb, 1997). Lipsitz (1984) studied four exceptionally successful middle level schools and found that they all used
some variety of team arrangements. She notes that satisfaction with the team arrangement among the teachers involved was high (p. 200). Kruse & Louis (1997) undertook an investigation of teacher teaming in middle schools and noted, “One frequently mentioned benefit to teachers was the addition of teacher teaming.” (p.267).

The strengths of team teaching were mentioned by the interviewees in the context of induction to the school, regular team planning and team teaching in the classroom.

**Staff induction**

Newly appointed teachers found they were welcome and received a sound induction to their new working situation. Processes of enculturation and induction proceeded in a natural way as the school setting was structured for teachers working closely together.

“The staff was very welcoming. There was a lot of warmth and acceptance and fun too. Lots of practical jokes and wrestling matches in the staff room.” (Albert)

“I remember the first thing I did was meet Carol. That was good because I felt right from the start that I wasn’t on my own. There was another Year 8 teacher there to work with. From the beginning it was a team-teaching situation… We were in that double classroom. Often we’d have the doors open and we had both of the classes together, taught them together.” (Joy)

“…when I came in as a new person very quickly I was embraced by people like (other members of the team) and brought on-board. Very quickly, as a newcomer, these people had something you also wanted to find about, and become apart of.” (Albert)

**Team planning**

Teachers plan together as a matter of course. At times it is general brainstorming around curriculum themes, at other times specific planning for lessons the following day.

“We used the after school time and the pupil free time to brainstorm and we really enjoyed doing that. We’d spend an hour and a half talking about each persons unit and even though I (wasn’t) going to teach it and would get no direct benefit – we didn’t even think like that. We’d write down all the ideas and then those who had to make it happen in the classroom would sift and organise them.” (Albert)
Team Teaching

The process of team planning also gives opportunity for team teaching:

“We spent time working together brain–storming, different ideas we all had. That made it very interesting to start with because the other teachers had different ideas and they also had thought more than once about the different topics we were teaching. Alan would make the comment, “I’m not particularly interested in this part of the theme” and I remember saying to him that we should swap classes and teach whatever we were interested in. Different aspects of the theme that we were more interested in personally; we’d swap around. (Joy)

In later years team teaching became the norm. The adoption of multi-age student teams gave more opportunity for core teachers to teach common units. Team teaching brought support through encouragement, solidarity and also in making real savings of time and energy for each teacher involved.

“….. as the years went on and we had the cycles (of curriculum units) we actually had a team partner, a team teacher, which really lifted a lot of the burden of teaching. We … had … adjoining classrooms so we often team-taught. It was just so much easier because we'd sit down and meet once a week and I'd say I'll do most of photocopying for the next fortnight…. and then another fortnight we'd swap.” (Sally)

Working as part of a team is also seen to introduce appropriate, informal accountability and the opportunity for strengths to be shared and weaknesses side-stepped.

“It was excellent. We kept each other in line. He understood that I liked to be very organised and it probably rubbed off too so it was good. We had a really good working relationship.” (Sally)

Sally also noted the positive effects on students who observed and benefited from the teachers’ team approach:

“It does help when you get along well with the people you work with. Definitely part of the dynamics of middle school. Also it really affects the kids. They see you as a team. They see that and they still talk about it now. They're older now but they still say how
much they enjoyed that part of middle school because they knew their teachers got along and we'd get very humorous a lot of the time. That made a big difference to the stress levels. A big difference.”

To summarise:

The team of teachers was of profound importance to the interviewees. Within the team members were coached and cultured toward a new approach to education. They believed that the team added value to their own teaching and the learning of their students through the accountability, ideas and encouragement that came from team planning and team classroom teaching.

KEY AREA 3: VISION AND MISSION

Another aspect of the teaching team in this situation was its congruity or harmony of purpose. The school was established to reflect a particular religious view of life. Stated broadly, the school’s charter was to follow Christ in all areas of its work. The people who were part of that community saw this as having implications for many aspects of the school. For example, relationships were to be based on love, and curriculum was to reflect the wholeness of creation. The teachers had available to them elements of a common tradition (although they came from many different Christian churches) which gave them a common mind set and language, through which they could absorb, develop, and carry forward a common vision.

“My impressions were straight away that this was not an elitist situation. It is not a situation where kids are being protected and not exposed to reality which were some of the misconceptions I had before I walked into the place. Very quickly that it was a very real place where people were excited about what they were doing educationally. Among the teachers and the parents, and the kids as well, there was a sense of excitement about what they were doing. It was different to what I’d seen in other schools ….. because they were letting their Christian beliefs shape educational structures and priorities. They weren’t just adopting a particular form of education and touching it up with Christianity but consciously developing what they saw to be the right context for schooling adolescents.” (Albert)

Sirotnik (1999) while proposing that school renewal is a “voyage” rather than a “harbour” underlines the need for a fundamental vision that gives direction.
“There can be no renewal, whether of individuals or society, without purpose, without some sense of fundamental values about what is better or worse in individual and collective living.” (p.606)

Staessens and Vandenberghe’s (1994) study of nine Belgian schools found high levels of goal consensus in two schools, which were identified as “high vision” schools, or “Schools with a mission”. They conclude,

“The quality of an implementation process and implementation results is determined by the existing vision. A degree of goal-consensus offers a platform for discussions among teachers when they are confronted with an innovation…”

The degree to which such a vision is important to the development of thoroughgoing and sustained renewal in other situations is an emerging question. I have a hunch that some sort of common mission is necessary, and that this mission needs to be profound and persuasive, at the level of a religious vision of life. I mean by the term religious, a vision of life sufficiently cogent to address, for that person, the key questions they need to resolve, in order to pursue a sensible life.

Addressing teachers’ deeper needs

Goodlad’s study (1984) of teachers’ attitudes found that, when asked why they chose teaching as a profession, the majority responded with reasons that relate to personal fulfilment (p.173-175). A school’s vision could connect with the personal mission of teachers, to be of service to others, or to work in a good and worthy profession (two key factors that emerged from Goodlad’s study). Such a vision has potential for teachers to find congruence between their deeper needs and motivations and their daily work. This sort of vision can be seen to be operating in many situations where a compelling mission is shared by a group of people. One of the teachers felt that without a shared vision the cause was lost as the teachers involved would be dissatisfied working with an inadequate or less than convincing foundation:

“I think the other thing too is that middle schooling has at the moment become a bit of a buzz (word). (At Manningvale they needed)……a foundation for why they were doing what they were doing; they weren’t just doing it because it was the latest educational theory; they were doing for much deeper reasons. And I think that if schools start experimenting with middle schooling without a foundation, two things combined, teacher dissatisfaction and lack of a foundation, will mean it is doomed. I’m concerned that …
schools are now going to “try it” and it won’t work and the students will be the losers.”
(Albert)

**Addressing adolescent’s deeper needs**

Manningvale School is a site where spirituality was on the agenda for teachers and students alike because it was a key element in the school’s vision and mission. Curriculum goals relate to the student making active response to the issues they study. Studying industry involves a simulation of factory work. Students experience alienation in the work place, tension between boss and worker, and work over a 5 day period to bring about improvements. Aboriginal studies involves a 3 week visit to Central Australia, living, working and learning alongside Aboriginal people.

A recent edition of the popular American education journal, *Educational Leadership*, gave over its entire issue to the question of spirituality in education. An article entitled “Nourishing Students in Secular Schools” is introduced in the index with the following statement:

“The spiritual yearnings of adolescents include a search for purpose, a hunger for joy, a creative drive, and a need for silence.” (Kessler, 1998)

James Fowler draws on the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson and Levinson to develop a theory of faith development, which he suggests is common to all people in all situations. He characterises the adolescent years as a time when people, for the first time can imagine how things ought to be. This realisation drives the young adolescent to question the status quo and begin a search for “utopian” solutions to the deeper mysteries of life (Fowler, 1985). Westerhoff, calls this stage of faith development, searching faith, when adolescents throw off their family’s “faith” and go looking for a faith they can own themselves (Westerhoff, 1992).

**To summarise:**

The middle year’s of schooling is a critical site for the development of spirituality whether we plan it that way or not. To neglect this dimension is also to address it; by default. I don’t know what the answers might be but I do note that educators of Christian, Jewish, Islamic and secular backgrounds are all calling for schools to address the spiritual dimension. A middle year’s curriculum and school context that fosters the exploration, by students, of the deeper issues of life would be meeting the most profound needs of its students and their teachers.
7. **SUMMARY**

Garvin (1992) notes that, “Starting a middle school is easier than maintaining one.” The challenge of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have been successful in the difficult task of maintaining middle years' renewal.

The study hypothesis that, “Thorough-going middle years renewal can deliver the environment needed for teachers to derive the energy, skills and commitment to sustain the reform.” is supported by this pilot case study of the Manningvale school.

Manningvale was found to be a site of thoroughgoing and sustained middle year’s renewal. The elements of middle years' renewal, secured at Manningvale, provided teachers with the capacity and resources to maintain the reform over many years.

The key elements identified by the seven teachers who have taught at Manningvale focus around: teachers' work; staff team relationships and; vision and mission. Teachers felt they were trusted professionals, given an achievable teaching assignment within which they had latitude to make decisions, individually and corporately, to optimise the conditions for student learning. The staff team worked in such ways that people were inducted, supported, valued and sustained through an intrinsic and natural interdependence. A vision, sufficiently cogent to galvanise a team and provide appropriate core values, served to deepen the teachers’ and students’ own understanding of themselves as teachers and learners. Garvin (1992) appears to capture these elements when he suggests that a communal, “…mindset that people helping people develops a healthy community.”, is needed for maintaining middle schools. This mindset, which values care, he says is generated and maintained through shared vision, dialogue, action and reflection.

The outcomes and methodology of this pilot study form a basis for the design of a more extensive study of teachers’ experiences of thorough and sustained middle year’s renewal. Their responses establish fruitful areas for ongoing inquiry and constitute the first of a series of case studies, which will explore teachers’ experiences of a range of contemporary sites of middle years' reform. The ongoing study will employ retrospective case study method to examine three sites of long-term sustained middle year’s renewal. In addition some dozen “promising” more recently established sites will also be surveyed. The outcome of the research will be a profile of those elements of middle year’s renewal that are most important to the growth and vitality of the teachers involved.
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