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In search of the Middle school Teacher:
what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers

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Introduction

"They [teachers] have to be patient with student's learning, especially if they get angry, if you can't get something... I just lose the will to try and do it" (Sleepy Transcript: 10).

"They have to learn how to work out how teenagers think. The generations have changed. It really, really annoys when they go "in my day we didn't do that," and I'm like "well it's not your day." "It's quite a few years later, we do things different now, can we not talk about it?" Technology hello!" (Sneezy Transcript: 8).

"I think the worst thing a middle school teacher can do is to start treating the student like a student and not like a person. (Frodo Transcript: 5)

"teachers have to be prepared to learn with the students and be prepared to meet students on their terms". (Dopey Transcript: 2)

What is this kid's achilles heel? What makes them feel good, what do they want, what can we give them...what kind of alternative programmes are there; to get them through so they're at least still at school?" (Kathryn Transcript: 6).

Curriculum change is casting a *shadow* over education nationally and with it comes all the uncertainty, anxiety and excitement associated with something new. In a period of upheaval, such as the one we are living in, change is inevitable, it is the norm, so we must think anew and act anew. The middle years of schooling reform is one such change, with its proposed reforms aimed at the best way to facilitate the transition from childhood to adulthood. However, it is not without its tensions, especially for those who are responsible for providing relevant schooling pathways for young people. These tensions have intensified in recent times and middle schooling is disrupting the complacent "*competitive curriculum*" (Connell 1998) and the "*continuity of practice*" (Smyth et al. 2003) of the secondary school. Once the bastion of uniformity and conformity, the secondary school has lost its compass and is looking to chart a new course. However, as the study revealed, charting a new course, by forging an alternative, where a school looks markedly different from other schools, like a middle school, appears "*radical*". This paper argues that the middle school reform is disrupting the complacency of the primary-secondary school divide and, is like a stone in your shoe, it is not going to go away.

This paper engages with the research surrounding the middle years of schooling teacher – *in search of the middle school teacher: what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers*. Some commentators (Luke et al. 2002; Smyth et al. 2003; Smyth & Hattam 2004; Pendergast & Bahr 2005) suggest that this reform is urgent and that the reform of secondary schools "*is one of the most elusive educational issues of our time*" (Spencer Foundation, cited

in Smyth et al. 2003). Therefore, it is timely, given the focus and resources being deployed to initiate a national curriculum, to consider what the middle years reform entails and the contribution it might make to this national conversation on curriculum. Central to this conversation is the nature of the teacher of secondary school students, in particular middle school students. This paper examines the emerging attributes of the middle school teacher gained from interviews with principals, teachers and students and concludes that the middle school teacher is a *specialist in adolescence* by being a *designer of a wholesome curriculum* and a *passionate advocate for the middle years learner and of the middle years reform*. This represents a new image for secondary/middle school teachers in Australia in a time of curriculum reform. This newly emerging image must be central to the ongoing national curriculum conversation if reform outcomes are to be achieved.

Middle schooling as a movement for change

Middle schooling as a movement for change is only a recent development within the Australian educational landscape (Barratt 1998). Therefore, this notion of a middle school teacher with its own unique set of attributes is shedding new light on the importance of the teacher in this reform. So much so, that it is challenging the default position that the attributes of the teacher are generic and not usually differentiated from other teachers. The middle schooling philosophy and how this philosophy is being implemented in various schooling jurisdictions around the country needs to be understood within the context and conditions of young people in this post millennial time and in the light of the development of the middle years of schooling reform.

The proposition posed by this study, *In search of the middle school teacher*, is concerned with creating the conditions that support a different type of teacher, a type of teacher who is responsive to the kind of comments cited above from young people in the study. The study found that such a teacher is one who can forge a middle school identity and is a specialist in adolescence. In addition, the middle school teacher is one who is creative and innovative and is skilled in designing a wholesome curriculum which is differentiated and integrated around themes that are relevant to young peoples' lives and delivered by a teaching team. The middle school teacher is committed to forging positive relationships with students, nurturing independence and a sense of identity in the middle years learner. In addition, the middle

school teacher requires specific support systems, if they are to sustain the changes in teaching and learning proposed by the middle years of schooling reform.

The study further found that the middle school teacher is a companion on this *“rollercoaster ride”* of constant change, facilitating the transition of the young person to becoming *“independent”* and *“autonomous”*. Principally, the middle school teacher has to be *“passionate”* and believe that they can *“make a difference”* to the lives of students. The middle school teacher is not someone *“just filling in time or just doing their job”*, after all, the middle years are *“tough years”* requiring teachers *“who are passionate about doing their job”*. Importantly, this highlights the advocacy attribute of the middle school teacher, one who is willing to be an *“advocate”* for the middle years learner and help young people *“learn from their mistakes”* and to realise that teachers *“do genuinely care about them”* and will help them in any way they can to *“to make that journey a little bit easier”*.

Due to the forces for change that accompany the national curriculum, uncertainty about their consequences for schools, as well as their contradictions, the efforts to craft defensible visions of what schools should be seems daunting. The emergence of middle schooling reform during this same period of the proposed change to a national curriculum is a defining moment, as it identified for the first time that the young adolescent was someone who was *“caught in the middle”*; hence, the need to respond more specifically to the learning needs of young adolescents. Relevant reports and studies include the South Australian *Junior Secondary Review* (Eyers, Cormack & Barratt 1992); *The Middle Years of Schooling Discussion Paper* (Schools Council 1992); *In the Middle: Schooling for Adolescents* (Schools Council 1993); *From Alienation to Engagement* (Cumming & Cormack 1996); *Teachers Working with Young Adolescents* (Queensland Board of Teacher Registration 1996); *The National Middle Schooling Project* (Barratt 1998); *Listen to me I'm Leaving* (Smyth et al.); *Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project* (Hill & Russell 1999; Russell 2003), *Beyond the Middle* (Luke et al. 2002); *Dropping Out, Drifting Off, Being Excluded* (Smyth & Hattam 2004); *Developing Lifelong Learners in the Middle Years of Schooling* (Pendergast et al. 2005), and the *12 to 18 Project* (Yates & McLeod 2007). As well, a range of professional associations, including the Australian Primary and Secondary Principals' Association and Middle Years of Schooling Association Queensland (MYSA) also produced statements and reviews, echoing these proposals for *restructuring, reforming, reculturing* and *improvement* in the middle years of schooling.

If this middle schooling reform, the focus of this study, is to bear fruit, educators in all states and territories must pass through the *shadow* of curriculum change bringing "*fresh hope*" and a "*new start*" by refashioning the shape of the middle school teacher in this new "*learning society*".

With this as a context, this paper reports the findings of a qualitative enquiry that aims to develop theory about the attributes of the middle school teacher and address the void that exists in middle years of schooling research. The study used grounded theory to develop theories about the role, function and attributes of the middle school teacher, pointing to what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers: primary school teachers and secondary school teachers. The study uses procedures for data generation and analysis to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about the middle school teacher (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The approach enables the study to focus on the phenomenon of the middle years teacher in its micro setting of South-East Queensland symbolised in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the research sample

PARTICIPANTS	EDUCATION QUEENSLAND SCHOOLS x 2	CATHOLIC SYSTEMIC SCHOOLS x 1	INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS x 3	TOTAL
Teachers	Year 6-9 teachers	Year 6-9 teachers	Year 6-9 teachers	15
Principals	2	1	3	6
Deputy/ Head of Middle School	1	1	5	8
Student Focus Groups	Year 7, 9 & 11 1 focus group per cohort group	Year 7, 9 & 11 1 focus group per cohort group	Year 7, 9 & 11 1 focus group per cohort group	11

In particular, this paper will speak to three things. Firstly, the features of the middle years reform will be outlined. Secondly, the characterisation of the young person's life-worlds, to which the middle school teacher must respond, is presented by way of context. Finally, the core attributes of the middle school teacher as they emerged from the study will be identified.

Features of the middle years of schooling reform

The advocates (Beane 1993; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Dickinson 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Smyth et al. 2003; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Knipe 2007; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007) of this reform are committed to the idea of middle years of schooling as learning and teaching for young adolescents who are informed by the following values and principles symbolised in Figure 1.



Adapted from: Jackson & Davis (2000), Luke et al. (2002), Smyth et al. (2003), Smyth (2006)

Figure 1 Features of the middle years of schooling reform

The middle schooling reform is seen as progressive, a *turning point*, which aims to contribute to the betterment of society and questioning some aspects of the status quo (Beane 1999; Jackson & Davis 2000; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). At the heart of the middle years reform, argues Jackson and Davis (2000), is its commitment to social justice, providing a vision of

hope that every young adolescent can learn and succeed. Such a vision, with its focus on the needs of the young adolescent, will inevitably challenge the established social and economic inequities that exist between different groups of people. Breaking down these social and economic hierarchies fosters the dream that every young adolescent can enjoy success and at the same time become the very best person they can be (Dickinson 2001; Stevenson 2003; Smyth 2006).

The schools that are implementing the middle years of schooling philosophy for young adolescents place great importance on advancing and enhancing the teacher-student relationship; they seek to develop collaborative approaches to learning and teaching; they negotiate appropriate aspects of the curriculum with students; and they integrate the personal and social concerns of students into the curriculum. Above all, the literature identifies a specific kind of middle school teacher, one that nurtures a teacher-student relationship which values the development of a democratic and inclusive culture (Beane 1999; Jackson & Davis 2000; Smyth et al. 2003; Pendergast & Bahr 2005).

Characterisation of the young person's life-worlds

When developing a discourse of early adolescence it is important to present a simplified approach. If the young adolescent in this *new time* is reduced to a homogenised concept, as the collective 'they' we lose sight of individual student differences. When developing a discourse of early adolescence it is important not to present a simplified approach. Young people, in their quest to establish an individual identity need to develop the capacity to assume a complex set of roles because of the complex world in which young adolescents now live and will live in the future (Carnegie Council 1989; Cumming & Cormack 1996; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Wyn 2004). Young people have demonstrated their capacity to construct themselves in this consumer driven society of the twenty first century away from direct adult control of previous generations (de Vaus 2004). The *young person's life-worlds* are not unlike a *tug-o-war* (Figure 2). The two worlds (adult and young person) are pulling against each other, concurrently enabling and constraining the young person's capacity to make the transformation from childhood to adulthood. While adolescence is a more rapid period of development than any other phase of life, except for infancy (Carnegie Council 1989), the difference between adolescence and infancy is that these young people observe

and feel the changes taking place. The manner in which young adolescents navigate their *life-worlds*, in order to have their needs met in these challenging conditions and circumstances is largely a function of interactions, both positive and negative, with the world around them and in particular, with family and schools (Crawford & Rossiter 2006).

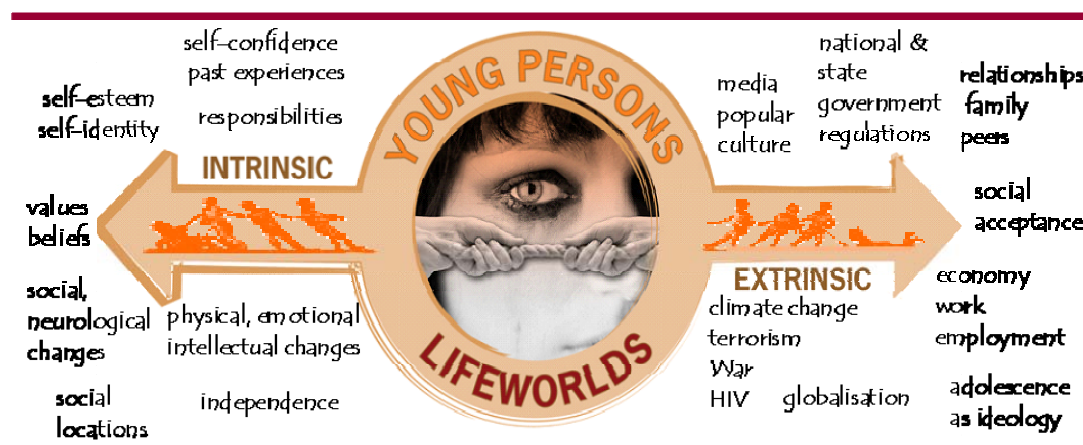


Figure 2 Young person's life-worlds

The *young person's life-worlds* consist of choices and opportunities within a culture that are complex and continually evolving within a culture. This culture is created by the nature of the times in which it exists and contributes to the ways we come to know and understand young people. The conditions that shape the lives of contemporary young people are diverse and highly individualized. The *young persons' life-worlds* consist of a two-way interaction between the intrinsic and extrinsic world, though there is a growing disconnection between the two worlds (Carnegie Council 1989, 1995; Cormack 1992; Cumming & Cormack 1996; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Luke et al. 2002; NMSA 2003; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Beamon 2005; Yates & Mcleod 2007). The manner by which young people navigate these life-worlds will inevitably shape their lives and serve as a signpost to educators as they attempt to better understand the needs of young adolescence in this new time.

Recognising the adolescent life-worlds with all their contradictions and multiple identities, together with the complexities of the relationship with the adult world, draws attention to the importance of new learning proposed by the middle school reformers, and highlights how responsive educators need to be in meeting the needs of young people. Thus, a call exists for the refashioning of the teacher in secondary contexts of schooling, in particular, the teacher situated in the middle years of schooling.

The context of the middle years of schooling teacher

The study, reported here, *In search of the middle school teacher* affirms that the teacher is the key to the success of the middle years of schooling reform and innovation. What then might be the attributes of the middle school teacher? Drawing on the *innovative teacher* literature the key attributes of the teacher are “altruism, passion and creativity” in people who are “self starters, ideas people and highly attuned” (Cumming & Owen 2001:3) to *young person’s life-worlds* with their emphasis on popular youth culture and the middle years of schooling philosophy and practice. When identifying the context of the middle years of schooling teacher there is an underlying assumption that the middle years teacher is a person who comprehensively understands the social and global context of the 21st century. These ideas are represented in Figure 3 as three overlapping forms of knowledge and practice embedded in this interconnected social and global world of the 21st century, reflecting the empirical and philosophical writings of the current literature. The study that forms the focus of this paper will enhance these findings.

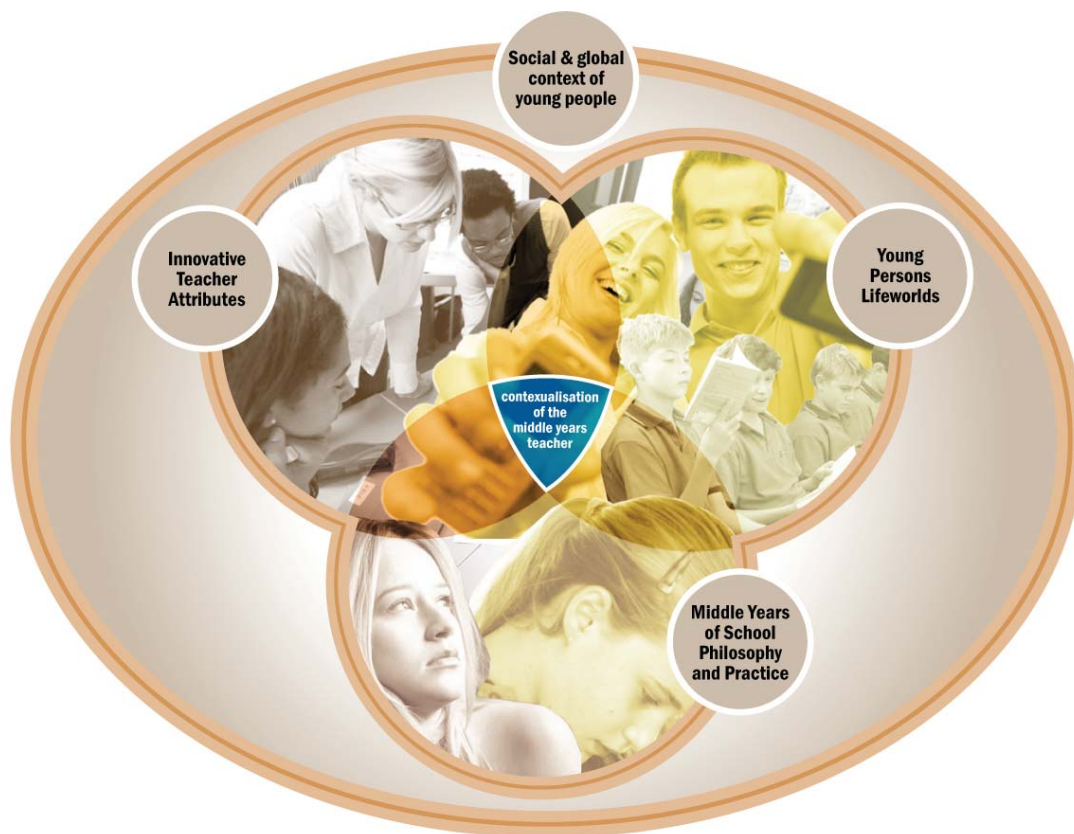


Figure 3 The context of the middle years of schooling teacher

The middle years of schooling teacher is the nexus of the three overlapping circles in Figure 3. The circle surrounding the three overlapping circles symbolises the socio-cultural context of

young people. In this representation, the overlapping of circles emphasize that teachers need a comprehensive understanding of young people and of the pedagogical implications of learning and teaching in the new learning society. These attributes assume a deep understanding and a commitment to the *philosophy and practice* of the middle years of schooling, of the *young person's life-worlds* and of innovative learning and teaching practices. The middle years of schooling has a prime focus on early adolescence and therefore teachers of the middle years are required to be "specialists in adolescence" (NMSA 1995, 2001; Jackson & Davis 2000; Chadbourne 2002). According to Chadbourne (2002), the contextualisation of the middle years of schooling is what gives the middle school its distinctive identity and therefore, the ability to differentiate the role and function, and attributes of the middle years of schooling teacher.

Identifying the Attributes of the Middle Years of Schooling Teacher

Importantly, the middle schooling philosophy focuses strategically on the efficacy of the teacher. The middle school teacher is charged with the responsibility of shaping, fashioning and transitioning young people, between the cultural divide of primary school into secondary school. This age group, referred to as 'young adolescence' aged between 11 and 14, is the hormonally charged transitional period, which can, for the teacher, be quite daunting at the best of times and quite threatening in the worst of times. What the middle school philosophy proposes is a shift toward a more developmentally responsive middle school, a shift from a traditional teacher-centred approach to a student centred approach of working closely with young adolescents as they would with an adult. This involves a participative approach to engagement. Therefore, the middle school philosophy is asking the teacher to reposition the centrality of the teacher and to relocate young people as the focus of learning, inviting them to participate in their own knowledge construction and management. This repositioning represents a paradigm shift for teachers, by inviting young people to ask questions of what they would like to learn; to work in teams and to collaborate with other teachers who may have a different perspective to share in the development of curriculum; to teach in areas which might extend the teacher beyond their current knowledge and preparation; and to invite young people to freely express themselves as active participants in their own learning.

The perspectives of the middle school teacher, which emerged from the research, were generated from educators with broad and diverse experiences as middle school teachers. These perspectives are presented, not as individual responses to interview questions, but as a

result of analysis of *core attributes* and *sub attributes*. These categories were generated from a thorough analysis of all data transcribed from interview texts, and field observations recorded in memos. The focus of this research is on the middle school teacher. Each attribute generated through analysis, reflects the initial perspective of the participant. Their perspective is followed with interpretative confirming, or divergent perspectives, gathered collectively from principals, teachers and students. A summation of the core attributes are listed in Figure 4.

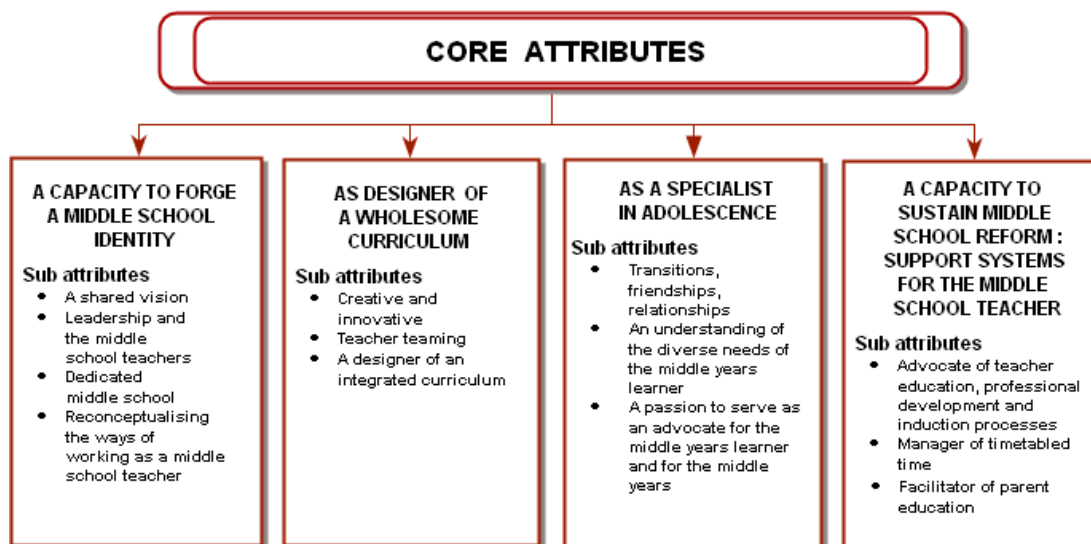


Figure 4 A Summation of the Middle School Teacher Core Attributes and Sub Attributes

A synopsis of the emerging attributes for the middle school teacher is as follows:

Core Attribute 1: Capacity to Forge a Middle School Identity

This attribute presented itself comprehensively and diversely in each of the interviews and observations. The *Capacity to Forge a Middle School Identity* emerged from the interviews as participants expressed their divergent ideas and perspectives concerning what it was that gave the middle school its particular identity. Importantly, it encompassed perspectives surrounding the original vision of this innovative development within the individual school and ideas about whether the vision had been realised or not.

The six schools in the study, implementing the middle years of schooling philosophy, identified strongly the challenges this posed for the staff and parents. The implementation of the middle schooling philosophy signalled to staff, students and parents that a middle school identity was being forged, though the shape of it for many of the schools was still a work in progress. The

principal and teacher participants of the study were people who were not afraid of change, and given the opportunity, were prepared to be engaged in the change process of *forging a middle school identity*. The sub attributes of this core attribute are identified in Figure 5.

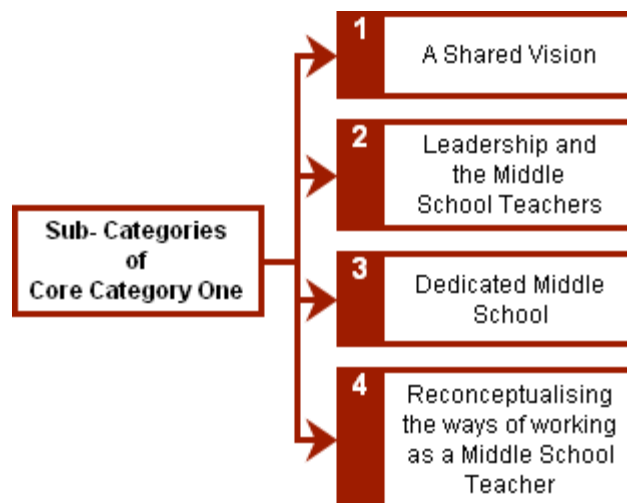


Figure 5: Sub-categories of Core Category One: Capacity to Forge a Middle School Identity

However, the findings of the study concerning the capacity of the middle school teacher to forge a middle school identity required schools to:

- introduce a new space into the schooling landscape that specialised in adolescence, which represented a change from the existing subject/discipline specialist approach;
- forge a middle school identity which was more apparent and better able to be achieved in P-12 schools;
- develop a change strategy and an understanding of the change process which would empower the teachers was a central factor contributing to the effective implementation of the middle years of schooling vision;
- come to a shared vision of middle schooling as an organic process and one which was responsive to new ideas and allowing it to take time to evolve;
- introduce curriculum leadership positions and was found that by elevating the middle school leadership function to a senior leadership position led to an increased level of commitment and confidence in the staff as it connected to the school's leadership and teaching staff by providing a voice and a relationship between the executive leadership and the middle school teaching staff;

- a dedicated middle school which contributed to forging a strong middle school identity and allowed middle school teachers to respond more effectively to the emerging issues surrounding the teaching and learning needs of young people in the middle years of schooling;
- meet better the needs of young adolescents, by deploying teachers who are driven by an understanding of adolescence and the development of the "*whole child*".

Core Attribute 2: As Designer of a Wholesome Curriculum

Designing a *wholesome* curriculum is a comprehensive approach drawing upon the nurturing skills of a parent and the *design* skills of the teacher to expand the imaginations of her students and restoration of well-being. By provoking our imaginations with new possibilities, the teacher *as designer of a wholesome curriculum* is taking us beyond our boundaries and revising our realities. The teacher as designer challenges us to reconstruct our symbols, to retell the story, to overturn the set conceptions, and to re-vision into a more wholesome, relevant, meaningful and lifelong learning experience. The study found that the teacher *as designer of a wholesome curriculum* is not just concerned with the communication of knowledge but is concerned with a curriculum that is transforming the imagination of the child into a more holistic engagement with the world. In such a wholesome curriculum, the designer becomes the learner's "*companion*" in the developmental and cognitive dimensions of learning. The sub attributes of this core attribute are identified in Figure 6.

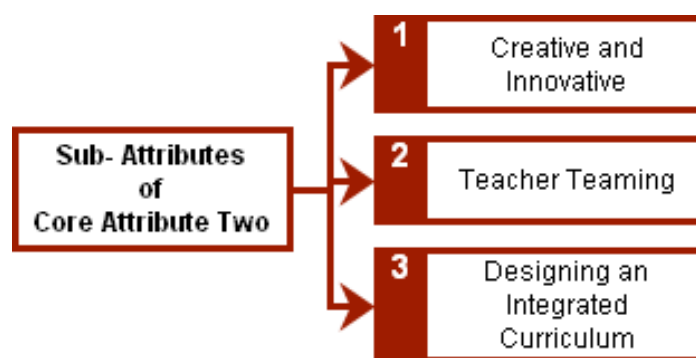


Figure 6: Sub-attributes of Core Attribute Two: As Designer of a Wholesome Curriculum

However, the study found significant changes to understanding a middle years curriculum in that:

- as a *designer*, the middle school teacher is redefining the meaning of a rigorous curriculum through an emphasis on *collaborative* forms of curriculum, "*differentiated learning, cooperative learning using small group strategies, negotiated learning*" and designing an "*integrated curriculum*" that *crosses the "subject boundaries"* and designed around "*themes*"; allowing for an innovative integrated approach to teaching and learning, bringing a new vitality to the middle school space by providing opportunities for young people and allowing them to find their "*own voice*";
- this study affirms that the teacher is the "*key*" to advancing the change proposed by the middle years reform. This is a change that forges a "*holistic approach*" to quality teaching and learning which is responsive to student needs, helping them to re-imagine a world which empowers them and is full of hope;
- the teaching and learning in the middle years called for teachers who were committed to being *creative and innovative* which drove a "*positive learning culture*" based on "*innovation*" and "*experimentation*";
- 'letting go' of the teacher-centred approach in favour of the more student-centred approach involved "*taking a risk*". This notion of 'letting go' stressed the importance of "*giving greater freedom*" to students so they can "*be challenged to be creative*";
- *teacher teaming*, the middle school teacher is no longer working autonomously or separately from colleagues and "*critical*" to being a member of a teaching team requires "*trust*" and a "*preparedness to give time*";
- required effective modelling by the teaching team to students by "*working as a group, as a team working with students*" in the classroom. This "*modelling*" helped establish an adult mentor for students: "*somebody that they can connect to, to pursue their learning [and]... some significant person that will assist each kid in following their interests*";
- *teacher teaming* resulted in an increase in collective responsibility which not only improved student learning but importantly, improved the professional learning of team members and gave rise to the emergence of genuine professional learning teams being established that were seeking 'deeper' learning;
- there were a diversity of approaches and understandings of what is meant by *designing an integrated curriculum*; and there was consensus in the study that the approach to the middle years curriculum needed to be concerned with "*making linkages*" between subjects and KLAs (Key Learning Areas), emphasising a

pedagogy that appeals to a wide range of learning styles and allowing teachers to differentiate student learning;

- by *designing an integrated curriculum*, led to teachers adopting a more flexible, creative, coherent and consistent approach to classroom pedagogy.

Core attribute 3: As a Specialist in Adolescence

As noted earlier, adolescence has been viewed as a discourse surrounding the progression from childhood to young adulthood that is a predictable, straightforward and a natural process driven by biological and psychological maturation. Alternatively, according to this thesis, it is well accepted that young people have to make sense of, and navigate a transition in a complex and continually changing world. This is characterised by disjunctures between agency and passivity and change that is linear and non-linear, continuous and discontinuous and influenced by both nature and nurture. This proposition amounts to adolescence that is unpredictable and offers little more than impermanence and insecurity to young people. The data from this study, suggests a new lens is needed to read adolescence that will embrace this transition from childhood to adulthood and that recognises individual diversity and presents adolescent development more holistically.

The middle years of schooling has a prime focus on early adolescence. Consequently, the study found that teachers of the middle years are required to be *“specialists in adolescence”*. The attribute, *as a specialist in adolescence* cultivates a focus on the new type of middle school teacher which emerged from the data. This attribute explores ideas that *“anchor”* the teacher in the middle years by focusing on ways to improve student learning and well-being. The sub attributes of this core attribute are identified in Figure 7.

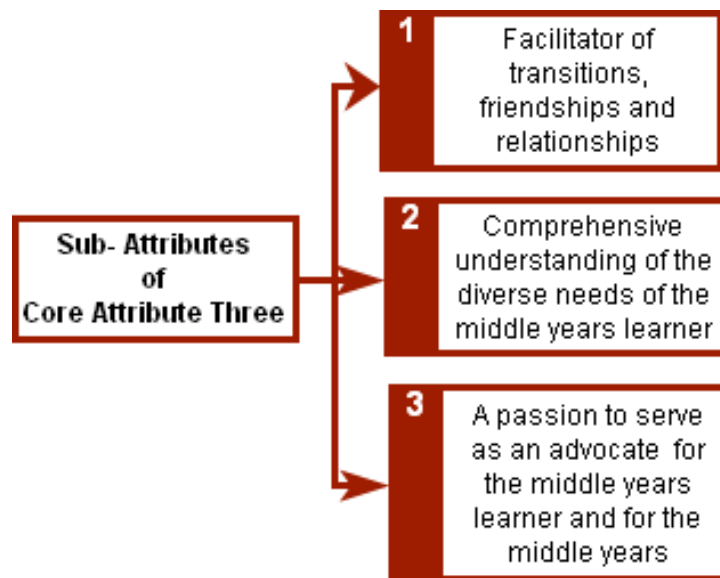


Figure 7: Sub-attributes of Core Attribute Three: As a Specialist in Adolescence

However, the study found that the teacher of the middle years was increasingly concerned with its relationship to students as impacting:

- positively when teachers are *“passionate”* and *“committed”* to this age group nurturing an *“interest in developing good relationships”* with the young middle school learner;
- most successfully when the middle school teacher placed importance on student well-being through a strong pastoral care focus where *“safety”, “empathy”, “compassion”, “love”, “forgiveness”* and *“flexibility”* were seen as critical characteristics embedded in this attribute of the middle school teacher;
- on teacher-student *relationships* that are *“healthy and happy”* and contribute to a students' motivation to *“continue with their education”*;
- effectively when teachers nurtured a *“comfortable zone”* that was *“positive”* and *“optimistic”* and provided *“stability”* in their relationship with both peers and teachers;
- effectively when teachers learn the characteristics of this generation of learners and to incorporate these elements into their teacher and learning;
- when understanding the needs of the middle years learner you are bringing *“fresh hope”* because you are not going to see them as a *“learning problem”* or a *“behaviour problem”* but as an *“independent”* and *“autonomous”* learner;
- when the middle school teacher becomes the *advocate* for the middle years learner requiring the teacher to *“love kids”* and be *“genuine”* and *“unconditional”* in that care and concern for these young people.

Core Attribute 4: A Capacity to Sustain the Middle Years Reform: Support systems for the middle years teacher

Young adolescence is changing, middle school practices are changing, technology is making new activities possible. Hence, the middle school teacher needs to develop the capacity to sustain the changes proposed by the middle school reform. This will involve the middle school teacher being the advocate for the middle years reform by ensuring appropriate resourcing and support systems for teachers of middle years are in place. Both the principal and teacher participants of the study identified this as essential if teachers were to *“adapt”* and *“embrace”* new ways of working with young middle school learners. As noted earlier the advent of middle schooling, with its focus on early adolescence and the new ways of working with middle years students, is only a recent development in Australia. Therefore, the individual teacher cannot do this alone and requires a range of support systems to stay the course and to avoid *“burn out”*.

The data from the study noted there needs to be a *“collaborative”* effort on the part of school leadership, teachers, parents, system authorities and universities in supporting teachers and schools in making effective this change to working with middle school learners. This requires a process that will engage all stakeholders in shared decision making, setting goals and implementing a change plan. As well, sharing the heartaches and triumphs in providing effective learning experiences for the young middle years student. The fourth core attribute, *a capacity to sustain the middle years reform: support systems for the middle years teacher*, is the next attribute to be identified. This final core attribute, examines the ideas associated with the new ways of working with the middle years learner by identifying the support systems required to assist the teacher, if this change is to be sustained over time and if outcomes from the reform are to be realised. The sub attributes of this core attribute are identified in Figure 8.

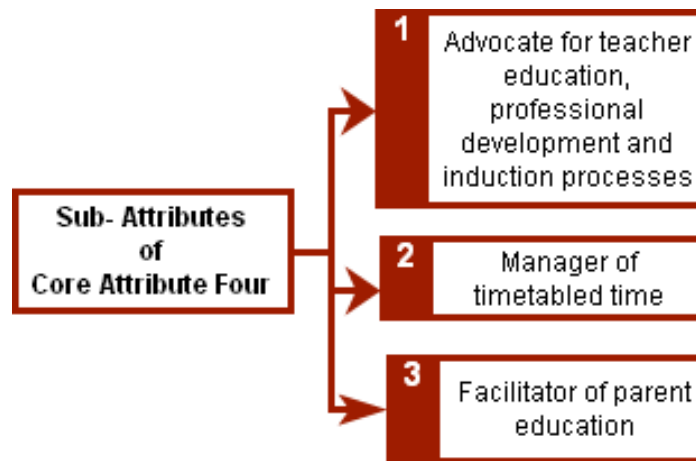


Figure 8: Sub-attributes of Core Attribute Four: A Capacity to Sustain the Middle Years Reform: Support systems for the middle years teacher

However, the findings of the study concerning the potential influence emanating from how the implementation of the middle years of schooling philosophy was introduced and noted some ambivalence toward changes that would enhance the standing and effectiveness of the middle school teacher, identified as:

- processes that allowed for education and a forum for staff to put their ideas and concerns resulted in some schools setting up a *"task force"* a *"Middle Schooling Committee"* and in another a *"Consultative Committee"* to harness support and to give direction;
- schools providing adequate funding for professional development, as they all expected the middle school *teacher "to make sure they continue their professional development and study"*;
- a *"fear"* from heads of department that something would be lost to their particular subject area as a result of the implementation of middle schooling;
- when regional offices do not have middle school advisers or is collapsed into an overarching curriculum position little support was forthcoming for the concept of middle schooling and for the teacher;
- ongoing professional development for the middle school teacher tended to be of a general nature without any attempt to provide additional development for the beginning teacher in middle years;
- limited timetable support to support teaching teams by giving time in the timetable to meet;

- consideration of induction programs for new and beginning teachers of middle school;
- consideration of ways to work more effectively with parents in promoting the middle years concept and supporting them in adolescence formation of their children.

Conclusion

The study affirmed the work of the middle years teachers and of principals who have had the courage to “take a risk” and to do something different to better meet the needs of the middle years learner. The study has highlighted the diverse ways in which schools have introduced the middle years of schooling philosophy by being explicit and focused. In addition, as schools introduced the concept of the middle years there was an evolving understanding of what it meant within the context of social and cultural change and the implications this had for the middle school teacher which needed to be addressed. This paper has endeavoured to refocus attention on the centrality of the teacher, in particular the middle school teacher and the particular attributes required of the teacher if they are to work with this group of young people.

Therefore, the relevance of the study can be found not only in the emerging attributes of the middle school teacher that have been generated but also from the methodology itself. The method of the study recognised the complex and diverse understandings of the middle years of schooling but validated a process that sought to provide an opportunity for individuals to share their experience. The context of the study took into account the different school situations where principals, teachers and students lived out their understanding of middle school and what it means to be a middle school teacher. The study can assist on many fronts to those who are responsible for the education of young people and who are entrusted with formulating educational policies, such as, the committee for the national curriculum. In addition, system authorities, school leadership, parent groups and those involved in teacher education by being more attuned to the complex set of demands and circumstances confronting the middle years learner and their teachers. Hence, the study makes an important contribution to the ongoing task of understanding the middle years learner by the difference the teacher can make to this age group, recognising that the middle school teacher is different from other teachers. The extent to which the needs of the middle years learner and the refocusing on the centrality of the middle school teacher with its specific attributes is woven into the national curriculum conversation remains to be seen, but is like a stone in your shoe,

the middle years is not going to go away. Furthermore, while curriculum documents are currently being written from a traditional perspective (P [K]-10), one must ask what is the place of the middle years teacher in a context that appears to be reproducing curriculum development that reflects mistakes of the past and shows little regard for the unique needs of the middle years learner.

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