Developing Lifelong Learners in the Middle Years of Schooling

A report about the practices, processes, strategies and structures that best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the middle years of schooling.

Donna Pendergast, Ron Flanagan, Ray Land, Mark Bahr, Jane Mitchell, Katie Weir, Geoff Noblett, Michael Cain, Tony Misich, Victoria Carrington, Jennifer Smith.

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Executive Summary

Overview

In order to participate effectively and with satisfaction as a citizen in the post-industrial 'information societies' and 'knowledge/service economies' of the 21st-century, an individual needs to be better-informed, to have greater thinking and problem-solving abilities, to be more self-motivated, to have a larger capacity for cooperative interaction, to possess more varied and more specialised skills, and to be more resourceful and adaptable than ever before.

Rapidly changing circumstances and opportunities in contemporary work, social and recreational environments, demand the continuing acquisition of new knowledge, new skills and new abilities – and their efficient application. This demand can be met satisfactorily only through a process of continual learning: learning how to *do*; how to *know*; how to *be*; and how to *live together* (Watson 2003, p.6). For young people in particular, there is an urgent need to develop the confidence and the know-how required to deal with the uncertainties and complex conundrums which many of them face now in adolescence and which all will face as adults.

The findings of a broad range of recent studies have highlighted the importance of encouraging and sustaining young people's effective engagement with learning, particularly during the 'middle years of schooling'. Relevant research literature indicates that insightful and thoughtfully applied educational practices, also especially in these 'middle years', can significantly affect the development of the habit of *lifelong* learning, by enhancing the specialised competencies and abilities required for this outcome. Many researchers believe that finding the best means for introducing an effective process for the promotion and long-term maintenance of these learning skills will become the next key focus for educational renewal.

This report presents the findings of a Project undertaken to address the broad question of how to ensure the engagement with learning of *all* middle years students and how to encourage in them a higher order of learning objectives and outcomes both now and throughout life. It builds on current nationwide and international efforts at school reform, intended to provide learning programs that are intellectually demanding, connected to the real world, socially supportive, community linked, and engaged with the wide diversity of student abilities, preferences, circumstances, and needs. Given that middle schooling reform is currently a key focus of educational reform in Australia and that lifelong learning is recognised as a highly desirable attribute of learners, it is appropriate to frame this project in the theoretical context of reforming schools.

Academic staff from The University of Queensland's School of Education, together with consultants from Educational Priorities Pty Ltd and KPA (Consulting) Australia Pty Ltd, were contracted to undertake this national Project over the period March 2003 to August 2004. The Project brief was managed by Education Queensland on behalf of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), and had the following research question:

What practices, processes, strategies and structures best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the 'middle years of schooling'?

The Project consisted of four elements:
• A Literature review;
• 'Case-studies' of selected school sites;
• A Student survey ('*School and me!')*; and
• A Discussion paper: 'Implementing and sustaining school reform in the middle years'.

Each of the four elements were presented separately over the course of the Project and were subsequently amalgamated to produce this final Report. The contents of each element are described and summarised below.

Element 1: Literature review

The literature review was a focused analysis of key reports and papers published in Australia and overseas in each of the three priority educational research areas identified in the Project brief, *viz.*: 'lifelong learning', 'middle years of schooling' and 'school reform'. Several intersecting themes for 'best practice in schooling' (i.e. the 'core component changes' considered most appropriate to effect educational renewal along the desired lines) were identified. These are summarised below. A model was developed from the literature for the data collection at case study schools and discussion paper phases of the project.

Core component changes for best practice in schooling
From the research literature on *lifelong learning*:
• School vision and visioning processes
• Student transitions and transitioning procedures
• Changing social and economic conditions demanding a broader skill set
• Learner- and learning-focused programs.

From the research literature on *the middle years of schooling*:
• Student engagement in learning
• Meeting greater diversity of adolescent needs and capacities
• Improved alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems
• Enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge
• Connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school
• Teacher teaming
• Innovative leadership.

From the research literature on *school reform*:
• Sustainable innovation
• Focus on both social and academic outcomes for students
• Linking school culture change with innovative structures
• Professional learning communities, with teachers as learners
• Evidence-based policy development processes

As indicated in the School sites case-studies, these 'core component changes' were subsequently used as a basis to structure investigations into innovations being utilised

by selected Australian schools known to have had success in implementing programs to promote lifelong learning.

Changing school culture and structure
The identification of these core components of potential educational renewal has implications for the future culture and structure of schools. The development, support and sustainability of a school-wide lifelong learning environment requires the improvement of school organisational capacity, achieved through the broad structural and cultural components of program coherence and fluidity, whole-school philosophy, student-driven input, and the formation of a professional learning community.

Schools need to develop a culture of change and renewal for teacher and student alike, promoting experiment and innovation, breaking with tradition, inspiring confidence for academic risk-taking, allowing more student management of learning experiences for greater interest and satisfaction, setting high expectations, and providing challenge, within a supportive and celebratory framework in which mutually beneficial interpersonal relationships are established on the basis of valued and respected individuality.

School structures need to permit in-depth exploration of authentic tasks; to allow time to think and to reflect; to provide access to powerful knowledge and promote research and development; to include teacher professional development and leadership opportunities; to foster the formation of learning partnerships and of links to the family, the local community and the wider world; and to turn the school into a community-oriented learning hub.

Middle year's classrooms
Much of the literature related to lifelong learning deals with the establishment of the generic skills and attitudes and the enabling contexts required to achieve that higher learning outcome. But this literature fails to present an adequate picture of what these skills and attitudes and contexts look like in the actual classroom – what strategies, organisational patterns, programmes and community connections act together to bring about the development of lifelong learning habits in early adolescence. In an attempt to clarify this picture, it was necessary to examine successful lifelong learning classrooms in action.

Element 2:   School Sites Case-Studies

This aspect of the Project focused on uncovering how some schools with reputations for innovation are able to develop the capacities of students as lifelong learners in the middle years.

The 25 schools chosen for investigation were carefully selected following consultation with, and formal approval from, senior staff in relevant education authorities in six of the Australian States and Territories (VIC, SA, WA, QLD, NSW, & ACT) and in all employing authority sectors (State, Catholic and Independent). Schools were chosen on the basis of information supplied by their system representatives, indicating that their orientation was towards encouraging and assisting students to acquire the habit of learning for life, and that innovations and reforms in the middle years of schooling, aimed at achieving

that objective, were well underway. Further variables considered in school selection were:
- size of school (small/medium/large);
- type of school (primary/secondary/primary + secondary/middle);
- school location (metropolitan/provincial/rural); and
- broad socio-economic status (SES level) of the community served (low/medium/high).

A Project investigator visited each school after all necessary university ethical research clearances and system/school approval protocols had been completed. At each site the following activities were conducted, usually over 2 days:
- Interview(s) with key school administrators (including with a Coordinator or Head of the Middle School, if appointed and available);
- Interview(s) with key teacher(s) operating a designated initiative for middle years students;
- A focus group meeting with a group of selected middle years students; and
- A student survey ('School and me!') of a 5% random sample of diverse middle years students currently experiencing the designated initiative.

In the presentation of results from these investigations (with the exception of the statistical analysis of the 'student survey') school names were fictionalised for privacy purposes.

All Project investigators used common guidelines for the structured interviews (with administrators and key teachers), and for the focus group meetings (with selected students). These guidelines were based on the stated Research Question, with probes drawn from the previously listed 'core component changes' for best practice in schooling, identified in the Literature review. As a result, there was a common format for undertaking each of the school case-studies.

These school case-studies provide a wealth of detail regarding practices, processes, strategies and structures that have been used to:
- promote lifelong learning and the development of lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling;
- develop curriculum and pedagogical initiatives that have proven to be successful in developing the characteristics of lifelong learners; and
- assist teachers to become managers of learning (more 'mentors' than 'instructors') and students to become successful learners.

Full details of these case studies are given in Appendix A of this report and an examination of their findings has been used to construct Chapter 4, the discussion paper: '*Implementing and sustaining school reform in the middle years*'.

Element 3:   Student survey ('School and me!')

The survey was conducted to determine students' own perceptions of their school environment and their 'resilience' (a personal factor affecting their ability and willingness to maintain intelligent engagement with uncertainties). A total of 291 middle years students were randomly sampled from classes involved in relevant initiatives in 16 of the 25 Project schools (chosen from 4 of the 6 States/Territories). This student sample is

therefore not claimed to be representative of the full range of middle years students in Australian schools.

Participants completed a 101 item questionnaire (the middle years survey: 'School and me!' – see Appendix B) either on-line or using a pen and paper. Results were tabulated to produce two scales:
• The 'Middle Years Environment' scale ('MYENV'); and
• The 'Middle Years Resilience' scale ('MYRES').

The MYENV scale consisted of 69 items, further factor analysed into five sub-scales of pragmatic interest:
• Pedagogy for understanding;
• Higher order thinking and 'fun' teaching;
• Support and engagement;
• Academic problem-based learning and recognition of difference; and
• Safety.

The MYRES scale was derived from the use of a further 20 items in the survey. Results were tabulated into four sub-scales:
• Academic self-efficacy and engagement;
• Willingness to engage with peers;
• Communicative self-efficacy; and
• Meta-knowledge of academic strategies.

Also included in the Instrument were 7 open-ended qualitative items ('Your feedback'), and 5 demographic items - birth month, birth year, gender, school name and academic Year level.

Overall results of the student survey indicated that:
• Most students surveyed were satisfied with their learning environments and experiences;
• Girls reported higher resilience scores than boys;
• Resilience levels for both boys and girls declined significantly from Years 5-6 to Year 9;
• Student perceptions of their schooling environment indicated considerable differences between individual school sites; and
• There is a moderate positive relationship between student perceptions of their environment and their resilience ratings: high student resilience might result in a better environment, and a good school environment might result in higher student resilience.

The simplest interpretation of the second finding could be that boys generally feel more disenfranchised than girls at school and reflect this attitude in their lower levels of resilience; though it could alternatively be the case that - in contrast to boys – girls, as a group, are less likely to criticise the school system.

The apparent decline in resilience scores over the middle years suggests that around Year 9 students as a whole may be becoming more aware of the limitations of their academic abilities.

Differences between perceptions of school environments do not appear to be associated with either schooling authority sector or location by State. When the data from schools are collapsed to the State level a picture of considerable uniformity of perception is apparent.

Concerning the relationship between environment and resilience, this is most evident in terms of student *Academic self-efficacy* rather than in broader indicators of student resilience – such as their perceived capacities for *Communicative self-efficacy* or their performance as a *Team worker.*

Responses to the seven qualitative questions were much more varied, though there were some broad patterns of note:
• The majority of respondents provided highly positive comments on the quality of their classroom work.
• A similar proportion claimed some degree of relevance or connectedness of the classroom work to the wider world.
• Most felt self-efficacious and capable about the extent of their personal learnings over the previous year.

The issue of safety was an interesting one, contrasting *academic* safety and *personal* safety. While the overwhelming majority of respondents report feeling safe to take *educative* risks in the sampled classrooms of the Project schools, some of the *social* safety issues appear little different from those that we might expect to find in other schools. A significant minority of students still report a concern about bullying, in conjunction with clear recognition of their school's adoption of strong policies regarding such harassment. It seems that many students are recognising the difficulty associated with enforcing anti-bullying policies.

Element 4: Discussion Paper - Implementing and sustaining school reform in the middle years

This segment of the Report provides an overview of data derived from school site investigations, concentrating on the relative effectiveness of various curriculum, pedagogical and assessment strategies employed by the innovative schools studied, and on the level of general applicability and transferability of findings and approaches across the range of environments and conditions in Australian schools. The Model incorporating likely innovation features developed from the literature and used to prompt interviewees is introduced and explained.

At all schools examined, investigators were asked to rate the apparent evidence for the existence of each of the 16 core component changes identified in the Literature review and used to structure the school case-studies. Ratings were then used to develop a Three-Phase model of the general sequence in which reforming schools typically attended to particular core component changes in their middle years initiatives. The phased model indicates that programs of reform were established in three phases, gradually introducing particular core component changes, and spanning a total of about eight to seventeen years, depending on circumstances. This reinforces many other findings in the research literature, indicating that schooling reform takes much longer than usually expected or normally allowed for in reform schedules.

The first phase ('Initiation') typically lasted 1 to 2 years and typically included the following core change variables:
•   school vision and visioning processes;
•   student transitions and transitioning procedures;
•   connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school;
•   teacher teaming; and
•   innovative leadership.

The second phase ('Development') lasted an extra 2 to 5 years and showed attention to:
•   improved alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems;
•   enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge;
•   sustainable innovation;
•   linking school culture change with innovative structures;
•   professional learning communities, with teachers as learners; and
•   evidence-based policy development processes

The final stage ('Consolidation') required a further 5 to 10 years and achieved the introduction of changes to address:
•   changing social and economic conditions demanding a broader skill set;
•   learner- and learning-focused programs;
•   student engagement in learning;
•   meeting greater diversity in adolescent needs and capacities.

The three-phase model also suggests that some core change variables may be more critical than others for moving and sustaining the reforms from one phase to another, as some factors appear to connect more variables across two phases. For example, the application of *teacher teaming,* the development of new models of *innovative leadership* and a focus on both *social and academic outcomes of students* appear most critical for progression from the Initiation to the Development phase. Introduction of *enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge* in classroom work, appears to be most critical for successful progression from the Development to the Consolidation phase.

Most schools in this study - whether primary, secondary or other types; whether State, Catholic or Independent; whether rural or city, wealthy or poor - were in the second (or Development) phase of implementation of their reforms. Some schools were still in the Initiation phase, or in transition from the Initiation to the Development phase. Only a few schools appeared to be in transition to, or clearly in, the third or Consolidation phase. This is accounted for by the relative recency of the reform agendas for both middle schooling and lifelong learning.

There are many difficulties at the heart of taking reform into 'the mainstream' or the 'core business' of the school. Priorities abound; hard choices regarding change have to be made; numerous meetings litter the school calendar; procedures are created and re-created; and the resources and time available never seem to be enough for the size of the tasks confronting a staff having to realise the details of a 'dream'.

Most reforming schools in the Development phase undergo a significant 'dip' in their implementation efforts and in the efficiency with which they are able to operate. This is particularly so after the excitement and creative challenges of initiating a reform based

on the achievement of consensus, and the building of a vision and philosophy, have passed.

Yet for some reforming schools (or innovative elements within a single school site) the implementation experience is often less traumatic and teachers can experience smoother sailing. Usually this can occur only when several key factors are aligned and sustained:
• Team membership across several years;
• Congenial, philosophically-aligned dynamics among team members;
• Sensitive and sustained leadership;
• Early adoption and shared risk-taking among members who challenge each other to extend themselves;
• A strong emphasis on team problem-posing and problem-solving; and
• Effective use of research in evidence-based planning.

Future Directions

The Project aimed to provide information about the following question:

> **What practices, processes, strategies and structures best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the 'middle years of schooling'?**

This study has demonstrated that many reforming schools emphasise the importance of developing lifelong learning in their vision and philosophy statements and that students tend to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with lifelong learning in four main ways:
• as a result of the social learning engendered in working collaboratively and cooperatively with other students;
• as outcomes from specific curricular and co-curricular programs;
• as required to complete specific tasks determined for school assessment; and
• most importantly, as a result of the role models provided by individual teachers - both as learners themselves and as illuminators of specific attitudes regarding the importance of learning in our lives. Even in a school where reforms may be failing such teachers exist and continue to be role models.

Learners in the middle years are generally viewed by school staff as providing significant challenges for achieving the goals of lifelong learning. There is also a realisation of the limits of the school in developing positive attitudes towards learning throughout a person's life; additional important roles are played by the home, the media and the broader community.

In summary, this study demonstrates that schools can make a difference for students by encouraging them to have positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and to want to become lifelong learners. But it also indicates that the process of reforming a school so that it is more likely to achieve these outcomes is a long and usually difficult one. While there is no single, 'right' way to undertake reform in the middle years, typically there is progression through three phases that involve the systematic linking of many components of a school's operation.

Despite the difficulties, all the schools surveyed in this study believe the journey to be a worthwhile and important one, particularly for the futures of their students.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

1.1 Background to this report

Developing the skills and aptitudes of 'lifelong learning' is an essential capacity for effective participation in contemporary knowledge economies and societies. It is axiomatic in the literature that there are various generic skills, attitudes and capacities essential to becoming a lifelong learner. The development of these skills begins at birth and they are honed through thoughtful and effective educational practices. There is a clear link in the research literature and the anecdotal experiences of teachers between effective learning, and both motivation to learn and engagement in the learning experience. This has been one of the key drivers of the keen interest in reform in the education of young adolescents in Australian schools.

The emergence of lifelong learning as a core educational policy agenda-item coincides with the emergence of the middle years of schooling as an educational priority across Australia. The overlaps between the two are clear. The 'middle years of schooling' and 'middle schooling' literatures identify a clear set of characteristics, needs and abilities associated with teaching and learning across these years, including:
• the establishment of learning communities,
• higher order thinking,
• critical and reflective consideration of issues and problems, and
• new pedagogies and organisational structures.
As the literature review and discussions in this report reveal, these same themes are reflected and strongly articulated in the lifelong learning literature.

Taking note of this repetition of themes, and against the background of the international and national 'school reform', 'middle schooling', 'middle years of schooling' and 'lifelong learning' literatures, this report documents innovations, structural and organisational contexts, and best schooling practices related to the development of lifelong learners in Australian middle years classrooms. The case-study sites were situated across a range of schools, locations and systems and the case-studies document lifelong learning activities and outcomes in a diverse range of settings.

1.2 What do we mean by 'Lifelong Learning'?

As a concept, 'lifelong learning' has seemed annoyingly nebulous, variously used across all levels of educational provision from classroom-based curriculum through adult education to policy for the past three decades (Papadopoulos 2002). Until the 1990s, the concept could be identified most often in relation to adult and post-compulsory education. The term stood alongside others such as 'adult education' and 'vocational education' and was focused around ensuring that adults were entitled and encouraged to access formal post-compulsory and continuing education (Faure 1972; Husen 1974). A range of nations, including the United Kingdom, continue with this view (DfEE 1998).

Since the mid-1990s, however, there has been a shift towards a concept of lifelong learning that includes all learning that enhances and contributes to knowledge and skills. In 1996 the OECD committed to the importance and relevance of lifelong learning

(OECD 1996). This has meant the enfolding of foundational and compulsory education into this broader concept, and the emergence of a 'cradle-to-grave' stance towards lifelong learning (Istance 2003). This extension of the notion of lifelong learning has been prompted by the emergence of knowledge economies and information societies, the key features of which are well known and documented, and include:
- globalisation and increasing trade liberalism,
- ageing populations,
- changing nature of work and employment opportunities,
- increased mobility and conversely, immobility of populations,
- increasing impact of new and future ICTs, and
- a shift away from manufacturing towards knowledge and service economies.

The emerging global knowledge economy is profoundly altering demands on labour markets and citizenry worldwide. It is estimated that by 2010 the industrial workforce of advanced nations will account for only 10-15% of all workers (OECD 2000). The citizens of these societies require an increasing range of skills and knowledge in order to operate effectively in their daily lives. Kegan (1994) describes this as a change from an 'automatic' to a 'stick-shift' society. Where in an 'automatic' society, many of an individual's life decisions about where and how to live and work are pre-ordained, in a 'stick-shift' society the individual must assume responsibility for and accept the consequences of, direct choice and must, as a result, become highly adaptable to changing circumstances.

These changed contexts have prompted the abandonment of the view that education could be limited to the compulsory years; that is, that these years could contain all the skills and knowledge that a productive worker/citizen would require in a lifetime. It has become increasingly obvious to NGOs such as the OECD and government at all levels that the costs of failing to become and stay educated are high in both social and economic terms. Thus, the 'front-loading' view of learning linked to a narrow band of school years is being overtaken by a view of lifelong learning that encompasses 'individual and social development of all kinds and in all settings – formally in schools and vocational, tertiary and adult education institutions; and in-formally, at home, at work and in the community' (OECD 1996).

Here the notion focuses on purposeful learning activities designed to increase knowledge and skills. This is, of course, set against the profile of a citizen/worker who must retrain repeatedly across his/her lifetime in order to remain economically profitable and socially engaged. Implicit is the acknowledgement that in a knowledge economy — whether in the developed or the developing world — the range of knowledge and skills required outstrips the capacities of formal or vocational education alone. The notion of lifelong learning, then, focuses attention on the need for continual learning and on the sets of generic skills and capacities that will equip individuals and societies to embrace this expanded notion of learning and the challenges of living and working in knowledge economies.

Both the OECD and UNESCO argue that lifelong learning is an essential component of social and economic wellbeing. This commitment was outlined in the OECD's *Lifelong learning for all* (1996) and the UNESCO report *Learning: the treasure within* (Delors 1996). These two reports have been highly influential in establishing a broader sense of lifelong learning and a focus on identifying key competencies and abilities of the lifelong learner.

The OECD (Selby Smith & Ferrier 2002) identifies four key pillars of lifelong learning in contemporary societies:

1. Systemic view of learning – that learning, formal and informal, is linked to the full life-cycle rather than 'front-loaded' into the compulsory years of schooling;

2. Centrality of the learner – recognition of diversity of learners and a shift in priority towards an increased client focus;

3. Motivation to learn – attention to self-directed and individualised learning; and

4. Multiple objectives of educational policies – economic, social, personal.

Likewise, the UNESCO report (Watson 2003, p 6) identified four characteristics of lifelong learners that could set the parameters of a learning society:
- learning to *do* (acquiring and applying skills, including life skills);
- learning to *be* (promoting creativity and personal fulfilment);
- learning to *know* (an approach to learning that is flexible, critical and capable); and
- learning to *live together* (exercising tolerance, understanding and mutual respect)

Reflecting international economic and political trends, lifelong learning has tended to have a neo-liberal, economic focus that revolved around varied perspectives on enabling continued individual employability, or a social-democratic focus on community engagement, enhanced citizenship and quality of life.

Australia, of course, has not stood outside the economic, cultural, technological and social changes which have prompted the shift in international perspectives on education and lifelong learning. Australia's economic structure has changed considerably within the space of a single generation — tariff reduction and/or removal, deregulation of banking, changes to employment contracts and the scope of trade unions, taxation reform, ongoing drought and changes to social welfare (see also Stanwick NCVER nd).

Australia is clearly reconfiguring itself as a knowledge-based economy, via:
- changed occupational structure – growth in service sector employment and decline in trades, manufacturing and rural sector employment,
- high investment in ICT,
- high uptake of computer and internet usage, and
- increasing percentage of workers employed in global, rather than locally focused markets.

The expansion of VET and other post-compulsory programs is indicative of a growing policy and fiscal commitment as government recognises the challenges of participation in knowledge economies. Watson (2003, pp. 6-7) argues that four discernible themes can be identified running through international and Australian policy literature:
- recognition of formal and informal learning,
- importance of self-motivated learning,
- emphasis on self-funded learning, and
- the idea that participation in learning should be universal.

This commitment is also reflected in the embedding of lifelong learning in a number of government reports and policy documents since the 1980s. These include:
- Higher education White Paper (1988);

- National ACE policies from the 1990s (MCEETYA 1993);
- NBEET reports, including *Lifelong learning: Key issues* (1996);
- National VET Strategy (1998);
- Education and training reforms for the future: A White Paper. Education Queensland (2002); and
- Queensland's new Action plan for the middle phase of learning (2003).

While overarching policy commitment or direction is absent at this time, this repositioning around the foci of lifelong learning poses quite significant challenges for all sectors of education, including the middle years This has promoted increasing attention to the range of learning outcomes and attributes associated with becoming a lifelong learner and the importance of successful transitions in and out of various learning contexts. Recent Australian research in lifelong learning is identified in the Literature Review presented later in this Chapter.

1.2.1   What characteristics define the lifelong learner?

Again, following the international trend, Australian education bodies are increasingly focusing attention on the sophisticated sets of skills and attitudes now associated with lifelong learning and becoming a lifelong learner.

While the role of schools in the broader lifelong learning agenda is still being debated (Istance 2003) a range of key characteristics of lifelong learners has emerged in the literature. The delineation of these characteristics, along with the recognition that they must be developed throughout life rather than via post-compulsory education alone, has meant that primary and secondary education providers are now turning their attention toward framing curriculum in these terms (OECD 2000).

Several key characteristics have been associated with being a lifelong learner. Distilling the recent OECD work on *Definition and selection of competencies* (Rychen & Salganik 2001, 2003), (Istance (2003, pp. 95-97) identifies a set of key competencies and abilities considered fundamental to effective participation in contemporary life:

1.   Acting autonomously
    a. Ability to defend and assert one's rights, interests, responsibilities, limits and needs;
    b. Ability to form and conduct life plans and personal projects; and
    c. Ability to act within the larger context.

2.   Using tools interactively
    a. Ability to use language, symbols and texts interactively;
    b. Ability to use knowledge and information interactively; and
    c. Ability to use technology interactively.

3.   Functioning in socially heterogeneous groups
    a. Ability to relate well to others;
    b. Ability to cooperate; and
    c. Ability to manage and resolve conflict.

The role of schools in developing lifelong learning capacities is becoming clear. According to the OECD, 'children, before leaving the formal education system, must

have "learned how to learn'" under self-motivated and self-managed conditions' (2000, p. 22). The OECD (2000, p. 22) notes that the core learning processes that would lay the foundations for lifelong learning include:
• learning and thinking techniques;
• ways of organising knowledge;
• forms of expression; and
• interpersonal social relations.

Expanding upon these processes, generic cross-curricula skills and competencies have been identified, for example, Trier and Peschar (1995) noted that the following would provide a strong framework for developing lifelong learners:
• problem solving;
• critical thinking;
• communication;
• democratic values;
• understanding of political processes; and
• self-perception and self-confidence.

Rearticulating these competencies in the Australian context of the Queensland Year 1-10 curriculum, the Queensland School Curriculum Council (2002) – since amalgamated into the Queensland Studies Authority – identified the learning outcomes and valued attributes of a lifelong learner:
• A knowledgeable person with deep understanding,
• A complex thinker,
• A creative person,
• An active investigator,
• An effective communicator,
• A participant in an interdependent world, and
• A reflective and self-directed learner.

These learning outcomes and attributes form a general framework for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in schools, both in Queensland and throughout Australia.

The concept of lifelong learning straddles a range of often-competing policy and implementation priorities, but there is general agreement in the literature on the generic capacities, skills and knowledge required for such learning, as well as agreement that the acquisition and application of these prerequisites will enable an individual to continue to make the most of learning opportunities and to contribute to the social and economic well-being of the community.

1.3   Overview of selected international and Australian research literature

This review of selected literature is based on an international and national survey of recent research focused on lifelong learning and the link to education. The particular focus here is on the connection between the compulsory years of schooling and the broad goals of lifelong learning established by the OECD and UNESCO in the mid-1990s. Of particular relevance are works that relate to what are called the 'middle years' or 'middle phase' of learning (or of schooling), generally accepted as related to students between 9-10 and 14 years of age. In order to avoid confusion of terminology in this report the term 'middle years of schooling' will generally be used instead of 'middle

phase of schooling' or 'middle phase of learning', except where a different meaning is intended, or where a direct quote requires the retention of alternative words.

The literature review was undertaken using the descriptors of:
• lifelong learning;
• middle years of schooling;
• schooling;
• education; and
• middle schooling.

While there is a vast literature related to lifelong learning in the context of adult and vocational education, the reports cited here are drawn from those that move beyond this view and have addressed lifelong learning issues of relevance to the middle years of schooling. This literature and the studies described provide a broad basis for considering the case-study reports and recommendations that form the core of this report.

1.3.1 Selected lifelong learning literature

OECD. 2000 Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. 'What Works In Innovation In Education', Motivating Students For Lifelong Learning: Education And Skills. OECD.

This key report notes the crucial nature of engagement and motivation, particularly for adolescents. The report clearly indicates that lifelong learning is not just about preparing young people for a working life that will include several career changes, but that by '2010, many of today's 18-year-olds will be doing jobs that do not even exist at present'. The challenge, therefore, is to 'inculcate the "zest for learning" that young people will need if they are to thrive in 21st-century post-industrial societies' (p. 11). The report also notes in relation to lifelong learning:

> Any new culture of learning must inevitably demand changes in the culture of schools and in the attitudes towards education that are displayed by influential stakeholders – parents, employers, community organisation and regional and local governments. Schools must come to terms with the full implications of lifelong learning, and motiving all adolescents to become lifelong learners is a massive challenge (p. 47).

The core role of school systems in motivating students to remain in school and to learn is recognised and the study reports on 24 school-based innovations underway across 8 countries. The study emphasises that student motivation to participate in learning is drawn from a number of factors that include, but are not limited to their experiences in classrooms. These other factors include individual psychological aspects, and parental, cultural and national attitudes to education.

Of interest is the recognition that national schooling systems are all quite distinct, responding historically to quite different social, cultural and economic evolution and that consequently it is not possible to identify and mandate a one-size-fits-all approach to student motivation and engagement or to the development of lifelong learners. However, this said, there are some trans-national observations regarding the nurturing of lifelong

learners that can be made as a result of the study's findings across the 8 nations. These are summarised below.

♦ Individuality and diversity – an increasing commitment to student-centred learning is demonstrated in a range of ways including teacher strategies, classroom organisation and school design, curriculum and assessment, health and welfare programs, and guidance and counselling programs. Diversity is demonstrated via the provision of expanded educational pathways, greater choice of institution and course, and expanded modes of assessment and learning.

♦ Curriculum reform – many of the nations in the study were vigorously attending to reconceptualising curriculum to take account of changed employment and social conditions. This focus has manifested in a growing interest in curriculum integration of various types and an increasing willingness to legislate to ensure that traditional subject boundaries and practices become cross-disciplinary.

♦ Active learning – 'learning by doing' has become identified as a core component of motivation for students. This concept has been extended to include the notion of community participation and work experience. Across the nations and educational systems studies, the ways in which this out-of-school experience is structured ranges from extracurricular activities, through vocational work experience to universal work experience for all students. The study notes that a movement towards community and work participation by students will necessarily change teachers' perception of their role and work.

♦ Role models – teachers are important and effective modellers of lifelong learning. It is noted 'without this example many students are unlikely to be motivated to become lifelong learners' (p. 39).

♦ New technologies – here it was noted that the increasing power and prevalence of ICTs poses a challenge for teachers in their role as lifelong learners and role models. There is potential for the traditional role of teacher as authority and broker of knowledge in classrooms, as well as traditional pedagogies, to be changed profoundly.

♦ Assessment – there has been some movement internationally towards forms of assessment more appropriately aligned with the foci and priorities of student-centred learning and teaching. In the context of lifelong learning, end-point and other standardised assessment should be seen as only one component of student achievement. Other curricula and extracurricular achievements should contribute to an assessment of student achievement. Additionally, if the priorities of lifelong learning are to be valued by student, teacher and society then their value has to be demonstrated via the assessment system. Additional means of assessment currently in use include portfolios, progress files, training logs and individual log books.

♦ Guidance and counselling services – these services are prominent across the nations participating in the study. The increased provision of these services is linked to increasing diversity of students, expanded choice and learning pathways, and recognition of the importance of transitions in lifelong learning.

♦ Infrastructure improvement – these include adequate financing, in-service training for teachers and other educational staff, financial support for students in need. As well, increased attention to relationships between schools and local communities, including parents, was emphasised.

♦ Appropriate environments – Layout and design of classrooms was identified as a factor of note in student motivation. The report suggests that new technologies and

new clientele, along with the requirements for delivery of new curriculum via new pedagogies, require that school design be rethought. Innovative responses to these contextual changes identified across the participating schools included cybercafes, suitable accommodation for the expanded role of guidance and counselling services and the provision of conference rooms for staff.

Watson, L. (2003) Lifelong Learning In Australia. Lifelong Learning Network, Division Of Communication And Education, University Of Canberra. Canberra: Dest.)

In this report, Watson notes that the international and Australian lifelong learning agenda has been built around the centrality of maintaining and renewing skills in the new economy. This view, in turn, builds upon international evidence pointing to the continued exclusion from social access and economic prosperity of those individuals and groups who are not well educated and who have less well developed skills. Lifelong learning, then, addresses these issues by, on the one hand, developing motivation to learn and to continue to learn; and on the other, ensuring the maintenance of a highly skilled lifelong workforce.

Watson identifies four common themes running through the international and national lifelong learning research:

♦ Informal learning - Here, it is noted that the notion of lifelong learning has been expanded to include all learning both formal and informal that is purposeful. This, claims Watson, is a shift from the former tendency to focus on formal qualifications.
♦ Self-motivated learning - Individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own learning. This marks a significant shift in framings of the learner in the lifelong learning literature. Lifelong learners are no longer defined by the type of education, training or qualification they receive, but by the personal characteristics that will lead them to these achievements. Watson notes (p. 3) that 'lifelong learners must have the motivation and capacity to learn, in any type of setting, with any type of teacher, or simply by themselves'.
♦ Self-funded learning - There is an expectation that lifelong learners will take responsibility for self-funding learning. There is a direct link from here to the issue of motivation to learn as well as a policy concern regarding direct and indirect costs to governments of lifelong learning. The focus is on the development of partnerships between individuals, employers and governments around funding of ongoing learning.
♦ Universal participation - Here, there is recognition that universal participation in the goals and activities of lifelong learning are requisite for nations to meet the demands of the new economic structures. There is additional recognition that universal participation in learning will provide the social cohesion necessary in times of rapid social and economic change.

While the focus of Watson's report is on post-compulsory and adult education within the broader lifelong learning agenda, it begins to contextualise the increasing role of primary and secondary, and middle school education in meeting the goals of lifelong learning.

Building on this more general work, a small number of research projects, related to identifying the characteristics of lifelong learners in school settings, have been

undertaken. The largest and best-known of these is the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) Project out of the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom.

Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) Project (Deakin Crick Et Al, 2003) (Via Citizenship, Lifelong Learning And Assessment)

The aim of the ELLI project was to develop an assessment tool capable of engaging with the qualities and characteristics of effective lifelong learners, and methods of assessing the qualities of effective lifelong learners in a range of contexts. The project indicates four broad categories (cumulative, discrete and inter-related) that make a substantial contribution to lifelong learning, or dimensions of 'learning energy', as outlined below:

- learning capacities – awareness, dispositions and skills;
- learning identity - the beliefs, values and attitudes about learning, self and knowledge held by the learner;
- learning story - the socio-cultural formation of learners over time; and
- learning relationships - the quality and substance of learning relationships (Citizenship, lifelong learning and assessment, p.4).

From a factor analytic study of around 2000 students in state and independent schools in England, seven dimensions or components of 'learning energy' were identified/emerged. These are seen as key to the development of lifelong learners and a learner-centred school culture. A brief summary of each is provided below.

♦ Growth orientation – the technique of learning is seen as learnable and perceived as a lifelong process. Learners have a sense of history and hope with regard to their growth and development as learners. Challenge associated with the process of learning is perceived as being positive.
♦ Critical curiosity – learners have a curiosity to develop deep understandings. They see knowledge as problematic: a part of human inquiry.
♦ Meaning making – links are drawn between new and background knowledge. Knowledge is understood in terms of its connectedness and relevance.
♦ Dependence and fragility (contrast pole is resilience and robustness) – adversity to challenge and risk-taking. Dependent on others and external structures for their self-esteem.
♦ Creativity – focus on different perspectives, knowledge as problematic, embrace imaginative and creative aspects of learning.
♦ Relationships/interdependence – Balance maintained between these, with learners recognising the need to learn with and from others as well as learn independently.
♦ Strategic awareness – knowledge of own learning, engagement in reflective and self-evaluative processes. Includes ability to make judgements, take responsibility for, take risks, discuss, re-motivate for learning.

A number of key themes emerge in relation to lifelong learning and, in turn, revolve around pedagogy and the development of learner-centred and learning-focused communities. These include an approach to pedagogy that focuses attention on the 'quality, processes and values of learning located in relationships and personal and collective stories'; recognises the 'central importance of learning relationships characterised by trust, affirmation and challenge'; and recognises the importance of student ownership of learning. An integration of curriculum outcomes with lifelong learning outcomes is seen as key to the development of lifelong learners. Also seen as

central to the development of effective lifelong learners are a 'learner-centred' strategic focus with teachers and community members as models of learning, and the development of a professional learning and development community around a shared vision and values. One of the positive outcomes for primary and secondary students is the development of a language to talk about learning. This metalanguage is missing from many studies of lifelong learning and classroom learning in general and is a powerful tool in the development of self-esteem and the skills of self-directed learning.

Bryce, J., Frige, R., Mckenzie, P. & Withers, G. (2000). The Era Of Lifelong Learning: Implications For Secondary Schools. Camberwell, Vic.: Acer.

This report is concerned 'with the role that schools can play in engaging young people in their learning and helping them to develop skills and attitudes that will give them an orientation towards learning for life' (p. 1). The authors note that what we understand as 'essential' learning skills, or basic skills, must expand in response to our move towards 'learning society' status and that students and young people must be helped to develop a positive orientation to the skills and characteristics of lifelong learning. This report notes that schools could assist in this process by bringing different elements of learning together more effectively so that skills and knowledge are reinforced and continually developed. While acknowledging that most secondary schools address the elements of lifelong learning, a more effective integration and reinforcement of these elements is needed.

The report identifies a set of key areas for school action in relation to the development of lifelong learners (p. 9):

- the importance of becoming an 'information literate';
- the need to question, reason about, evaluate and justify the relevance of, information;
- the values, dispositions and attitudes associated with lifelong learning;
- generic skills that promote lifelong learning;
- the way that a strong personal self-concept assists learning, and ways this can be developed; and
- ways of helping people learn how to learn.

Of particular interest is the report's discussion of the implications for schools in the turn to lifelong learning. Effective lifelong learning requires that teachers move away from authoritarian, didactic models towards the roles of mentors and facilitators in learner-centred classrooms; that they become, in effect, lifelong learners and part of a robust learning community. Central to this shift is a view of classrooms as learning communities with explicit goals and expectations, active learning, a focus on relationships and cooperation, and diverse tasks and learning activities.

It is also noted that lifelong learning in schools requires a commitment to long-term planning. Lifelong learning cannot be 'transplanted' (p.30) but must be developed over time and sustained by shared commitment.

Bryce, J. & Wither, G. (2003) Engaging Secondary School Students In Lifelong Learning. Camberwell, Vic.: Acer.

Building directly upon the earlier report, *The era of lifelong learning: implications for secondary schools* (2000), this report focuses on identifying the key characteristics of

lifelong learning schools. The authors suggest that, based on the available literature, lifelong learning in schools is more effectively thought of as a 'journey' rather than something that can be imposed onto a school community. In this sense, lifelong learning becomes an orientation to relationships and learning that pervades the entire community. The report suggests that the foundational elements of this journey are (p. 3):

- The centrality of the learner and learner needs, reflected in an orientation towards the demand side of education and training;
- An emphasis on self-directed learning, and the associated requirement of 'learning to learn' as an essential foundation for learning that continues throughout life; and
- A long-term view that encompasses the life cycle.

Based upon these elements, the study itself focused on identifying issues related to:

- information literacy,
- values dispositions and attitudes,
- skill sets beyond the 'basic',
- oneself and one's learning: self concept,
- learning how to learn, and
- teachers as model lifelong learners.

Drawing from case-study data, the report uses these key organisers to describe characteristics and operating principles of effective lifelong learning schools. The specific focus is to identify ways in which schools are variously addressing these organisers and to demonstrate this as an orientation rather than an imposed and transient programmatic change or add-on.

With the exception of some aspects of the ELLI project, these reports attend exclusively to secondary schooling. Little research-based literature is available on lifelong learning in primary school settings. As well, the focus has been on identifying the key characteristics of lifelong learners rather than on identifying the organisational, pedagogic and curricula patterns that will best enable these generic capacities to be developed.

Here, research activity taking place in Australia around the middle years of schooling is of interest. While the lifelong learning literature has tended to differentiate between primary and secondary sectors, the middle years, as conceptualised in Australian educational discourse, spans the physical and cultural divide between primary and secondary schools. Additionally, there has been a raft of activity around the explicit observation of classroom pedagogy as well as attention to the establishment of enabling conditions for effective reform across these years. The following section briefly overviews the growing literature base related to middle years, middle schooling and the middle years of schooling that has emerged in Australia over the last 5 years.

1.3.2   Selected middle years literature

Chadbourne (2002) Middle Schooling In The Middle Years
This report was commissioned by the Australian Education Union (AEU) as a discussion paper on some of the key issues raised around 'middle schooling'. As such, it incorporates input from State reviewers, providing a broad overview of a range of issues

across the Australian context. The report provides useful distinctions between what is understood by the terms 'middle years', 'middle school', and 'middle schooling'.

Drawing on Barratt's 1998 report on the National Middle Schooling Project, the 'middle years' are identified as those which apply specifically to early adolescence, students between the ages of 10-15, or, in Australia, those in Years 5-10. While the term 'Middle School' is seen as referring to organisational units specifically designed to cater for students within these middle years, it does not necessarily encompass the entirety of this group, with some schools focusing on one or two year levels spanning the transition years between the Primary and Secondary Schools divide. Nor does this identifier necessarily indicate a shift away from traditional primary or secondary classroom organisation and pedagogy. On the other hand, the term 'Middle Schooling' refers specifically to a particular orientation to the formal education of young adolescents, or those within the 'middle years'. It is seen as being 'responsive and appropriate to the developmental needs of young adolescents' (Chadbourne, 2002), in line with the principles of 'constructivist pedagogy', embracing the following principles:

- Higher order thinking, holistic learning, critical thinking, problem-solving and lifelong learning;
- Students taking charge of their own learning and constructing their own meanings;
- Integrated and disciplinary curricula that are negotiated, relevant and challenging;
- Cooperative learning and collaborative teaching;
- Authentic, reflective, and outcomes-based assessment;
- Heterogeneous and flexible student groupings;
- Success for every student;
- Small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention in a safe, healthy school environment;
- Emphasis on strong teacher-student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort;
- Democratic governance and shared leadership; and
- Parental and community involvement in student learning.

Chadbourne raises a number of questions in relation to the philosophy and practice of 'middle schooling'. Two questions are of particular significance for the purposes of this report. Firstly, the question of whether or not the needs of young adolescents are unique is considered. Chadbourne warns against an emphasis on the inherent nature of adolescents, and an associated deficit approach to conceptualising adolescence, rather than recognising the social construction of young adolescence. However, in light of a range of recent research on Middle Schooling, on teacher attitudes to students, student outcomes, and rates of alienation among other things, Chadbourne does recognise the need for prioritised action surrounding this group of students.

Another issue raised is that of the nature of 'middle schooling' pedagogy, and whether or not it need be distinctive in order to address the needs of adolescence. Chadbourne argues that in fact, according to the majority of the literature on 'middle schooling', the most appropriate pedagogy is not distinct from notions of 'progressive', 'constructivist' (or more recently, 'productive pedagogies'), which are based more on notions of effective learning rather than distinct needs of young adolescents.

Barratt Shaping Middle Schooling In Australia: A Report Of The National Middle Schooling Project

The National Middle Schooling Project (NMSP) was launched in August 1996. Funded by DEETYA and managed by the ACSA, it built upon the work of recent research, reports and reforms associated with middle schooling, in order to form a collective view of middle schooling in Australia.

This project was based on the recognition that the middle years of schooling 'represent a critical stage of development in the lives of young adolescents' (Executive Summary, p.1). While the middle years are identified within this report as including the age range of 10-15 year old students (p.5), the notion of 'middle schooling' itself is used here to describe the stage of schooling that 'bridges the conventional primary/secondary divide' (p.1). Framed within a context of a history of reform around middle schooling in Australia and internationally, the report advocates a 'collective responsibility for the education and development of young adolescents', with 'greater cooperation and the capacity to assume shared ownership' needed for this development (p.1).

Emerging from the State, Territory and National forums conducted during 1996-97, the project identified a common Australian view of the needs of young adolescents; the principles which guide our work with them and the strategies that are regarded as most appropriate for their positive and successful development. But the project also recognised the diversity within this group of adolescents, with regard to 'cultural, socio-economic, gender and other factors' (p.29). In particular, it was argued that in addition to the range of personal, intellectual and social needs of all students, young adolescents in the 'middle years of schooling have particular physical, emotional and cultural needs that should be addressed' (p.29).

The needs of young adolescents identified as a result of this investigation are outlined below.
♦ *Identity*: exploring how individual and group identities are shaped by social and cultural groups.
♦ *Relationships:* developing productive and affirming relationships with adults and peers in an environment that respects difference and diversity.
♦ *Purpose:* having opportunities to negotiate learning that is useful now, as well as in the future.
♦ *Empowerment:* viewing the world critically and acting independently, cooperatively and responsibly.
♦ *Success:* having multiple opportunities to learn valued knowledge and skills as well as the opportunity to use talents and expertise that students bring to the learning environment.
♦ *Rigour:* taking on realistic learning challenges in an environment characterised by high expectations and constructive and honest feedback.
♦ *Safety:* learning in a safe, caring and stimulating environment that addresses issues of discrimination and harassment (e.g. racism) (p.29-30)

The report also identified a number of principles seen to 'constitute essential components of Middle Schooling'. These principles include: s*chool-based practices* that are underpinned by the following values:
• learner-centred;
• collaboratively organised;
• outcome-based;
• flexibly-constructed;
• ethically-aware;

- community-oriented;
- adequately-resourced; and
- strategically-linked (p.30.).

Further, the project identified a number of characteristics of effective middle schooling practices regarding students, teachers and learners which can be found in full in the report itself (p.31-32).

The key findings of the report refer to 'strategies…which appear to make a significant difference in engaging students with their learning in the middle years of schooling'. These are:
- integrating the curriculum;
- authentic assessment;
- negotiating learning outcomes; and
- team teaching (p.40)

The project gave rise to three key insights regarding the effective development of the strategies that meet the needs of adolescents within 'middle schooling. These are:
- *powerful knowledge* - access to up-to-date information about research and development for those individuals and groups involved in middle schooling;
- *integrated curriculum* - a more relevant and meaningful curriculum was found to be a significant objective of those involved in middle schooling, with existing curriculum frameworks able to assist in the reform process; and,
- *assessment* – linked more closely to the curriculum through a variety of assessment tasks, with authentic assessment a significant notion, and leading to a renewal of curriculum(p.3).

Hill & Russell (1999) Systemic, Whole-School Reform Of The Middle Years Of Schooling
In this report, Hill & Russell provide a broad overview of general guiding principles for the development of middle years of schooling. Commonly agreed principles are identified as:

- educational provision based on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents;
- a *holistic, integrated approach to change*, involving all aspects of schooling including curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, school organisation and school culture;
- establishment within schools of a *sound philosophical base* and a shared set of theoretical constructs and beliefs about middle years reform;
- *partnerships with students* in the development of the curriculum, the ways learning is organised and monitored, and in other aspects of the life of the school community;
- a *close relationship between students and teachers*, so that teachers know and understand each student and students feel supported and connected to the school;
- *collaborative work by teachers* in the planning and teaching of groups of young adolescents;
- *flexible use of time, space and other resources*, replacing the rigidities imposed by existing structures such as traditional timetables and room allocation which run counter to the learning needs of adolescents;
- *use of an outcomes-based approach*, with ongoing recording of progress and achievement in relation to explicit expectations of students;

- *continuity between the three stages of schooling*: the early, middle and later years, while giving recognition to the different needs of each stage;
- *involvement of parents and the community* in productive partnerships in relation to the education of young adolescents;
- *fair and adequate share of resources*, especially in terms of staff, facilities, technology, equipment and materials; and
- *implementation of new approaches* through strategies based on theories and understandings of change.

But as Hill & Russell argue, 'the take-up of these has been piecemeal, localised and short-lived … [with] few well-documented models that adopt a whole-school approach to the middle years … and little known regarding their efficacy' (p.6-7). In response to this shortcoming, Hill & Russell propose a set of strategic intentions to guide reform efforts, such as securing the curriculum essentials, managing the transitions, creating a new model of provision, transforming teaching and learning, creating outward-looking communities, and tooling up for reform.

Out of a review of 24 school-wide reform models spanning the middle years of schooling, undertaken by the American Institutes for Research (1999), a set of general design elements is proposed. These elements are 'hypothesised to be fixed elements in all schools' and stem from earlier research undertaken for the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP) by Crevola and Hill (1997, 1998).

Figure 1.1: General design for improving learning outcomes (Hill & Russell, 1999)

These general design elements were used as the conceptual basis for program designs in the MYRAD project (reviewed next).

Middle Years Research And Development (MYRAD) Project, 2002
Commissioned by the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) and undertaken by the University of Melbourne between 1998 and 2001, MYRAD was focused on improving student learning-outcomes in the middle years (Years 5-9) of schooling. The study evolved over time to focus on developing an agenda to scaffold system-wide reform in the Victorian schooling system in relation to educational provision across these years.

In relation to progress and continuing change, the report identified a number of areas to focus on for reform to be sustained. These include focus on enabling and supporting leaders in managing and supporting reform; and developing strategies for reform, the support of teachers by ongoing professional development, and the continued collection and analysis of data.

Significantly, MYRAD identified a need to focus on the development of a range of effective pedagogical practices; a need to integrate thinking and learning skills across the curriculum; and a need to realise that the development of thinking skills is an area requiring ongoing targeted professional development.

MYRAD also identified several general strategies and practices seen to have contributed to improvement in the middle years, as outlined below:
• *primary-secondary cluster* cooperation, planning and consistency;
• securing a whole-school commitment;
• structured *three-year action planning* based on a whole-school design approach;
• strong investment in targeted, ongoing professional learning by teachers and leaders;
• a data-driven, evidence-based, evaluative approach; and
• provision of resources and specialist support at all levels

The report recommends a need to identify specific practices and strategies in three key areas. These are reproduced below.

Teaching and learning practices in the classroom which:
• strengthen both teacher-student relationships and the challenge of learning';
• are based on a constructivist method of learning;
• involve students in decision-making about content, process and assessment';
• present authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow time for exploration;
• include processes involving cooperation, communication, negotiation and social competencies generally; and
• provide for individual differences in interest, achievement and learning styles.

Curriculum and assessment
• use of learning outcomes required for a knowledge society as the curriculum goals;
• significant reduction in the amount of curriculum content included;
• curriculum, and teaching and learning structure, that include extended cross-disciplinary problem-solving tasks;
• direct teaching about thinking and learning;
• involvement of all students in deciding content, structure, process and assessment; and
• assessment and reporting of the learning outcomes required for a knowledge society.

School organisation for learning
• time-tabling for sustained thinking and learning;
• teacher-student-class arrangement for strengthened teacher-student knowledge and relationships
• team-teaching and professional learning;
• monitoring systems for tracking individual students;

- data-driven, evidence-based processes; and
- leadership team development and professional learning.

Finally, the MYRAD Project also suggested a need to align the message systems of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, with structural and accountability aspects of schooling.

Luke Et al, (2002). Beyond The Middle: A Report about Literacy and Numeracy Development of Target Group Students in the Middle Years Of Schooling,
This study was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training under the Grants for National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme. Its purpose was to study middle years programmes in all Australian States and Territories, and report on the efficacy of these programmes in improving teaching and learning, and student literacy and numeracy outcomes in a range of target groups. The target groups are identified as consisting of: 'students from lower socio-economic communities, aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Language Background Other than English (hereafter LBOTE), rural and remote, and those students struggling with the transition to secondary years' (p.2).

The research methodology was made up of four research elements. These elements consisted of a large-scale national and international literature review on the middle years of schooling (p.2), a curriculum/policy mapping exercise, on-site data collection and analysis of the 'effectiveness of key literacy and/or numeracy strategies', and an analysis of assessment and reporting data obtained from state visits and school case-studies.

Preliminary research of provision, policies and strategies involved the literature review and mapping exercise. Based on an international survey of work on the middle years of schooling, the initial element, the Literature Review, includes an analysis of Australian inquiries, reports, and projects on middle schooling developments during the 1990s. The mapping exercise saw the construction of a 'template' to identify policies, curriculum documents and research reports for each State and Territory, and each employing authority, and the location of such documents through a web-based search. Further to this, each State and Territory employing authority was visited, with data collected from interviews with relevant personnel. An analysis of the data contributed to the amendment of relevant 'curriculum/policy maps', the subsequent construction of a national middle years policy matrix, and the selection of case-study schools (p.3).

Subsequent research involved an analysis of the effectiveness of the provision, policies and strategies within the case-study schools. Within these schools, data were collected via interviews, classroom observations that coded for the extent of productive pedagogies (p.3), unstructured interviews with the classroom teachers, and interviews with appropriate personnel in relation to middle schooling, identified target groups, students, and the numeracy and/or literacy programs being implemented. These case-studies informed the construction of a matrix based on the 'structural arrangements of each school' (p.3). In addition, qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the Productive Pedagogies coding sheet were used to compare the case-study schools with the data corpus obtained from the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard et al. 2001) and informed the findings relating to middle years pedagogy. The assessment and reporting data collected were analysed, with the findings being compiled according to a conceptual framework based around 'authentic assessment' (p.3)

The report concludes with a number of preliminary findings relating to the efficacy of explicit state policy, funding, and curriculum and professional development frameworks for the improvement of classroom pedagogy in the middle years. The report also notes the quite distinct challenges around new communications technologies and texts, along with the challenges of new youth cultures and the changing demographic and racial profile of Australia.

In light of these findings, Beyond the Middle does acknowledge that there is a need for a 'second generation of middle years theorising, research, development and practice – with a stronger focus on intellectual engagement and demand' (p.4). In particular, the final report makes a number of recommendations based on these findings and their limitations. The implications of the research are outlined as a need for the following:

1. A next generation of middle years conceptualisation and research on student pathways.

2. Funding of a cooperative, multi-partner professional development strategy on middle years school innovation.

3. To focus systemic activities on renewing mainstream pedagogy in middle years schooling.

4. To align school-based innovation in middle years pedagogy and assessment to focus on student outcomes.

5. To integrate and align approaches to assessing and reporting on social and academic student outcomes.

6. To commission research into patterns of middle schooling leadership that sustain student outcomes.

7. To support and research distinctive middle years teacher-education programs and career pathways.

8. To coordinate an innovation and dissemination strategy for the findings and recommendation of this report and related strategies.

This cross-section of research related to the middle years identifies a number of the core concerns driving middle years reform in Australia. The first and main concern is with the evident *disengagement from learning* that often manifests in the middle years. Achievement, particularly in numeracy and literacy, plateaus and often regresses as students make the transition from primary to secondary curricula and cultures. This *transition* is another of the core concerns identifiable within the literature. Many students encounter difficulties in the traverse from learner-centred school cultures and pedagogies to the subject-centric culture characteristics of traditional secondary schooling. Another core theme is to identify *appropriate assessment models*: models capable of chronicling achievement in social as well as academic outcomes.

Underwriting these classroom-specific concerns are issues related to the *organisational structures of schools*. Often these structures militate against the kinds of reform to classroom life needed to address the challenges highlighted above. Much of the middle years literature identifies the importance of *new teaching cultures* as well as *new alignments of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment*. These cultures include

opportunities for professional development, team teaching, restructured timetables, timetabled planning time, opportunities for innovation and a shared ethos.

The literature makes it clear that reform in the middle years is more complex than the imposition of new curricula. Sustained, systemic reform, interwoven through and across, a range of levels of practice and discourse is required. Of particular interest to this report are the relationships between the identified skills and capacities required of lifelong learners and the range of pedagogy, curricula, assessment and organisational strategies encouraged by the middle years of schooling literature.

The following literature review focuses more particularly on recent research directed specifically at school reform.

1.3.3   Selected school reform literature

Student Engagement With School: Individual And School-Level Influences, Lsay Research Report 27, (Fullarton, 2002)
Based on Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) in Year 10, this report examines the relationship between adolescent engagement and individual and school-level influences. Notwithstanding social-background factors, the school-related factors of the study have significant implications for the structure and culture of schools, as outlined below.

- While a number of out-of-school factors were seen to impact strongly on student engagement (e.g. Parental influence, gender and socio-economic background) the *nature of the school* itself is seen to have a substantial impact on student engagement.
- At the whole-school level, high engagement was found to be a strong predictor of student-level engagement. The negative effects of socio-economic and indigenous status were found to be moderated by *high school-level engagement*. This has strong implications for increasing student engagement through participation in extracurricular activities.
- At the individual level, a number of factors were seen to impact on student engagement. Among other things, *student perceptions of school climate*, *self-concept of ability*, and *intrinsic motivation* were found to be significant factors contributing to the individual level of engagement of adolescents.
- When the analysis was conducted separately for girls and boys, student perceptions of school, and class climate, were among the strongest predictors for boys, whereas self-concept of ability, and perceptions of school climate (but not class climate) were found to be among the strongest for girls.

CORS (US Context)
The Center for Organizational Re-structuring and Schools (CORS) was commissioned by an office of the U.S. Department of Education to 'conduct a five year program of research on school re-structuring'. Initially, the purpose of the research was to discover whether or not re-structuring actually worked. The research team realised that 're-structuring could have multiple effects' and that there was a need to identify the impact of re-structuring on specific, widely accepted desirable outcomes. The objective of their research was to determine the conditions of school re-structuring that 'promote authentic student achievement' (Newmann *et al.*, 1996).

Newmann & Associates developed a set of 'criteria of authentic intellectual achievement'. These criteria - 'construction of knowledge', 'disciplined inquiry', and 'value beyond school'- apply to both pedagogy and associated assessment practices. In relation to these criteria, they developed a set of standards against which to 'assess the quality of teaching and learning' in what they perceived to be re-structured schools. Specifically, the standards for pedagogy (as instruction) are:
• higher order thinking;
• prior knowledge;
• deep knowledge;
• elaborated communication; and
• connectedness to the world beyond school.

The CORS authors conclude that there exists a range of structural and cultural conditions necessary to support 'authentic pedagogy'. Re-structuring alone will not result in the required improvements to 'intellectual outcomes'. In order to promote a 'professional learning community' that supports authentic achievement, re-structuring must 'support cultural foundations' (Newmann et al., 1996). The findings and conclusions drawn by CORS highlight a need for deep change if re-structuring is to be lasting.

Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) Lingard Et Al. 2001.
In the Queensland context, this study goes a long way towards identifying specific pedagogical and assessment practices that improve the social and intellectual outcomes of students and that are particularly relevant for the middle years of schooling. Derived from the CORS Study by Newmann and Associates in the US, the *QSRLS* offers a view of school reform that focuses on changes in the nature and alignment of the message systems of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment, but that is also sustained by lasting changes in both the structure and culture of schooling.

The research conducted by the *QSRLS* consisted of an international review of a wide range of literature, including available sociology literature and reform literature, a 'statistical analysis of Newmann and Associates' Authentic Instruction Scale, and phone interview with principals of Phase 1 Leading Schools (Ailwood et al, 2000). From this research, the *QSRLS* team developed the notion of *productive pedagogies* as a means of improving intellectual and social outcomes for all students in Queensland State schools. This was then used as a model with which to conduct observations in a large number of classrooms. *Productive pedagogies* identifies a number of dimensions that are necessary but not sufficient for the desired improved outcomes, which include:
intellectual quality;
• connectedness;
• supportive classroom environment; and
• recognition of difference,
and which are made up of twenty elements of pedagogy nested within these dimensions (see Table 1.1).

The *QSRLS* suggests that improved intellectual and social outcomes can be achieved with the support of a 'professional learning community' which places Bernstein's three message systems of schooling (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment), as the central foci for improving student outcomes (King, Ladwig & Lingard, 2000). But these must be aligned if they are not to work at cross-purposes to each other (Lingard, 2000a).

This research indicated that, while Queensland schools are on the whole quite socially supportive environments, the elements of intellectual quality and recognition of difference *do* need attention. The findings of the final report suggest that professional development which focuses on matters of pedagogy and assessment might be the way to develop a professional learning community and to achieve the change necessary for improved and more equitable outcomes (*QSRLS* Research Team, 2001).

Table 1.1: Productive pedagogies dimensions and elements

Intellectual quality	Connectedness	Supportive classroom environment	Recognition of difference
• Higher-order thinking	• Knowledge integration	• Student control	• Cultural knowledges
• Deep knowledge	• Background knowledge	• Social support	• Representative participation
• Deep understanding	• Connectedness beyond the classroom	• Engagement	• Narrative
• Substantive conversation	• Problem-based curriculum	• Explicit criteria	• Group identity
• Knowledge problematic		• Self-regulation	• Citizenship
• Metalanguage			

1.4   Summary of key themes arising from the literature

A number of intersecting themes emerge from these three fields of research. These are summarised in the following sections.

1.4.1 Lifelong learning literature

- *School vision and visioning processes* - The importance of conceptualising a vision for school learning to provide the foundation for the key characteristics of a lifelong learner;
- *Student transitions and transitioning procedures* - The prevalence and importance of transitions in the process of lifelong learning;
- *Changing social and economic conditions demanding a broader skill set* – Recognition of changed economic, technological, social and cultural contexts for student learning. Hence the need for a broader set of 'basic' or 'essential' skills, conceptualised to embrace the ICT-based multi-literacies increasingly demanded in knowledge-based economies and societies;
- *Learner- and learning-focused programs -* The need for lifelong learning to become an overall 'orientation' to learning rather than an add-on to existing school structures and cultures. Students are able to exercise choice and negotiate with teachers regarding the structure and content of learning activities. The organisation of learning incorporates a recognition of difference which leads to a student-driven (as opposed to a content-driven) approach to learning.

1.4.2 Middle Years of Schooling literature

- *Student engagement in learning* – The importance of increased engagement for motivating learning, and acknowledging the extent of disengagement amongst many students in the middle years. 'Fun' is seen as an accidental by-product of programs. 'Pleasure' and 'satisfaction' are derived from sustained engagement in interesting learning activities. Group activities predominate and students (and their learning) are valued by teachers and peers;

- *Greater diversity of adolescent needs and capacities* - The recognition of a clientele who have changed, along with changes in their social, cultural and economic contexts. Identification of special requirements for greater experience of active, self-directed and negotiated learning. Increased depth of experience and involvement in the development of new knowledge;

- *Improved alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems* - Need to balance and link changes in the three instructional 'message' systems – curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – as innovations are developed and implemented;

- *Enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge* – Need for increased repertoires of pedagogy to address the needs of increasingly diverse learners, including increasing the intellectual demand placed on students in classrooms. Grades and marks are supplemented by insights into students and their knowledge, understanding, synthesis of learning and learning styles. Students contribute to teachers' knowledge about their learning through reflective writing and contributions to assessment and reporting processes;

- *Connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school* – Two aspects are significant: first, an emphasis on making connections between theoretical underpinnings and real-life experiences, with consistent efforts made to maximise experiential learning; and second, students are 'connected' to teachers as mentors and, where possible, to other mentors within the school or broader community;

- *Teacher teaming* - Need to develop new contexts for teacher work and support for innovation, especially via cooperative and collaborative teacher teaming – teachers working in teams to undertake collaborative planning and to reflect on program outcomes/student learning. Within this team approach, changes are also apparent in the demise of faculty hierarchies in favour of sub-school/Year-level organisational structures; and in curriculum organisation and delivery through integration across key learning areas (KLAs), with teachers assuming responsibility for more than one subject (e.g., English+SOSE, Maths+Science) and blending lesson content around key themes;

- *Innovative leadership* – Sponsorship by a key educational leader, especially the principal. But innovative organisational structures, and dispersal of leadership through broader professional learning communities, are also important in establishing conditions for ongoing reform.

1.4.3 School reform literature

- *Sustainable innovation* – The need to acknowledge and plan for whole-school organisational reform as a long term commitment by all participants;

- *Focus on both social and academic student outcomes* – Improved student outcomes require a systematic focus on making corresponding changes to

curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. A focus on developing the whole person over time requires attention to be given to social as well as academic achievement;

- **_Linking school culture change with innovative structures_** – Sustained leadership and innovative organisational procedures are keys to establishing and maintaining the conditions for effective school reform. Use of time blocking to enable deeper exploration of content (by utilising higher order thinking to elicit deeper understandings about key issues and about selves), and to develop enhanced student teacher relationships. As a result of time spent together over longer periods, adversarial relationships can be broken down, with superficiality around content and tasks giving way to mutual explorations of issues and concepts, to allow the achievement of new learning for both teacher and student;

- **_Professional learning communities, with teachers as learners_** – Investment in the establishment and maintenance of professional learning and development is essential for effective and sustained school reform. Commitment to professional development - that manifests as a philosophical positioning about middle schooling as a key driving concept; and as an alignment of values and beliefs (about teaching and learning) that evolve across the middle years of schooling;

- **_Evidence-based policy development processes_** – Reforming schools, over recent times, emphasise the building of a capacity and specific mechanisms to collect, analyse, review (and provide feedback on), key data related to school progress, student engagement and attainment, and perceptions of quality held by teachers, students and parents. The major function of this evidence is to ensure that practices are aligned with policies, and that implementation effort is expended in the directions likely to have maximum 'payoff' for the school, as it attempts to generate and sustain reform. There is an increasing need for this evidence to integrate data from within and from beyond the school, from system-wide evaluations and from school-based indicators.

1.5   Implications for culture and structure of school

The research suggests that the key to the strategic development, support and sustainability of a school-wide lifelong learning community/organisation, is the development of school organisational capacity, which is achieved through the cultural and structural components of program coherence and fluidity, whole-school philosophy and a professional learning community. This involves cultures characterised by a balance between:

- focus on change and renewal, and promotion of experimental and innovative practice in order to develop confidence to take risks and break with tradition;
- encouragement of learning and development through high expectations and challenge, and through the supportive and celebratory framework needed to develop motivation for all learners and learning; and
- Relationships that build on the diversity of individuals and their learning.

This is together with structures that provide:
- Time to think and reflect/time to explore authentic tasks/timetabling;
- Access to powerful knowledge, research and development;
- Teacher professional development & leadership re innovative practices & ICTs;
- Partnerships and links/community oriented;
- Learning hub.

These are summarised in Table 1.2, as key factors influencing the development of lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling.

Table 1.2: Key factors influencing the development of lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling

Rigour	Challenge through	Depth of knowledge
		Problem solving
Identity	Support for	Individual learning styles
		Individual needs
	Recognition of	Social identity
		Cultural Identity
Relationships	Communication with	Adults and others (outside peer group)
	Inspiration by	Mentors and role models
Safety	Support to	Take risks
		Participate (in discussions)
Success	Promotion and celebration of	Success
	Promotion of	Self-assessment
	Discussion of	Achievement
	Identification of	Learning goals
Empowerment	Focus on	Student centred learning
		Student control of learning
Purpose	Opportunities to	Negotiate learning now and for the future

These needs are met through a range of practices, as detailed in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Aspects of schooling contributing to the development of lifelong learners in the middle years

Structure	Provides	Alignment of CPA (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment)
		Heterogenous, flexible student groupings
		Team-teaching
		Time to think and reflect
		Time to explore authentic tasks
		Opportunity to discuss achievements with adults
		Access to knowledge and research
		Resources and ICT's
		Incentives (financial/cultural to participate)
		Community-oriented
		Inspirational leadership
		Fluidity between subjects/years
Culture	Focuses on	Learning to learn and learning outcomes
	Provides	Support for risk-taking
		Inspiration
	Celebrates	Learning achievements/developments
	Promotes	Innovative practices and change
		Teachers as Lifelong Learning models and mentors
Assessment	Based on	Outcomes
	Integrates	Learning outcomes
		I.T. skills and processes
		Authentic assessment
	Considers	Individual learning styles
	Developed through	Negotiation with the learner
	Developed around	Individual learning goals
	Informed by	Reflection of learning
	Encourages and provides opportunity for	Self Assessment
	Provides	Opportunity for follow up discussion
Curriculum	Based on	Holistic approach/integrated curriculum
		Reduced curriculum content

	Revolving around	Cross-disciplinary problem-solving
	Incorporating	Learning outcomes
	Explicitly develops	Social practices (collaboration, communication etc.)
	Developed through	Negotiation with the learner
	Focused on	Connection to the learner
		Learning Processes/Skills
	Recognises	Learner needs
	Revolves around	Learner-centred activity
	Establishes	Learning goal-setting
	Caters for	Individual learner differences and abilities
	Recognises	Individual learning styles
		Individual social and cultural identities
Pedagogy	Based on a	Constructivist approach
	Developed through	Collaboration with teachers
Teaching		Negotiation with learners
	Focused on	Challenges/Problem-based (Intellectual rigour)
	Provides	Supportive and fun learning environment
	Exhibits	Ethical awareness
	Revolves around	Learner-centred activity
	Establishes	Learning goal-setting
	Caters for	Individual learner differences and abilities
	Recognises	Individual learning styles
		Individual social and cultural identities
	Identifies/celebrates	Individual achievements and skill developments
	Promotes	Reflection on learning
Learning	Developed through	Negotiation with teachers
		Collaboration with others
	Revolves around	Problem-solving
	Focused on	Goal-setting and evaluation
		Individual learning styles and needs
		ICT & Learning skill development (listen, discuss…)
	Explicitly develops	Social practices (collaboration, communication etc.)
	Involves	Risk-taking
		Participation in discussions
		Reflection on learning (needs, styles, processes, goals, achievements)
Relationships	Focused on	Communication with other adults
		Strong teacher/ student and student/student relationships

These practices in combination, develop in students the following characteristics organised around attitudes, skills, knowledge and practices:

Attitudes	Cherish habit of learning
	Open to new learning and knowledge
	Want to learn with self confidence
	See learning as form of problem-solving
	Are Motivated to learn
	Have a positive picture of self as learner
Skills	Set and evaluate own goals
	Work collaboratively to achieve objectives
	Develop communication skills
	Develop effective listening skills
	Participate and contribute appropriately to discussions
Knowledge	:Knowledge of own learning style
	Recognise gap between existing & target knowledge etc

	Knowledge of processes needed to meet Learning Goals
Practices	Set realistic personal targets for learning
	Take risks necessary to achieve goals
	Assess and Evaluate own achievements
	Reflect on Learning goals and Achievements
	Celebrate Achievements with others

The goal is that these practices will become embodied in students as characteristics of Lifelong Learners: reflectiveness; resourcefulness; confident uncertainty; resilience;

As an outcome of the literature review, a model representing the aspects of schooling, and their interaction, seen to contribute to the development of lifelong learning and lifelong learners in the middle years, was developed (see Chapter 4 for details).

1.6 Other key questions arising from the literature

Relatively clear sets of generic capacities and skills and enabling contexts for lifelong learning have been identified in the 'lifelong learning' literature. Many of these are paralleled in the 'middle years', 'middle schooling' and 'school reform' literatures. These intertwined themes converge to make the middle years a period of special interest in relation to the development of effective lifelong learners, and in relation to the application of school reforms to promote this priority.

Missing from the lifelong learning literature, however, is a specific focus on middle years *classrooms* in all their various forms and operations. Much of the literature dealing with lifelong learning draws from primary and most often, secondary settings. The middle years and middle school literatures establish that these are the years in which the skills of lifelong learning become central and the kinds of reforms taking place in these year levels are opening a space for innovation in relation to organisational structures, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Much of the literature related to lifelong learning deals with the establishment of generic categories of skills and attitudes.

What is of most interest to educators and administrators who work in the middle years are descriptions of what these skills and attitudes might look like in classrooms. What strategies, organisational patterns, programmes and community support act together, and in what combinations, to effect the development of lifelong learning in early adolescence? As a consequence, several focusing questions in relation to the current context of lifelong learning in the middle years emerge, and can be used to direct attention in the investigation of school sites:

Organisation
- What are the curriculum, assessment and reporting, and pedagogic initiatives in place to foster lifelong learning e.g. seamless curriculum, connections between discipline areas?
- What are the timetabling and staff/student organisational initiatives in place to foster lifelong learning?
- How are transitions in and out of the middle years conceptualised and effected?
- What professional development has been provided or is planned and for whom?
- What special programs are underway relevant to lifelong learning?

- How is a learning community orientation established and maintained across the school?
- At the classroom level

Teachers
- What are the pedagogies in place to support diverse learners in the classroom?
- How is intellectual quality deepened in line with the priorities of lifelong learning?
- How is a supportive classroom environment maintained?
- How does the teacher model the characteristics and practices of the lifelong learner?
- How are the characteristics of lifelong learning embedded in classroom curricula, pedagogy and assessment e.g. links across discipline areas, seamless curriculum, connectedness to worlds outside the classroom?
- How is ICT incorporated into learning?

Students
- Impact of middle years reform on classroom experience
- Understanding of lifelong learning
- Experience of deeper learning, supportive classrooms, diverse learning and learners
- Experience of transitions
- Use of ICT in classroom learning

Outcome/achievement data
- Academic outcomes
    What outcomes can be identified in relation to lifelong learning?
    What types of authentic assessment are in place to cater for diverse learning and learners?
- Social outcomes
    What types of assessment are in place?
- Behavioural and attendance outcomes
    What measures of these outcomes are in place?
- Evidence of effectiveness

Chapter 2 – Research Approach

Two major primary data collection activities informed this Project. Both were conducted following the extensive literature review, which shaped the direction of the research activities undertaken. The data collection involved:

- school sites study (including interviews with administrators and teachers and meetings with student focus groups);
- student survey (using a questionnaire for selected students).

2.1 School sites case-studies

Twenty-five schools were carefully selected on the basis that they would be able to present clear evidence of innovation in response to the research question:

> **What practices, processes, strategies and structures best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the 'middle years of schooling'?**

The selection of schools was completed following consultation with and formal approval from senior staff in relevant education authorities in six of the Australian States and Territories (VIC, SA, WA, QLD, NSW, & ACT) and from all systems (State, Catholic and Independent). Schools were chosen on the basis of information supplied by their system representatives, indicating that their orientation was towards encouraging and assisting students to acquire the habit of learning for life, and that innovations and reforms in the middle years of schooling, aimed at achieving that objective, were well underway. The Project schools were purposively chosen to maximise diversity in school types and, to achieve this diversity, the following additional variables were considered in the process of school selection:

- size of school (small/medium/large);
- type of school (primary/secondary/primary+secondary/middle);
- school location (metropolitan/provincial/rural); and
- broad SES level of the community that is served (low/medium/high).

Table 2.1 presents in tabular form an outline of how the diverse set of 25 schools selected for investigation in this Project illustrated these key variables. The modal features of a school selected for study in this Project were: a medium-sized State school enrolling either secondary students or both primary and secondary students, located in a metropolitan centre along or near the Eastern coastline and where parents of the students were broadly middle-class in their income levels and aspirations.

Table 2.1: Overview of schools selected for study in this Project

Schools studied	State / Territory	System[1]			Type[2]				Size[3]			Location[4]			SES level[5]		
		St	Ca	In	P	S	P+S	M	S	M	L	M	P	R	L	M	H
Sunnyside College	VIC	✓					✓		✓					✓		✓	
Greenfield Grammar	VIC			✓			✓				✓	✓					✓
St Resolute	VIC		✓		✓					✓		✓			✓		
Inner West Girls College	VIC	✓				✓			✓			✓				✓	
The Lakes Grammar	VIC			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	
Inner City Primary	VIC	✓			✓					✓		✓			✓		
Murray High	VIC	✓				✓				✓			✓			✓	
Macropod Area	SA	✓					✓			✓				✓		✓	
Marine Bridge	SA	✓						✓			✓	✓				✓	
St Josephs College MS	SA		✓					✓		✓		✓				✓	
Rivervale District High	WA	✓				✓				✓			✓		✓		
South West Senior High	WA	✓				✓				✓		✓			✓		
North Coast Cluster	WA		✓				✓				✓	✓				✓	
Fairstar State High	QLD	✓				✓					✓	✓			✓		
Metro Brisbane Grammar	QLD			✓			✓				✓	✓					✓
Southside Catholic PS	QLD		✓		✓					✓		✓				✓	
Treeline State School	QLD	✓			✓						✓	✓			✓		
Coopersplains Com Coll	QLD	✓					✓				✓	✓				✓	
Mercy College	QLD		✓			✓				✓		✓				✓	
South West Country H+P	NSW	✓					✓			✓			✓			✓	
South West Sydney High	NSW	✓				✓					✓	✓			✓		
Chaucer Primary School	NSW	✓				✓				✓		✓				✓	
Seaville Central School	NSW	✓					✓		✓				✓		✓		
North Canberra School	ACT	✓					✓			✓		✓				✓	
St Mary's Catholic College	ACT		✓			✓				✓		✓				✓	
Totals for features of 25 schools		16	6	3	4	9	10	2	3	14	8	18	5	2	8	15	2

25 = 7 x VIC, 3 x SA, 3 x WA, 6 x QLD, 4 x NSW, 2 x ACT

1	**System**	St=State	Ca=Catholic	In=Independent
2	**Type**	P=Primary	S=Secondary	P+S=p-12 M= Middle School
3	**Size**	S=small	M=medium	L=large
4	**Location**	M=metropolitan	P=provincial	R=rural
5	**SES level**	L=low	M=medium	H=high

2.1.1 Methodology for school sites investigations

A Project investigator visited each site after all necessary university ethical research clearances and system/school approval protocols had been completed. At each school site the following activities were conducted, usually over 2 days:

• Interview(s) with key school administrators (including with a Coordinator or Head of the Middle School, if appointed and available);
• Interview(s) with key teacher(s) operating a designated initiative for middle years students;
• A focus group meeting with a group of selected middle years students; and
• A student survey ('School and me!') of a 5% random sample of diverse middle years students currently experiencing the designated initiative.

2.1.2 Structured interviews and student focus groups meetings

All Project investigators used common guidelines for the structured interviews (with administrators and key teachers), and for the focus group meetings (with selected students). These guidelines were based on the stated Research Question, with probes drawn from the previously listed 'core component changes' for best practice in schooling, identified in the Literature review. The Model presented in Chapter 4 (Innovation features for developing lifelong learning in the middle years of schooling) which was developed from the literature, was used as a prompt by interviewers

Interview questions, for each of the first two staff groups and for each student focus group, are listed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Questions used for school site investigations for the Project

Questions for school administrators (Principal, Head of MYS)
- Ethos, philosophy, vision and school initiatives in the middle years of schooling;
- Demographic data, especially community, parent and staff profiles;
- Social/behavioural/academic outcomes for students in the middle years of schooling;
- Approach to the middle years of schooling (e.g., structural organisation, curriculum);
- Detail on school initiatives for the middle years of schooling (e.g. timetabling, staffing);
- Data on student pathways, performance and post-school destinations;
- Evidence of successful social and academic student Outcomes associated with initiative;
- School priorities for development of pedagogy, assessment and reporting;
- School priority on professional development and staff training;
- Parent/community links with associated with initiatives in the middle years of schooling.

Questions for selected teachers
- What are the initiatives in middle schooling in your school? Explain
- What is the hope for benefits of these initiatives?
- What middle years of schooling signifying practices do you use in your classroom (eg integrated curriculum, negotiated learning etc). Explain;
- What benefits have you seen in terms of student learning as a result of these initiatives? Do you have specific measures of efficacy?
- What is your understanding of lifelong learning? Explain
- How do you promote lifelong learning in your pedagogical practices?
- Do you model lifelong learning? How? Why?
Productive pedagogies – display productive pedagogies definitions and ask teachers to comment on:
- Their use of productive pedagogies in the classroom;
- What are they good at;
- What are they working on;
- What do they need to improve

Questions for student focus group
- What differences are there between school this year compared to last year?

- What are some of the things that you think are different between the way you learn at this school, compared to other schools?
- What is your attitude towards learning – do you like it, do you look forward to learning new things, what makes you interested in learning?
- What are your ideas (perceptions) about your teachers – what is it about your teachers that help you to learn?
- What have you learnt about your own learning? How do you learn best? Can you give examples of when learning was effective. What did you learn?
- What do you think lifelong learning might be? Do you think you have been learning for life? How has what you have learned here helped prepare you for life?
- Do you think of teachers as learners? Can you give examples?

Format for school sites case-studies

There was a common format (with some variations in usage) for each of the school case-studies. This common format is shown in Table 2.3. Full details of these case studies are given in Appendix A of this report and extracts of their findings (see Appendix C) have been used as illustrative examples in Chapter 4, the discussion paper: '*Implementing and sustaining school reform in the middle years*', (*q.v.).*

Table 2.3 Format used to conduct and report school case-studies

1. SCHOOL CONTEXT
       1.1 Location
       1.2 About the school
       1.3 Students/Staff/Community
2. UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING
       2.1 Philosophy
       2.2 School Structure
3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING
       3.1 Pedagogy – linking pedagogy and curriculum with lifelong learning/learning in the middle years
              3.1.1 Years 5-7
              3.1.2 Years 8-10
       3.2 Middle years curriculum
       3.3. Assessment and reporting
       3.4 Timetabling and staff/student organisation
       3.5 Professional development
       3.6 Special programs
4. TEACHER INSIGHTS
       4.1 Productive pedagogies
               4.1.1 Recognition of difference
               4.1.2 Connectedness
               4.1.3 Intellectual quality
               4.1.4 Supportive environment
       4.2 Lifelong learning
5. STUDENT INSIGHTS
       5.1 Middle years reforms
       5.2 Lifelong learning

2.2 Student survey ('School and me!')

A five percent (5%) random sample of students was taken from each Year level of the middle years of schooling initiations currently operating in 16 of the participating schools in 4 states (VIC, SA, QLD, & NSW).

Using an on-line middle years Instrument, ("School and me!"), this survey was designed to record and measure students' perceptions of the pedagogic practices they encountered in their classrooms, indices of their classroom environment and risk factors. An assessment of their 'resilience' – one of the factors examined in this survey - was seen as an indicator of self-efficacy.

A parallel pen-and-paper version of the survey Instrument [see Appendix B] was used by students when local conditions did not permit on-line testing.

2.2.1 Middle years survey Instrument: 'School and me!'

The survey Instrument comprised 101 items of which 69 were indicators of students' experience of their Middle Years schooling Environment ('MYENV' - refer to Table 3.2 in Chapter 3), 20 were indicators of students' Middle Years Resilience ('MYRES' - refer to Table 3.3), 7 were open-ended qualitative items, and 5 were demographic characteristics including birth month, birth year, gender, academic Year level, and school.

2.2.2 Analysis

The data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative dimensions and the findings are reported in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 – Research Findings

3.1 List of school sites

Twenty-five Australian schools (tabulate below according to state or territory) were investigated in this Project by conducting site case-studies. Those investigations included interviews with school administrators and selected teachers, and meetings with focus groups of selected students. An additional student survey ("School and me!"), gave an insight into students perceptions of their school environment and of their resilience. Except for some sections in the Student survey's statistical analysis (for which schools gave permission to show their real names) pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of schools and their members.   See Appendix A for comprehensive reports on the school sites Case-studies. The following pages present a full statistical analysis of the Student survey ("School and me!").

Table 3.1: List of selected school sites case-studied for the Project using pseudonyms

Victoria	Sunnyside P-12 College
	Greenfield Grammar School
	St Resolute's Catholic Primary School
	Inner West Girls College
	The Lakes Grammar School
	Inner City Primary School
	Murray High School
South Australia	Macropod Area School
	Marine Bridge Years 6 to 12 School
	St Josephs College Middle School
Western Australia	Rivervale District High School
	South West Senior High School
	North Coast Cluster Learning Project
Queensland	Fairstar State High School
	Metro Brisbane Grammar School
	Brisbane Southside Catholic Primary School
	Treeline State School
	Coopersplains Community College
	Mercy College
New South Wales	South West Country High School and Primary School
	South West Sydney High School
	Chaucer Primary School
	Seaville Central School
Australian Capital Territory	North Canberra School
	St Mary's Catholic College

3.2 Student survey ('School and me')

3.2.1 Overview

Students involved in this part of the study completed the middle years survey Instrument ('School and me!'), a total of 101 items. [See Appendix B]. Though designed as an on-line instrument, a parallel pen and paper version was used for students where local conditions did not permit on-line testing.

This survey was designed to record and measure students' perceptions of the pedagogic practices they encountered in their classrooms, indices of their classroom environment, and risk factors. An assessment of their 'resilience' – a personal factor affecting their ability and willingness to maintain intelligent engagement with uncertainties, and one of the factors examined in this survey - was seen as an indicator of self-efficacy.

The survey Instrument comprised 101 items of which 69 were indicators of students' experience of their Middle Years schooling Environment (MYENV). The Middle Years Environment scale, which was demonstrated to be a uni-dimensional construct, was further factor analysed into five sub-scales of pragmatic interest (see Table 3.2):
• Pedagogy for understanding;
• Support and engagement;
• Academic safety;
• Higher order thinking (HOT) and 'fun' teaching; and
• Problem-based learning (PBL)and recognition of difference.

The Instrument included a further 20 items which were indicators of students' Middle Years Resilience' (the MYRES scale - Table 3.3). Items in two MYRES sub-scales (*Academic self-efficacy* and *Meta-knowledge academic strategies* were highly reliable, while constituent items in the remaining two sub-scales (*Team worker* and *Communicative self-efficacy*) were of much lower reliability.

Also included were 7 open-ended qualitative items, and 5 demographic characteristics, *viz*: birth month, birth year, gender, school name and academic Year level - (though, due to uneven sampling issues, Year level data were recoded into the Year level groupings of Years 5-6, Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9).

3.2.2 Method

Respondents
The random sample of middle years students taken for this survey returned a total of 291 respondents from 16 of the 25 schools investigated in the Project. The schools from which these students came were located in 4 states (VIC, SA, QLD & NSW). The sample taken represented, as far as possible, 5% of students from each Year level of the middle years of schooling initiatives currently operating in participating schools. These Project schools had previously been selected purposively to maximise diversity in terms of:
• size of school (small/medium/large);
• type of school (primary/secondary/primary+secondary/middle);
• school location (metropolitan/provincial/rural); and

- broad SES level (socio-economic status) of the community served (low/medium/high).

The resulting student sample for this survey is therefore not claimed to be fully representative of all Australian students in the middle years of schooling.

Female students represented fifty point one percent (50.1%) of the sample. There was no significant variation in sample Gender distribution across Year levels ($\chi^2(4) = 5.905$, n.s.). Three point four percent (3.4%) of respondents did not provide Year level data and are not included in Year level analysis. Seven point two percent (7.2%) of students did not disclose their gender. Students were selected from at least two Year levels in 13 of the schools. In the remaining 3 schools students were available at only one Year level on the day of testing.

3.2.3 Middle Years Environment (MYENV) scale

The 69 items of this Scale consisted of multiple indicators designed to measure elements as diverse as teachers' pedagogic practices, the school environment, students' concern for safety, willingness to take risks, and other factors such as the use of problem-based learning (PBL) and recognition of cultural differences (as shown in Table 3.2). Factor analysis was used to reduce the elements to the five sub-scales shown in Table 3.2. This represents a solution of convenience used to preserve aspects of the environment that are of pragmatic interest. The factor analysis revealed that the school environment could best be treated as a uni-dimensional construct.

Table 3.2: MYENV (Middle Years Environment) sub-scales and constituent elements

SUB-SCALES				
Pedagogy for understanding	Support & Engagement	Academic Safety	HOT & Fun Teaching	PBL & Recognition of difference
Reflection Explicit criteria Explicit goals	Supportive Environment Engagement with teacher	Safe environment for risk-taking Substantive conversation.	Meta-strategies Deep Knowledge Learning is fun	Problem based learning Recognition of difference

3.2.4 Middle Years Resilience (MYRES) scale

The 20 items of this MYRES (Middle Years Resilience) scale consisted of multiple indicators designed to measure students' academic self-efficacy and engagement, willingness to engage with peers, communication self-efficacy, and meta-knowledge of academic strategies. Scales comprised between 3 and 10 items representing the constituent elements shown in Table 3.3.

Scale reliabilities for two of the sub-scales (*Academic self-efficacy* and *Meta-knowledge academic strategies*) were acceptable as indicated (marked **) in Table 3.3. The reliability of the other two sub-scales (*Team worker* and *Communicative self-efficacy*) were undesirably low (marked *) and results for these scales should be regarded with caution. Principal components analysis indicated that the scale could be treated as uni-dimensional as the ratio of the first to second eigen value exceeded 4:1 and the uni-dimensional solution accounts for 54% of the total variance. Total scale reliability exceeds .78 (Cronbach's alpha). As such, the total MYRES score is used in subsequent analyses as an overall indicator of students' resilience, and sub-scales are used to target particular domains of difference.

Table 3.3: MYRES (Middle Years Resilience) sub-scales and constituent elements

Academic self-efficacy	Team worker	Communicative self-efficacy	Meta-knowledge academic strategies
Academic self-efficacy Importance of learning Positive study habits Relevance of study	Willingness to work with others Desire to work alone Productivity of group work	Personal effectiveness Need to be heard	Novice meta knowledge
$\alpha = .87^{**}$	$\alpha = .31^{*}$	$\alpha = .43^{*}$	$\alpha = .70^{**}$

3.2.5 Procedure

Each student retrospectively rated their school experiences by indicating their agreement with the 69 statements describing their classroom experiences (the MYENV scale), and the 20 indicators of personal resilience (MYRES). Individual items were collapsed to produce mean scores for each of the 5 domains of the MYENV, and the 4 domains of the MYRES.

3.2.6 Results

Scoring

Averaged scales are used throughout to provide consistent scoring and aid interpretation. A scale score of one indicates minimal evidence of the domain characteristic, whereas a score of 5 indicates evidence of a high degree of the domain characteristic. Initial data diagnostics indicated that the data were distributed normally. Since there was considerable variation in sampling across the Year levels, and small cell sizes in the early and later years in the sample, the data were recoded into 4 Year level groups: Years 5-6, Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9. This recoding of groups resulted in more comparable cell sizes and better partitioning of the variance for analysis.

Preliminary analysis – Middle Years Resilience (MYRES)

A 2 x 4 x 16 ANOVA: Gender (trial: non-trial schools) by Year level (5 & 6, 7, 8, 9) by School was conducted to examine the joint influence of site and demographic variables on student resilience scores. There were no significant interactions and no significant variation in resilience scores between sites. But significant main effects were observed for Gender ($F(1,255)=4.70$, $p<.05$) and Year level ($F(4,255)=2.44$, $p <.05$) on the MYRES overall score. There was no significant Trial membership by Year level interaction ($F(4,255)=1.062$, n.s.). Table 3.4 shows means for Male and Female students at each Year level collapsed over sites. Female resilience scores were significantly higher than male students' scores at each Year level.

Table 3.4: Mean MYRES scores by gender and Year level

		Year level			
		5 & 6	7	8	9
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Gender	Boys	3.72 (.09)	3.69 (.07)	3.68 (.06)	3.45 (.16)
	Girls	4.01 (.09)	3.74 (.06)	3.76 (.06)	3.70 (.11)

NB: *sem* < .17 for each cell.

To investigate further the nature of the apparent differences in resilience a MANOVA was conducted on the sub-scales of the MYRES. Unsurprisingly, no significant

interaction was found between Gender and Year level (F(1,258)=5.286, p<.05, η^2=.003). But significant, albeit small, multivariate main effects were observed for both Gender and Year level **(F(4,255)=1.622**, p<.05, η^2=.025 and **F(12,255)=2.297**, p<.05, η^2=.038 respectively).

The significant main effects were limited to *Academic meta-knowledge* for both Gender and Year level **(F(1,258)=1.424**, p<.05, η^2=.015 and **F(3,258)=1.220**, p<.05, η^2=.038 respectively). Differences were also reported in the *Academic self-efficacy* sub-scale between Year levels (F(3,258)=5.626, p<.01, η^2=.061).

Trend analysis reveals a significant linear decline in *Academic self-efficacy* scores across Years. A similar trend is evident for the *Academic strategy* score (p<.05). The former of these is easily explained as an apparent loss of self-efficacy from the early middle years on. In part, this may reflect a lack of insight by students in Year 5 who characteristically rate themselves as 'highly capable'. As students age they may make more realistic assessments of their own capabilities, or they may simply be more capable of making finer distinctions about their own performances.

Note that neither of these interpretations infers that students' self perceptions are necessarily negative, or that students necessarily have low estimations of their capabilities. Students mean level of self-efficacy is still above the scale notional mid point of 3.0 in Year 9, indicating that in general students feel positive about their capabilities. This is not such a surprising finding, since the sampled schools were considered innovative in their middle years initiatives. Note however, that while the *sem* (standard error of measurement) indicates little variation between students' scores within a Year level, the *sem* for Year 9 students is nearly twice that of the Year 5 & 6 students, indicating that we can detect considerably more individual variation in self-efficacy in Year 9 than in the earlier Years.

Preliminary analysis – Middle Years Environment (MYENV)
Middle years survey Instrument characteristics

The Environment section of the Instrument contains a series of indicators designed to measure 12 aspects of students' school environment which may be anticipated to link to a student's resilience. The twelve aspects reflect 5 domains of the school environment:
• pedagogic practices in the school;
• engagement with teachers;
• support networks;
• risk taking and safety; and
• engagement with the school.

Table 3.5: Mean MYRES sub-scale scores by Year level within Gender

Gender		Year	5 & 6 Mean	(sem.)	7 Mean	(sem.)	8 Mean	(sem.)	9 Mean	(sem.)
	Boys	Academic self-efficacy	4.232	*.139*	3.853	*.112*	3.935	*.086*	3.443	*.246*
		Team work	3.379	.212	3.505	.170	3.316	.132	3.143	.375
		Communicative self-efficacy	3.068	.158	3.422	.127	3.339	.098	3.571	.280
		Academic meta-knowledge	4.212	.127	4.174	.102	4.127	.079	3.643	.225
	Girls	Academic self-efficacy	4.344	*.130*	3.838	*.090*	4.015	*.090*	4.006	*.163*
		Team work	3.693	.199	3.429	.138	3.302	.136	3.042	.248
		Communicative self-efficacy	3.460	.148	3.494	.103	3.572	.102	3.583	.185
		Academic meta-knowledge	4.530	*.119*	4.021	*.083*	4.165	*.082*	4.172	*.149*

NB: Italicised results indicate significant change in scores across Year level ($p<.05$).

For the purposes of this report, composite scales are produced by computing item means for those items which load on each of the twelve aspects. For analytic purposes these twelve domains have been reduced to 5 domains. In the interest of brevity, construct validity analyses will not be reported in detail here. But it should be noted briefly that the aspects of school environment represented in Table 3.6, both correspond to the designed structure of the Instrument and account for some 62% of the total variance.

Table 3.6: Reliabilities of aspects of MYENV domains

		α
R	e	3
E	p	8
β	o	2
5	a	6
6		6
8	b	2
M		4
9	e	0
a		2
9	h	2
R	c	6

The 5 domains are a conceptual grouping that demonstrated good simple structure that was derived from second order factor analysis of students' mean scores on the 12 aspects of school environments (Table 3.7). Most importantly, it should be noted that factor analyses suggested that it was likely that the scale was uni-dimensional. If so, recordings of the 12 aspects, and the 5 domains scores, are somewhat arbitrary devices used to provide a frame of reference that is consistent with middle years and pedagogic reform literature, rather than a reflection of any distinct emergent latent structure in the data. Put more simply - a single score can be used to represent students' perceptions of the school environment in a meaningful way.

Table 3.7: Factor loadings for the five MYENV sub-scales

Analysis of MYENV total scores

Given the apparent underlying uni-dimensionality of the Middle Years Environment Instrument (**MYENV**), an initial analysis consisted of the investigation of the contribution of demographic influences such as Year level, Gender and School site on the total score collapsed over all aspects. This was followed by an investigation of the overall correlation between resilience and environment as unitary constructs and by the elements of resilience.

A 2 x 4 x 16 ANOVA of Gender *(trial: non-trial schools)* by *Year level (5 & 6, 7, 8, 9) by School* indicated a significant two way interaction between Gender and School ($F(13,211) = 2.58$, $p<.01$) which accounted for some 13.7% of the variance. A further significant main effect was evident for school ($F(1,211) = 3.66$, $p<.001$), which accounted for some 19.5% of the variance. The power of both significant main effects exceeded 0.90. There were no other significant main effects. A simple main effects analysis of MYENV by school within the genders indicated significant but slight differences in boys' and girls' rankings of the sites. School site effects accounted for some 32.7% of variance in girls' MYENV scores ($F(14,132) = 4.58$, $p<.001$) compared to 24.2% of the variance for boys ($F(13,108) = 2.65$, $p<.01$). Examination of Figure 3.1, indicates that, in general, girls report more positive feelings about their school environment than do boys.

Figure 3.1: Box plots of perception of school environment scores (MYENV), by school and gender
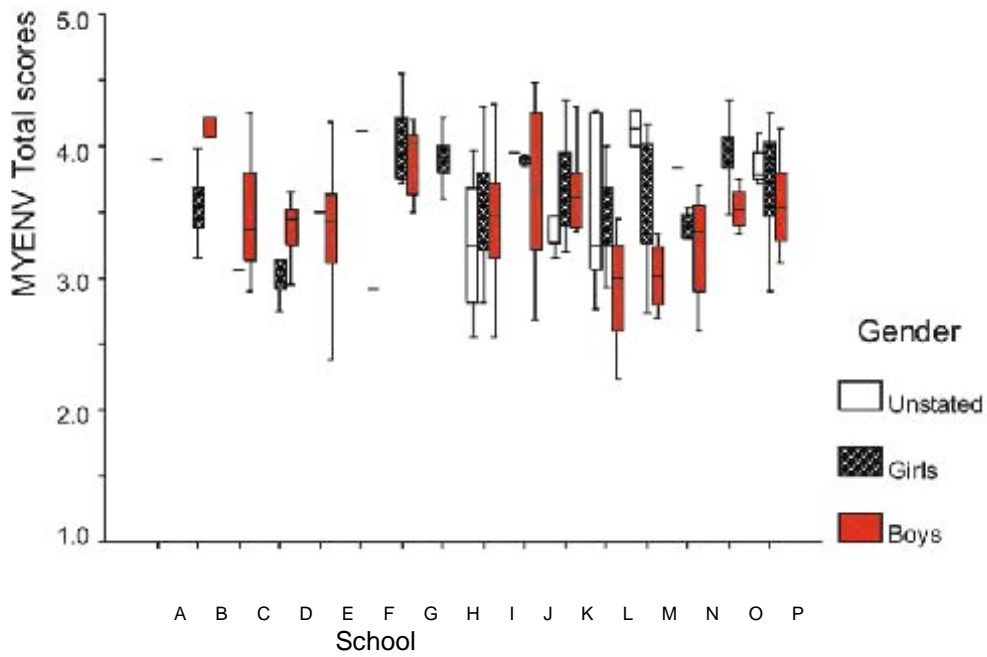
Tukey b post hoc tests revealed that the lowest and highest scoring schools significantly differed from the majority of other schools (refer to Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.2: Distribution of MYENV scores by school, collapsed over genders
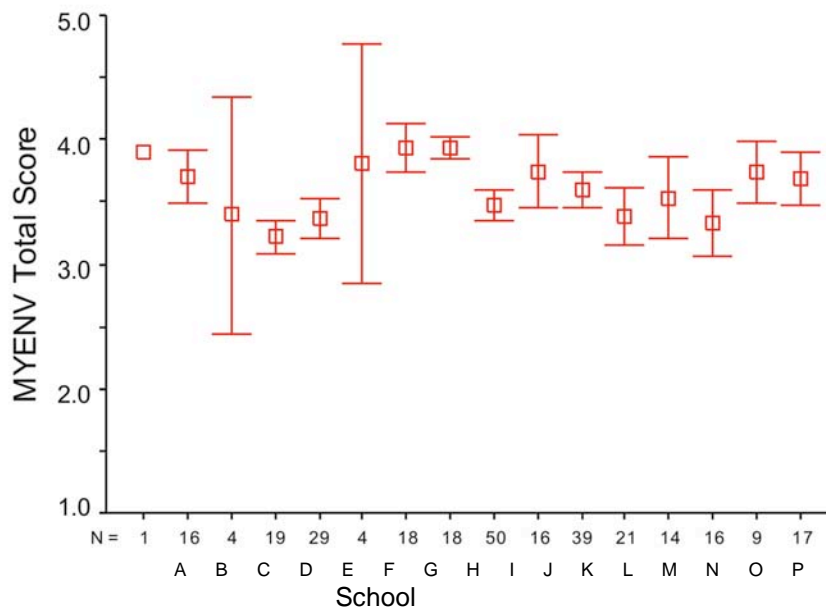
Since the overall pattern is one of consistency and the 'Schools' effect does little more than establish that the Instrument is indeed sensitive to site differences the data were reanalysed - collapsed over Schools by Gender and Year level (see Figure 3.3). This was done since the partitioning of variance by School may have masked Year level effects.

Figure 3.3: Distribution of MYENV scores by State jurisdiction
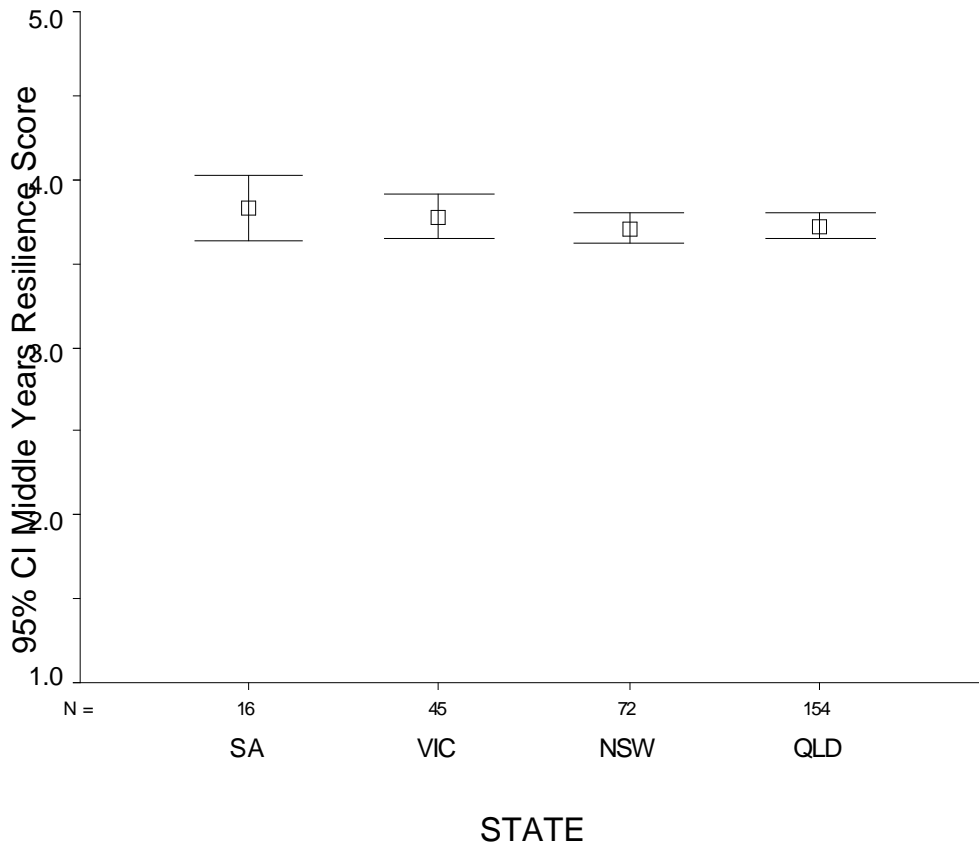
Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of environment scores collapsed across schools within specific State jurisdictions. Since the sample is not representative or randomly sampled further analysis is not warranted. However, it is of interest to note that there appears to be relative uniformity in satisfaction with the school environments provided across the four State jurisdictions.

Year level effects
The 2 x 4 ANOVA showed no significant Gender by Year Level interaction, but significant main effects for Gender ($F(1,260) = $ **6.63**, $p<.05$) and Year level ($F(3,260) = $ **7.54**, $p<.05$). In general, girls reported more positive feelings about the school environment than did boys. The Year level effect appears to be accounted for by non-critical acceptance of the school environment by Years 5-6 students. In general, students reported their school's environment in a positive light. This is reflected in the mean MYENV score in Table 3.8. Note that in all Year levels MYENV total score is above 3.0.

Table 3.8: MYENV scores by Year level

				7		8		9	
	M	E	M		M		M	
	ɤ a	1	8 a	ʊ	6 a	θ	9 a	ß
M	ɤ a	1	3 a	θ	3 a	θ	θ a	ß

a ß

Relationship between school environment and student resilience

The clearest overall picture of the influence of school environment on children's resilience may be obtained by simple correlational analysis of the relationship between the total scale scores. Simple Pearson's *r* indicates a moderate positive correlation between school environment scores and overall resilience ($r = .47$, $p < .001$). A more detailed analysis looking at the overall effect of environmental factors on MYRES sub-scales suggests that a positive school environment is associated with higher *Academic self-efficacy* ($r = .60$, $p < .01$), and *Academic strategic knowledge* ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). A more modest relationship is exhibited between overall environment and *Communicative self-efficacy* ($r = .15$, $p < .05$). There is effectively no relationship between MYENV total scores and the *Team worker* scale ($r = .05$).

The same pattern is observed within each gender, though different relationships are evident by Year level as shown in Table 3.9.

Perhaps the most striking result is the high positive correlation between satisfaction with the school environment in Year 9 and students' *Academic self-efficacy*. While the same relationship is apparent in the earlier Years (Years 5-6, and Year 7) it is substantially more evident in the latter part of the middle years.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, there is also evidence of a positive correlation between perceptions of school environment and *Academic meta-knowledge*. Although in this instance it appears that the relationship is highest in Years 5 and 6. Note that while the correlation declines with Year level, the overall positive association remains through to Year 9. These results contrast markedly with the results for the Engagement and Social Support elements of the resilience scores. In particular there is no evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between a student's *Team worker* score (an index of the student's social engagement with others in work settings) and MYENV scores.

There is evidence of a small positive association between students' *Communicative self-efficacy* at Year 7 and their MYENV score, perhaps indicating that *Communicative self-efficacy* is something of a focus at Year 7. No comparable results for self-efficacy are evident for any of the other Year levels.

Table 3.9: Correlations between MYENV total score and resilience scores across Year levels

	7	8
A	*	
B		
C		1
D	8	7

*: 6.

The following abbreviations are used in Table 3.9: ACADSE: *Academic self-efficacy*; TEAMWRKR: *Team worker*; COMSE: *Communicative Self- efficacy*; ACKSTRAT: *Academic strategic knowledge*

Qualitative observations

To investigate students' feelings about their work in a broader sense, a series of six open-ended questions were posed. They asked:
- How do you feel about the quality of your work?
- How could the quality of your work be improved?
- Does your school provide a safe and supportive environment for students? Please explain.
- Do you feel confident to take risks at school (like asking questions, and giving answers in class)?
- How does your classroom work connect to what happens outside of classes in the world beyond the classroom?
- What would you do to improve your school experience?
- What have you learnt about yourself this year?

Responses from 113 respondents are available for analysis from the on-line Instrument. Responses to the open-ended items collected from pen and paper Instruments have not yet been entered into computer format for analysis. Preliminary reading does not suggest that the response patterns observed in the pen and paper Instruments substantially differ from those obtained on-line.

The first of these examinations of student responses reveals considerable satisfaction with the quality of their work. Fifty-five percent (55%) of respondents expressed high positive valence about the work done in class. This included statements like '7/10', 'good', and 'I do well'. These statements were often accompanied by comments indicating that students believed the work was appropriately challenging, or that they could complete the set work in a timely fashion.

A somewhat smaller percentage (18%) rated the work of middling quality (figures of '5/10' or '5.5 out of 10' are typically cited. These respondents usually cite lack of

challenge as being an issue, as well as variation between subject areas and student's interest. Several students called for greater relevance, and greater 'fun' in class.

High levels of dissatisfaction are not evident in the responses. One student made a strong negative evaluation of class-work, saying*; 'boring and shite, 'cause its about stuff that we don't want to know about.'* However, this response was quite atypical - the remaining responses are more nondescript than harshly critical of the quality of school work.

Interestingly when students were asked what could improve the quality of their school work, they did not necessarily address the question in terms of what teachers could do. Thirty percent (30%) of students apparently saw this as an issue of personal responsibility. They said things like: 'I could work harder', or 'faster', 'not talk', and so forth. Another 6.2% claimed no improvement was necessary.

The remainder identified issues that would be familiar to anyone closely involved in education. They wanted school to be 'more fun' and teachers to be 'more enthusiastic' - allowing more student direction of activities, and incorporating more student interests, and relevant materials. Students also indicated that other students could be distracting or disruptive and that the use of methods such as reducing class size might help to eliminate this. Students also noted that quality of work would be improved by less classroom harassment. It was not clear if this was directed at other student behaviour, or interactions between students and teachers.

Students' qualitative responses to the question of '*does the school provide a safe and supportive environment?*' paint a picture slightly different from that obtained from the quantitative data reported earlier. While 78.8% of students report that their school is a safe and supportive environment with high alertness to bullying and harassment and clear rules and systems to deal with those issues, a significant minority (15.9%) still report some concerns with bullying. Students note that teachers 'can't be everywhere'. The remaining 5.3% of responses were uninformative.

Clearly students feel safe to take educative risks in the classroom. Eighty-six percent (86%) responded with simple affirmatives to that question. Elaborations consisted of notes that the asking of questions was an essential part of the learning experience, and that students were rarely teased or laughed at for errors. Several students denied that class participation was a risky activity. Only 2.7% of students claimed that they felt at risk while participating in class. But 7.9% noted that the degree of risk associated with classroom participation was situational, and that they might feel at risk with particular teachers, or where their subject knowledge was low.

Students were asked to comment on the relevance of their classroom experience to the broader world. While 52% of respondents claimed some degree of relevance or connectedness of classroom work to the greater world, many of the elaborating comments suggested a rather shallow interpretation of the question. Students in many instances cited generalities, such as: 'Maths is likely to help in doing my job'; or referred to one or two narrowly focused skills such as resume writing, or cooking, or work habits. Ten point six percent (10.6%) of overall responses referred to these types of activities. After removing this type of response, the degree of perceived connectedness drops to 41.4%, although an additional 5.3% of students noted that their classroom activities allowed self-direction, which may be an oblique reference to the development of useful

work habits, although the exact meaning of these statements is unclear. A further 18.6% of respondents failed to see any connection between classroom activities and the greater world.

Examination of student responses identified 15 themes which related to how students' schooling experience might be improved. These themes are outlined in Table 3.10, ranked in descending order of occurrence. Most evident from this Table is the large number of idiosyncratic responses, which indicated a diversity of opinion usually expressed as a single statement. These are classified as 'Other' statements. While these sorts of statements account for nearly 30% of responses they defy meaningful reduction to themes. They include such issues as the management of under-performing teachers, and having a student voice in the continuance of teaching staff ('*Try and get the principal to talk to the students, get our feedback on the teachers, then offer teachers longer contracts, rather than force them to leave')*, as well as curriculum content and even the stocking of the school tuck shop. Some responses simply defy description such as: '*Bring back naptime!'; 'Allow older students to beat some sense into younger ones (only if they are being arrogant and not respecting seniors)'; 'More interaction between older and younger students'.* The most common response that could clearly be identified as a recurrent theme is a request for better school infrastructure. Usually this took the form of a request for air-conditioning, swimming pools or the like. But a number of students also targeted the library, or general school maintenance and hygiene (toilets in particular were identified as needing more/better maintenance).

Seven point one percent (7.1%) of respondents claimed they were satisfied with their schools, and that they required no improvement. A number of responses indicated that students would appreciate further updating of computing resources or that they found that the current resources were too limited (refer to table 3.10).

Note that bullying and harassment were identified as issues. In particular, statements such as: '*Perhaps bring in some more rules on the bullying policy that are a bit harsher',* suggest that students were concerned about the enforcement of bullying policies in schools*.*

Table 3.10: Themes emerging from the question of how students' school experience might be improved expressed as percentage occurrence

Improvement	%
Other/ Improve teachers/Improve self/more supervision/less supervision/more holidays/more group work/more sport...	29.3
Improve infrastructure (air-conditioning, swimming pools, library)	21.2
No improvement necessary	7.1
Improve computing resources	6.2
Make schooling more fun	5.3
Make schools co-ed	4.4
Decrease Harassment/Bullying	3.5
Longer recess and lunch breaks	3.5
Fewer rules/less strict	1.8
Streaming	1.8
No response	15.9

Examination of students' responses to the last item about their personal learnings over the previous year indicated that the majority of students felt self-efficacious and capable. They also frequently mentioned learning social skills, and tolerance.

3.2.7 Discussion

This survey represents a simple assessment of students' resilience and their perceptions of their learning environments, in schools that offer 'middle years of schooling' programs. It was an exploratory review conducted in conjunction with the series of case-studies reported in the main study.

Given the relative youth of middle years research, and the lack of a clear understanding of the extent and type of variation in middle years programs across the country, it was not clear to the researchers what sort of causal structures might link factors such as a student's gender and Year level, to their perceptions of the school environment and their overall resilience. Indeed, since the environment-construct envisioned contained aspects of the social as well as the physical environment, it seemed likely that in part the relationship may be recursive. That is to say that high student resilience may result in a better environment and vice versa. With this in mind the investigation has examined variation between student ratings of resilience - and their perceptions of the schooling environment by gender, Year level, and site - to look for evidence of differences in aspects of middle schooling in different settings.

Gender has been seen as a primary influence on students' learning experience for many years. Recently, there has been some concern that the feminisation of schooling has lead to the alienation of boys at school. Similarly, student self-concept, and self-efficacy in particular are known historically to vary by the Year level of students. The current study began by investigating the interaction between student gender and Year level across sites. As might be expected from considerable research findings reported elsewhere, girls in general reported higher resilience scores than boys. In addition, resilience levels for both boys and girls declined from Year 5-6 to Year 9.

The simplest interpretation of these observations is that boys do indeed feel more disenfranchised at school than girls, and that this is reflected in lower levels of resilience. However we cannot rule out the possibility that the differential response pattern by gender may not reflect real differences in resilience, but rather a greater impact of social desirability bias ('willingness to please') on the part of girls. It may be that the girls are simply less likely to criticise the school system than boys.

The apparent decline in resilience scores over the middle years is interesting. The data for girls parallel those derived for boys. The greatest decline appears to be from Year 8 to Year 9, which supports the notion that this decline in rating represents a genuine change in students' perceptions of self, particularly in terms of their confidence in their knowledge and intellectual skills. No such difference was detected in the social indicators. This is not to say that we have evidence that Year 9 students are much more at risk academically than say Year 8 students, as the overall resilience score is still positive. Nevertheless this does suggest that around Year 9 students, as a whole, may be becoming more aware of the limitations of their academic abilities.

Simple eyeball investigation of the distribution of student perceptions of their schooling environment revealed considerable differences between sites. But these differences do

not appear to be related to either the State jurisdiction (VIC, SA, QLD & NSW in these instances) or the employing authority sector (Government, Catholic or Independent) in which the school operates. Indeed, when the data from schools are collapsed to the State level, a picture of considerable uniformity of perception is apparent. This uniformity does not appear to be a result of Instrument insensitivity, as both median scores and the semi-interquartile ranges for individual schools vary considerably (refer to Figure 3.1). Rather it appears that within States and within sectors there is considerable variation in student perceptions. Highest satisfaction with the school environment was found in a private school, and - perhaps surprisingly - the greatest dissatisfaction was found in another private school.

It certainly does appear that there is a moderate relationship between students' perceptions of their environment and their resilience. But this is most evident in terms of their Academic self-efficacy, rather than in other, broader indicators of student resilience – such as their perceived ability to work in teams (i.e., their ability to use social and work networks for support), or their Communicative self-efficacy.

Qualitative responses to open ended questions are most illuminating with regard to the issue of school safety. It is quite clear that while students on the whole feel academically safe in these schools, some of the social safety issues appear little different from those that we might expect to find in other schools. Fifteen point six percent (15.6%) of students still report a concern about bullying - in conjunction with clear recognition of a school's adoption of strong policies regarding harassment and bullying. It seems that students are recognising the difficulty associated with enforcing anti-bullying policies.

To conclude on a more positive note, examination of student responses to the final item (about their personal learnings over the previous year) indicated that the majority of respondent students felt self-efficacious and capable.

Chapter 4 – Discussion paper: Implementing and sustaining school reform in the middle years

4.1 Lifelong learning in the middle years of schooling: A conceptual model

This project set out to identify the practices, processes, strategies and structures that lead to a focus and promotion of the skills of lifelong learning for middle years students. This is a particularly important investigation because currently, both middle schooling and the development of lifelong learning attributes are recognised as key reform areas for our schooling systems. The hope is that these innovations will lead to the development of young people with the desirable attributes to live and cope effectively in their future world. It is postulated that the benefits of a school environment, which incorporates both middle schooling signifying practices AND a focus on the development of lifelong learning attributes, will be an ideal environment in which young people can prepare for their future lives.

As a starting point for this investigation, the literature around the two key themes in the topic, that is, middle schooling and lifelong learning, were reviewed. In addition, because both of these elements are part of reforming school practices, a literature review of reforming schools was also conducted. This provided a three-dimensional literature base as a platform for the project research phase. As a means of linking and merging the information from the literature about the likely innovation features for the three dimensions into a meaningful whole, a model was developed. The model - presented later in this chapter as Figure 4.1 represents the likely innovation features for the overall development of school organisation and activity to initiate, support and sustain the meaningful, lasting changes that best promote lifelong learning outcomes for the middle years context, as identified and mapped from the informing literature in a visual format for ease of access and utilisation during the research phase of the project. However, the next section provides the written details of the key innovations features for each of the three themes.

4.1.1 Theory meets practice: What we expected to see in innovating schools

When all the detail from the three strands of reviewed literature was considered, several broad parameters were identified, listed, and described as most likely to feature in innovative practice in those schools attempting to emphasise 'lifelong learning' processes, and to develop students to become 'lifelong learners' in the middle years of schooling. These parameters, drawn from the three relevant areas of the reviewed literature, are:

From the 'Lifelong learning' literature:
School vision and visioning processes

Conceptualising a holistic vision for learning including, but not limited to, that provided at the school, is important in providing both strategic directions for the whole school and a firm foundation for developing the key characteristics of lifelong learners among students.

Student transitions and transitioning procedures
In the course of lifelong learning, learners experience many important transitions. Some of the key transitions for most learners are from home to early institutional care settings; to pre-school and early school learning; from primary to secondary school settings; to senior schooling within secondary levels; to work and further training and post-school education.

Changing social and economic conditions demanding a broader skill set
These transitions are not negotiated in linear or expected ways by all, or even most, learners. We need to recognise and acknowledge that the economic, technological, social and cultural contexts for student learning have changed significantly over recent times. There is a need for a broader set of 'basic' or 'essential' skills, that are conceptualised to embrace the ICT-based multi-literacies increasingly demanded in knowledge-based economies and societies, but move beyond them into cultural, interpersonal and intra-personal domains. Gardiner's concept of 'multiple intelligences' and Goffman's concept of 'emotional intelligence' are very important in this context.

Learner- and learning-focused programs
Schools, as previously organised to meet the demands of the 'industrial era', emphasised 'batch processing' of sets of similar-aged students with one teacher in a classroom focusing on a subject or text. In the emerging 'post-industrial era' *evidence of learning* matters more than *degree of comfort in teaching*. There is a need for *lifelong learning* to become an overall 'orientation' to learning rather than an add-on to existing school structures and cultures. Increasingly, students are able to exercise choice and negotiate with teachers regarding the structure and content of learning activities. The organisation of learning incorporates recognition of difference, which leads to a student-driven (as opposed to a content-driven) approach to learning.

From the 'Middle years of schooling' literature

Student engagement in learning
The reform literature has long attested to the fundamental importance of student 'engagement' as a motivator for learning, and student 'disengagement' and 'alienation from learning', as being key symptoms of failure in the design and implementation of learning programs. At the same time as there is a need to 'up the ante' intellectually in schools, there is a need for the learning to be engaging, interesting and connected to things that matter in the world of students. Increasingly, 'fun' is seen as an important if accidental by-product of programs, and 'pleasure' and 'satisfaction' can, and should be derived from sustained engagement in interesting learning activities. There is a renewed emphasis on planned group activities to develop both social and intellectual capacities and skills.

Greater diversity in adolescent needs and capacities
School learning programs were traditionally organised with end-points or transitions built in, with the progressive elimination of students being a desired by-product of scholastic

failure. Now continuity matters; and all (or most) students stay at school longer. There is also a need to recognise that the clientele of schools has changed, along with changes in students' social, cultural and economic contexts. Recognition of difference, both within groups, and with regard to individual learners, reveals a learning environment of greater complexity for teachers. Identification of special requirements for some learners is now expected practice. In addition, the majority of learners now demand more experience of active, self-directed and negotiated learning, featuring increased depth of experience and involvement in the development of new knowledge.

Improved alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems
To sustain a reform in schools, there is a need to balance, and link changes in, the three key instructional 'message' systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (CPA). As innovations are developed and implemented, one of these systems often monopolises teacher time and effort and, as a result, there are 'imbalances' built into the reform. For example, there is often much collaborative effort expended in developing and documenting curriculum plans, with less attention being given to pedagogy and assessment. But if major energy is expended on improving assessment, there is often a lessening of concentration on curriculum and pedagogic systems. Reducing curriculum content-clutter, or overload, and providing opportunities for deeper cross- or trans-disciplinary problem-solving, appear in the reform literature as key strategies to assist in re-aligning the three key message systems.

Enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge
One of the hardest reforms to achieve appears to be that of a sustained and shared focus on improved intellectual Outcomes in schools. The very complexity of school operations, particularly in large schools and/or diverse communities, appears to militate against staff being able to maintain such a focus collectively and individually. There seems to be a need both to increase the range of pedagogical repertoires available to teachers and to improve the systems by which knowledge and skills are shared with others and put into practice.

Connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school
This connectedness is important if change is to be sustained. Two aspects appear most significant in the literature. First, there needs to be an emphasis on making relevant connections for students between theoretical underpinnings and real-life experiences, with consistent efforts made to maximise experiential learning. Second, students need to be 'connected' to teachers as mentors (and, where possible, connected to other adult mentors within the school or broader community), to maximise the 'zone of proximal development' which they experience in the learning process.

Teacher teaming
Over recent times, school administrators have found the need to develop new contexts for teachers' purposes, and support for innovation in their practices. The major strategy adopted has been the development and use of cooperative and collaborative teacher teams. Teachers, as members of semi-autonomous work-groups, undertake collaborative planning for Year levels, for example; or they collaborate in trans-disciplinary teams; or in subject groups; or in key learning areas (KLAs). These teams also reflect on program Outcomes (such as the impact of behaviour management strategies and pastoral care programs) and on the quality of student learning (such as the moderation of assessment standards). Teacher teaming is sometimes discussed as if it is a universal 'good', but there are often issues - relating to the capacity and

experience of individual team members, the quality of relationships and interpersonal dynamics, and team leadership - which can be vexed questions for resolution in practice.

Innovative leadership
Sponsorship of a school-based initiative by a key educational leader, especially the principal, is usually important to initiate and legitimate it in the eyes of other staff members. But innovative organisational structures, and dispersal of leadership among staff within broader professional learning communities, are also important in establishing the conditions for ongoing, sustained reform.

From the 'School reform' Literature
Sustainable innovation
There is a need to acknowledge and plan for whole-school organisational reform as a long term commitment by all participants, even if funding priorities and accountabilities, and system imperatives, act to 'swamp' the overall energy levels of staff. Feedback 'loops' built into school systems as they are reformed can both re-direct and interrupt habitual practices, obviating the need for extensive overhauls and supporting an evolutionary approach to reform. 'Succession planning' and 'staff proofing' of key initiators appear to be crucial to sustain an innovation, as are effective management systems and ongoing analysis of evidence of impact.

Focus on both social and academic outcomes for students
A sustained focus on developing the whole person requires attention to be given to the full range of possible Outcomes from schooling. In addition to the obvious *academic achievement* Outcomes, schools also provide many opportunities to develop and refine many *social* Outcomes. Even if such social Outcomes are more difficult to measure and monitor, and sometimes exist more precariously on the edge of the formal curriculum, they can have powerful impacts on the quality of the learning experienced by students and on their motivation to be involved subsequently in formal learning situations. Opportunities for self-assessment, and for having individual learning styles acknowledged, can matter to learners in the middle years.

Linking school culture change with innovative structures
Change in school culture driven by sustained leadership and the development of innovative organisational procedures appears to be a key way of establishing and maintaining the conditions for effective school reform. Any innovation must systematically address all elements that relate to its function in a school context. Innovative ways of blocking time; more efficient and effective use of space and other resources; strategies which deepen relationships and enhance the sense of responsibility and accountability to others; all appear to be important levers for sustaining reform in schools. Providing inspiration and support for risk-taking staff and celebrating their learning achievements can be important motivators of sustained action.

Professional learning communities, with teachers as learners
Teachers make or break reform. Nothing innovative will sustain in schools unless a sufficient number of the school's professional staff 'own' an initiative. Investment in the establishment and maintenance of professional learning of staff is essential for effective and sustained school reform. In part this involves a philosophical re-positioning around the importance of the 'middle years of schooling' and of the development of students as 'lifelong learners'. But for this to translate into changes in values and beliefs about teaching and learning and into changed pedagogic practices, concerted and committed

professional learning has to occur among teachers in groups and as a whole staff - otherwise commitment to the reform will rest with too few staff. In addition, if teachers are not developing as learners themselves, they will be limited role models for students attempting to become 'lifelong learners'.

Evidence-based policy development processes
Reforming schools over recent times emphasise the building of a capacity and specific mechanisms to collect, analyse, review and provide feedback on key data related to school progress, student engagement and attainment, and perceptions of quality held by teachers, students and parents. The major purpose of use of this evidence is to ensure that practices are aligned with policies, that implementation effort is expended in the directions likely to have maximum 'payoff' for the school, as it attempts to generate and sustain reform. This evidence needs to increase the integration of data from within and beyond the school, from system-wide evaluations and school-based indicators.

4.1.2 Modeling the likely innovations

As noted in the previous section, a model of the key innovating features was developed for use in the research phase of this project.   The model was developed using a backwards mapping approach towards the interplay of the key variables and parameters explained in the previous section. This notion of backward mapping has been utilised in other key projects (see for example the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Survey [QSRLS]). First, various aspects of school **structure** were placed as a framing circle. This included aspects such as teacher professional development, timetabling, strategic focus and so on (see complete list in model). Within this circle, an inner circle identifies the aspects related to school **culture**, that is features such as a focus on change and renewal, experimentation and innovation (see model for full list).   A third circle within this represents the role of teachers and teaching as pivotal to achieving lifelong learning for young people. These framing circles represent the various likely innovation features, as predicted by the informing literature, for developing lifelong learning attributes in middle school learners. In the model, these are various shades of green. Cutting across the structural, cultural and teaching features are three school organisational capacity elements: coherent and fluid program for middle years of schooling; the school as a professional learning community; and a learning-focussed whole-school philosophy, represented in the model as a blue triangle.

Sitting across these circles are the **instructional** innovation features, presented diagrammatically as a triangle (purple) because of the three elements comprised within: curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. These three key message systems of schooling are core to the structure of the model. This focus, and the alignment of these message systems, become central to the culture of the school as a means of promoting the improvement of students intellectual and social outcomes (see QSRLS). With regard to curriculum, it is predicted that integrated and inquiry based curriculum will feature and there will be a focus on the learner. Assessment will be authentic and formative, and will have aspects which are negotiated.   Pedagogies will be problem-based and process oriented and will be learning-centred and differentiated.

Two further sets of variables were described as influential over both the quality of school programs and student outcomes: **leadership** and **relationships**. The literature suggests that both of these aspects are considered to play an important, though indirect, role in

acting to orient the structure and culture of the school towards lifelong learning. For leadership, this includes the various models, mentors and leaders of learning, strategic links and partnerships, and the provision of a culture of care (see model for complete list). With respect to relationships, innovation features included factors such as peer support, the influence of parents and significant others, and teachers as mentors (see model for list). These aspects are represented in the model as red arrow blocks, as they have significant capacity to direct the structural, cultural and instructional variables around them. At the core and hence the centre of the model are **learners and learning outcomes**, which ideally demonstrate attitudes of lifelong learning and lifelong learners (yellow in the diagram).

With these dimensions, the Model was conceived of as operating as a series of rotating 'tops' fixed in successively higher planes reaching up to the **learners and learning outcomes**. These planes could be calibrated to 'lock' at certain positions, thereby providing key intersection points between variables and parameters. The **leadership** and **relationships** elements were conceived of as key 'interrupters' or 'aligners' of the variables in operation in school settings.

Using the Model in this Project
As detailed in Chapter 2 of this report, two major primary data collection activities informed this Project. Both were conducted following the extensive literature review, which shaped the direction of the research activities undertaken. The data collection involved:
- school sites study (including interviews with administrators and teachers and meetings with student focus groups);
- student survey (using a questionnaire for selected students).

The model was used as an organiser to address the research question:

> **What practices, processes, strategies and structures best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the 'middle years of schooling'?**

The model was used by the interviewers as a prompt to direct questions during interviews with various respondents. Interviewees also had access to the diagram as a visual prompt. Using this model as a base, the innovations of particular schools could not only be located and described, but could also be related systematically to the broader literature in the field. In fact, many school staff being interviewed found this figure useful as an *aide memoire* which assisted the process of explaining how the innovation operated in their school.

Figure 4.1: Innovation features for Developing Lifelong Learners in the Middle Years of Schooling (Model)
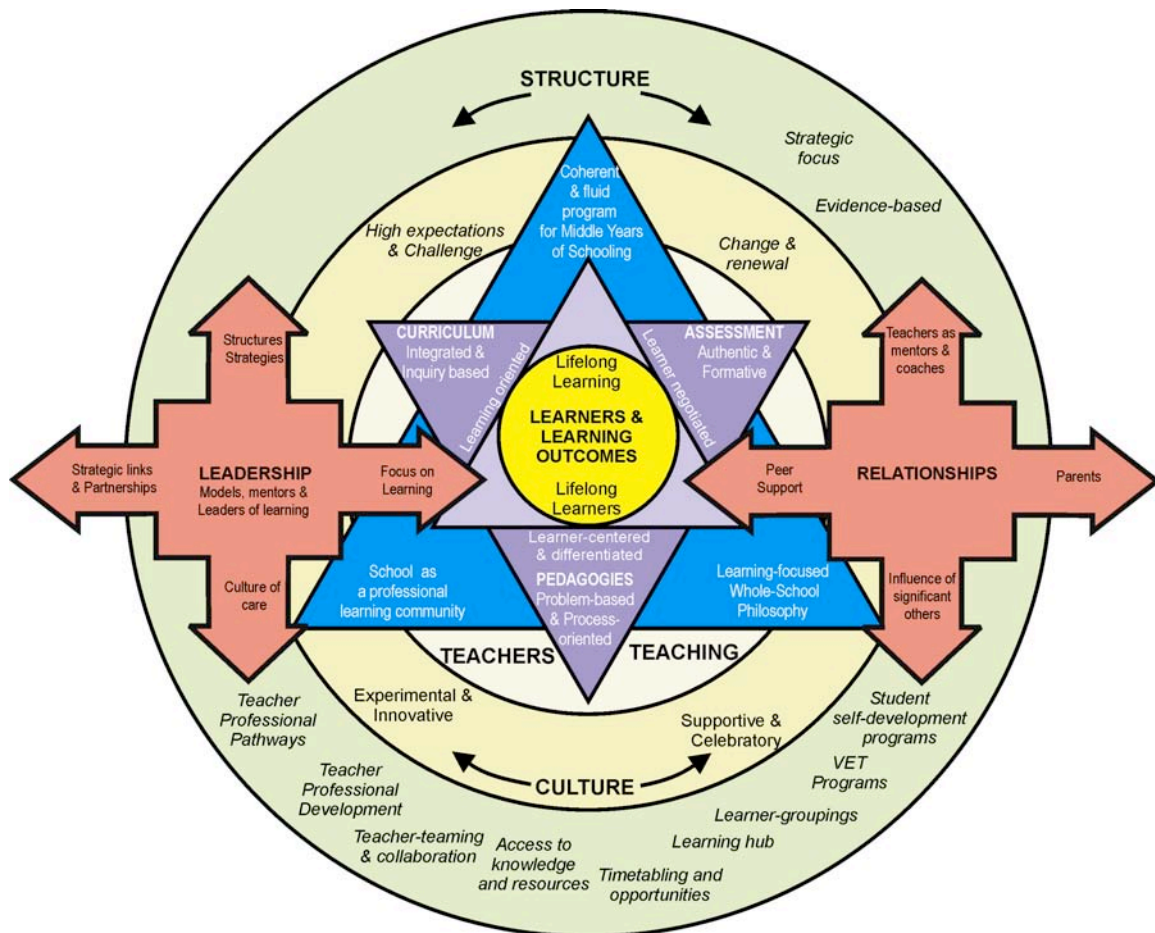
RESEARCH QUESTION
What practices, processes, strategies and structures best promote
'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners'
in the 'middle years of schooling'

4.2 Practice in reforming schools: What we found

As part of their enquiries at each site, investigators were asked to rate the apparent evidence for existence of each of the core component changes listed and described in Section 4.1.1 according to the following scale:

A = Strongly and currently evidenced throughout the school;
B = Some evidence that this component is in operation in part of the school;
C = Little or no evidence that this component is operating, or has been operating.

These ratings were collated, with groupings of components identified for particular periods in the reform trajectory of each school. It was found that the likely innovations identified in the literature review were indeed reflected in practice in the reforming schools that have commenced innovations in both middle schooling and lifelong learning. Furthermore, there is a pattern in the way in which these innovations typically are implemented, and that progression of the innovations and sustaining of innovations proceeds in identifiable patterns, with some preferred pathways evident. Hence, a relationship between the likely innovation features and when they are attended to could be determined from the data, in the overall attempt to identify the practices and processes, strategies and structures to best promote lifelong learning in the middle years of schooling, and how to efficiently attend to the reforms across each of the aspects over a period of time.

As a result of the distillation of the massive amount of data produced in response to the activity described above (see Site Case Studies in Appendix A), Figure 4.2 was devised. It presents a three-phase model of the general sequence in which reforming schools attend to particular core component changes in their reform initiatives. As this figure indicates, there are three broad phases of any major school-based reform in the middle years:

Initiation phase that typically occupies the first year or two;
Development phase that typically consumes the next two to five years; and
Consolidation phase that can last over a further five to ten years.

The time periods associated with each of the three phases are indicative only, being based on the experience of the reforming schools investigated in this Project. But they do reinforce many other findings in the research literature attesting to the fact that schooling reform takes much more time than planners typically expect or allocate.

Figure 4.2: Three-phase model of core component changes in reforming schools
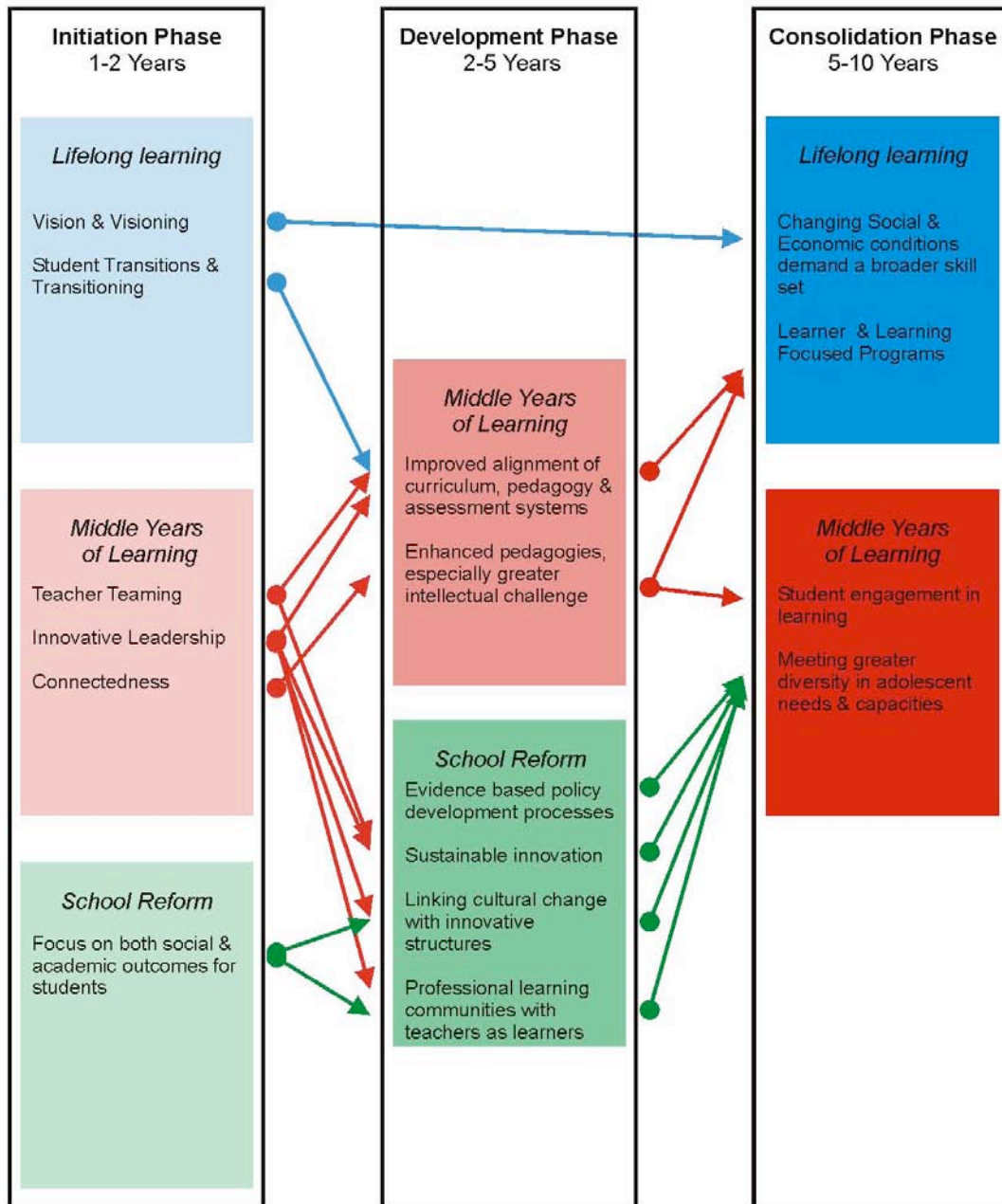
3.2.1 Three-phase model of change

The arrows in Figure 4.2 indicate typical pathways that Project schools used to sustain their reforms and to progress from one phase to another. This pattern also suggests that some core change variables may be more critical in this trajectory, as some factors appear to connect more variables across two phases. For example, the formation of *teacher teaming,* the development of new models of *innovative leadership* and a *focus on both social and academic outcomes for students* appear most critical for progression

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from Initiation to Development phases. *Enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge* in classroom work, appears to be most critical for successful progression from the Development to Consolidation phases.

The following discussion outlines or expands on the main features of this broadly sequential model by which schools typically introduce a reform. It includes illustrative examples extracted from the full case-study reports for a range of school sites surveyed. So as not to interrupt the general flow of the discussion, these examples are grouped for convenience in Appendix C and are referred to, when appropriate, through footnotes in the text. The complete case-studies, from which these extracts have been taken, are presented in Appendix A.

It is timely to note that schools case-studied in this project were chosen on the basis of information supplied by their system representatives, indicating that their orientation was towards encouraging and assisting students to acquire the habit of learning for life, and that innovations and reforms in the middle years of schooling, aimed at achieving that objective, were well underway. Most of these schools - whether primary, secondary or other types; whether State, Catholic or Independent; whether rural or city, wealthy or poor - were in the second (or Development) phase of implementation of their reforms.[1] Some schools were still in the Initiation phase, or progressing from the Initiation to the Development phase.[2] Relatively few schools were clearly progressing into, or fully operating in, the final or Consolidation phase.[3]

The Initiation Phase (1-2 years)

In this phase, schools typically first attend to some of the previously listed core components for reform, that had been identified in the review of literature selected from the three fields of educational research named in the brief:
- from the 'lifelong learning' literature, the core component changes of:
    School vision and visioning processes; and
    Student transitions and transitioning procedures;
- from the 'middle years of schooling' literature:
    Teacher teaming;
    Innovative leadership; and
    Connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school;
- from the 'school reform' literature*:*
    Focus on both social and academic outcomes for students.

School vision and visioning processes
Vision and visioning processes are very important early components of the Initiation phase for most reforming schools.[4] For this component and others in this first phase, there is an indication that initial reform tends to be driven by key school leaders, such as administrators - though an effective plan for change is best developed and sustained through the consensus and dedication of all staff involved. The more staff convinced of the worth of a program of reform, the more likely that it will progress and be taken through to full fruition.

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[1] See Appendix C Items 1.1 to 1.3
[2] See Appendix C Item 2.1
[3] See Appendix C Items 3.1 to 3.2
[4] See Appendix C Items 4.1 to 4.3

Implementation of reform procedures often involves forsaking various long-held educational traditions, to adopt radically different ideas. Change of this kind can meet with strong opposition from some teachers who are comfortable and confident with established methods. Inspiring teachers to be enthusiastic about new and relatively untried approaches can require considerable leadership skill. In schools where parent representative bodies have a strong voice, there might be further resistance from that quarter.

Once accomplished, school vision statements are not usually returned to until much later in the reform process. Given the effort to organise ideas into a clear, simple proposal and to generate sufficient agreement among staff and other stake-holders, this reluctance to modify and revise a hard-won vision statement is understandable.

The nature of the reform program chosen by innovative schools was generally influenced by recent advances in educational theory; advances that drew attention to the need for teaching and learning to be more connected to the real world; that advocated critical thinking, and assessment of consequences of learning and behaviour, rather than mere passive absorption of facts and rules; that saw the middle years of schooling - the time of emerging adolescence - as a critical time for laying the foundations of efficient learning and self-control; that favoured a student-oriented, whole-person and subject-integrated approach, involving choice and personal responsibility for teacher and learner alike; that realised the value of positive inter-personal relationships and leadership at all levels in a learning community; that advocated equal opportunity for all; that recognised and valued individual differences of experience, capacity, culture, subject interests and preferred learning styles; that suggested better time-management strategies; and that promoted the merits of cooperation and collaboration between individuals, within communities and across wider societal and academic boundaries.

Every established school is a unique social and educational entity with a unique and varied clientele. It arose within its own geographical, social, intellectual and economic setting. It has its individual history and character; its successes and failures; its strengths and weaknesses; its natural richnesses and needs; and its own set of specific objectives, within a general framework of basic educational requirements established by government regulation.

Though many of the characteristics and objectives of all schools are able to be changed if required, the necessity for making particular changes will be greater in some schools than in others, depending on the required urgency for local individual outcomes - academic, behavioural or social. Similarly, some common desirable outcomes will be achieved by different schools in different ways, depending on the resources available and the circumstances that apply.

So, while certain practices, processes, strategies and structures might be found to be represented and identified as 'most effective' across the totality of schools oriented towards, or achieving, lifelong learning outcomes for their students, not all schools will apply these elements in the same way, or in the same sequence, or perform identical activities to achieve the same or similar desired ends. The successful teaching of lifelong learning in a particular school is more the result of an individual journey than the product of a predetermined rigid framework of change that has been applied to the school community. A program of renewal that works for one school will not usually be transferable directly and relatively unchanged to reform another. Each school must find

its own pathway, appropriate to its own specific priorities, circumstances, setting and resources.

That said, there are some fundamental and essential characteristics of an effective learning environment that have been found to be present or sought in the schools represented in this study and that should be developed in any school attempting lifelong learning reform. These characteristics identify the school as a socialised learning centre, within a specific socio-economic environment, within a broader, more complex, regional, national and world setting. Recognition of this common basic identity and a critical assessment of prevailing local factors, provide the foundation for formulating an appropriate individual school philosophy and ethos.

School should be seen as an inviting, safe, supportive, happy, inspiring and rewarding place for everyone associated with it – students, staff and parents. These characteristics help provide a relatively stress-free atmosphere in which teaching and learning can take place more easily and with the approval and satisfaction of all.

One fundamental aspect of the school environment that should not be overlooked is its physical reality. It should be an attractive place to be; as comfortable and as well-equipped as financial and physical resources allow; a place that evokes calm, promotes a sense of belonging, and engenders a feeling of pride by association; a place to which students and others want to come, for social and personal - as well as academic - reasons.

Wealthier schools can afford the splendour of elaborate grounds and impressive structures and luxurious ancillary facilities such as multi-purpose auditoriums, swimming pools, tennis courts and private playing fields. But even poorer schools have found ways of beautifying surroundings, and making them more comfortable and inviting, by such simple processes as planting trees and maintaining gardens, or keeping grounds and equipment in good order, either through the cooperative effort of parents and other community members, or by the students themselves, as part of the process of educating the whole person. Sharing various facilities (such as libraries or playing fields) with neighbouring schools or with the wider community can help to compensate for a particular institution's other, more practical, shortcomings. Even such basic considerations as better and more regular maintenance of toilet facilities have been singled out by student surveys as matters for particular attention to improve the school environment.

The school must be envisioned as a community, nestled in a complex of larger communities with which it interacts. Its students are to be regarded as individual members of this complex both intramurally and extramurally), with individual backgrounds, experiences, capacities, wishes, rights, duties, personalities, perceptions and needs. They have to be taught how to become, in the future, independent and cooperative citizens of a complex world.

Student transitions and transitioning procedures
The transition of children, from primary to secondary schooling, is typically a major impetus for reform in the middle years in both primary and secondary school settings, because of the difficulties which many youngsters experience in making the change from a relatively small and intimate pre-adolescent educational environment to a much larger, more complex and more impersonal one with a dominant population of much older

students.[5] Sometimes this focus on transition is more broadly articulated in social and cultural terms, particularly in schools that hold most students at the same site across the primary/secondary transition stage and also where they have the resources to extend learning into co-curricular and extracurricular settings.[6]

In a transition situation where primary and secondary grades are both run on traditional lines the new student will also often find it difficult to adjust from the one-teacher/multi-discipline/student oriented approach of the primary school, to the secondary school's multi-teacher/subject-oriented system. Even students who have had their journey from primary to secondary levels made easier through middle schooling processes, there could be a further transitioning problem when they move from a middle school situation to the senior section of secondary education, unless part of the middle school final year is used to prepare for the change (e.g. through discussion and preparatory counselling).

Many of the schools in this study decided to introduce programs of reform - for at least their middle years classes – mainly in response to their realisation, that previously accepted philosophies, structures and procedures did not assist with transitioning difficulties, and did not produce the long-term results appropriate to the needs of students facing the challenges of life in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex modern world. Some schools have been purpose-built with this realisation in mind. Others have found their innovations so successful in middle years programs that they plan to extend the system, with appropriate modifications, to embrace the whole school.

Students in the middle years are actually in two states of transition - from childhood to adolescence and from primary to secondary grades of education. These are times of significant social, physical, emotional and intellectual change, requiring a high degree of personal adjustment. The school has a major responsibility to try to make this adjustment as smooth as possible, because disengagement can occur if a student feels confused or insecure at this time.

One minor attempt to lessen the problem of transition, especially when the destination school is not closely liaised with the school of origin, is to use a student 'passport' system. At one school this took the form of a comprehensive document compiled by transitioning students and recording thoughts and feelings, fears, strengths and weaknesses, ambitions, and any concerns or queries they may have had about the secondary school or the transition process. This document then formed part of the communication link established between students and the Year 7 coordinator. Parents were involved in feedback surveys and sharing thoughts and concerns with their children. A variation on this theme was a 'transition report' for students to take to their secondary school, giving a summary of student achievements, incorporating classroom profiles in areas of literacy and numeracy, and noting any 'special conditions', such as behaviour management requirements or special needs referrals.

Another more common and fuller way to ease the stresses of transition is to allow students in this group a certain amount of separation from the rest of the school, providing them with a sub-community of their own in which they can make the necessary adaptations without the distraction and greater challenge of constantly facing the larger

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[5] See Appendix C Items 5.1 to 5.4
[6] See Appendix C Item 6.1

and more mature student body, into which they can be introduced subsequently and by degrees.

Some schools achieve this objective by holding middle years students on a separate campus; others house them in a remote building on the same campus, or more simply group them in adjacent and interconnected classrooms in the main school complex. In larger schools, they might be organised into a number of sub-schools, each with its own lead teacher. In schools where conditions are such that transition is not likely to present a major challenge, these students might simply have the security of their own home-rooms, in which the majority of their time is spent, and from which they can make non-threatening brief excursions into the main school arena.

Whatever the physical arrangements, it is common practice for these sub-groups of middle students to have the same main teacher, or perhaps a pair of teachers, over the two or three years of their separation, for at least the core subjects of the curriculum. In some schools teachers even follow their middle school pupils into the senior years. Such a situation is most likely to be possible in schools that have a stable teacher population. Class sizes are also generally small, and this combination of arrangements allows the formation of close, continuing, trusting and cooperative student/student and student/teacher relationships. These relationships are useful for socialising the students and they allow teachers to become more aware of each learner's personal and intellectual characteristics and needs.

The relative isolation, the more intimate grouping, and the close long-term relationships formed also permit students to develop a sense of belonging, a sense of ownership of their space, and a sense of identity within their small community. These combined factors provide them with the confidence and motivation needed to be engaged actively in classroom activities and associated learning experiences, either individually, or as members of groups of various sizes and various combinations.

The idea of the school as a learning community, and particularly a critically thinking community, is important for both educational and behavioural outcomes. Disruptive and anti-social behaviour are negative factors in a learning environment. Clear directions for appropriate and acceptable behaviour and procedures can be given fairly easily as part of the socialising process in this time of student transition, by inculcating a strong set of core values that have been developed by the whole school community as a foundation for rules and expectations, and as the basis of school culture and teaching/learning relationships. A typically useful set of values would include: respect self-respect; self-knowledge, self-confidence, honesty and optimism; awareness of and consideration for the needs of others; acceptance and celebration of difference; positive relationships and resolution of conflict; sharing, helpfulness, cooperation, collaboration and teamwork; initiative, creativity, and enterprise; inquiry, critical thinking, relevance and excellence; and, most importantly, the development of learning skills and the idea of learning for life.

In terms of their provision of connecting pathways to the next phase of school reform, there appear to be four most important core components in the Initiation phase:
• teacher teaming;
• innovative leadership;
• connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school (as well as to structures, people and events within the school); and,
• focus on both social and academic outcomes for students.

Teacher teaming
The development of teacher teams appeared to be a key early structural component of the reform undertaken in most schools. This reform feature was undertaken for several reasons - particularly to ensure that the whole staff was progressively involved in the initiative, but also to ensure that more productive learning opportunities were provided for students,[7] through the better planning of learning programs and through more effective cross-disciplinary teaching, among other benefits.

As a result of initial collaboration and subsequent regular conferencing, teacher teaming permits the development of a more cohesive, more integrated curriculum within thematic frameworks and provides the opportunity for ongoing reassessment of curriculum content with regard to student academic development and changing needs. Collaboration and conferencing also allow the establishment of more efficient, more flexible and mutually more convenient timetabling – often featuring time-blocking in the form of either a smaller number of longer periods per day, or a change to the use of more double or even triple periods for certain key subjects (with a consequent decrease in concentration on less significant studies) thus permitting the acquisition of knowledge in depth rather than in breadth in key learning areas, increasing interest and satisfaction for the student and instilling a more useful package of knowledge and skills for subsequent practical application in real-life or in similarly authentic situations within the school.

Within a team framework, pairs of teachers are often given charge of one or two home classes, or one or two vertically-grouped combinations of two or three middle years classes (e.g. Years 7 to 9) – some of which might even include older or younger siblings – that can be linked by being housed in adjoining open area classrooms and managed as a single entity. In such an arrangement, home teachers support each other and typically spend the majority of their time with their home groups, covering key learning areas and perhaps swapping groups on a regular basis. A small number of specialist teachers (who frequently have responsibility for one or two related disciplines across the whole school) come to the home base for regular short sessions of more specialised instruction.

There are many advantages in structures of this kind. Students benefit, initially, from exposure to a larger social cross-section of their peers, allowing cultural exchange and the honing of communication skills. In the case of vertical grouping, combined with adjoining open area classrooms, there is also the greater social complexity of the two sub-groups within that combination; and the further possible mixture of older and younger siblings has been found to produce very positive relationship outcomes, that can even be taken back into the home. Vertical groupings also easily accommodate the different styles and rates of learning found in most groups of similar-age children; higher achievers can work at a more advanced level in the same shared environment, without the slower workers feeling inadequate, because of the mixture of age and ability across the community. Sub-groups form within the community, supporting each other academically and emotionally, and gently increasing the richness of the social structure.

Students and teachers both benefit from the extent and the stability of time spent together. Teachers develop a greater knowledge of their young charges and students

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[7] See Appendix C Items 7.1 to 7.6

are able to form confident and trusting relationships with one or two key adult guides (ideally over at least two or three years), with the opportunity of more slowly developing good working and personal relationships with the small number of other adults who provide specialist instruction. There is an added advantage for teachers in having a greater slice of school leadership and management responsibilities, as structures of this kind are usually encouraged to be more under the control of home teachers and are often large enough to be regarded as sub-schools.

Teachers also have the professional and personal advantage of working more closely and cooperatively with one or more of their colleagues, and (as members of even larger cohesive teams established for other purposes within the school – such as curriculum planning, or professional development) they benefit from the opportunity to share and compare cross-disciplinary knowledge and varied pedagogical approaches that become apparent during collaborative planning and review – especially in schools that incorporate junior and senior levels, where there are frequently marked differences in pedagogical practices and beliefs between Middle Years and Senior School staff. With teacher teams working cooperatively towards shared goals it is also more likely that initial reforms will be sustained and that further reforms will be more easily introduced and supported.

Innovative leadership
The second key factor for progression towards the Development phase appears to be the availability of strong and consistent leadership that is innovation-focused and appropriately dispersed through the structure of the school, as already suggested in the previous paragraphs. Leadership of this nature can be crucial in providing both direction and support for continuing reform, especially for 'converting' or encouraging staff members who might be more stubbornly tied to traditional philosophies and practices.[8]

Dispersed leadership reduces the burden on the chief school administrator and can strengthen reform procedures by providing more sources of encouragement and support for all staff. It also increases the potential for job satisfaction by allowing more teachers to contribute some of the decision-making and to share some of the administrative responsibilities for which their individual talents make them qualified.

Leadership teams can work cooperatively across the whole school to avoid conflict of aims and objectives; to help make better co-ordinated timetabling decisions; to encourage and direct collaboration of multi-discipline teachers; and to help co-ordinate team teaching activities. They can encourage staff risk-taking in reform practices and advise potentially innovative teachers on procedures for negotiating the introduction of novel ideas and resolving possible associated conflict or opposition from other staff. They can assist the orientation of new teachers; encourage and manage teacher professional development; give direction for curriculum decision-making in accordance with middle schooling and lifelong learning objectives; and facilitate the use of specialised teaching aids in all disciplines. Some schools have a specially trained ICT co-ordinator or a full-time research and development officer on their management team.

As previously indicated, lead teachers are also often appointed when a school has one or more middle years sub-schools in its management structure, especially when the remainder of the school is organised along more traditional lines. These lead teachers

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[8] See Appendix C Items 8.1 to 8.4

can act as liaisons between the two systems and can make especially valuable contributions to the processes of transition, both into and out of the middle school. In one school in this study, coordinators undertake 'area-of-study' reviews in forums of Years 7 to 12 teachers, collectively focusing upon work programs in individual specific learning areas, as a form of moderating learning outcomes and expectations. These forums aim to enhance transition from the Middle school to the Senior school, and also address the differences in pedagogical practices and beliefs between Middle and Senior school staff.

Connectedness of student learning to the world outside the school
In terms of approaches to pedagogy when attempting to advance from the Initiation to the Development phase of reform, innovative schools need first to build on their supportive classroom environments to generate clearer examples of connectedness for students, both in terms of links between learning in various areas of the curriculum and in terms of the variety of relevant community experiences pertinent to student learning opportunities.[9]

A fundamental connection can be made between the acquisition of basic knowledge and its usefulness for performing routine activities, by identifying core skills and outcomes as non-negotiable and applying them to thematic directions jointly determined by students and teachers. Students are expected to be able to apply newly acquired learning in different and meaningful contexts. With integrated studies across key learning areas forming a major part of each student's learning, relationships are clearly established between the different types of thought and knowledge found in various disciplines. Through being taught critical and evaluative thinking procedures, and being encouraged to contemplate possible outcomes of various courses of action, students are able to observe the connection between choices and consequences, and between thinking and practical awareness, and procedures in real-life situations. This is a useful approach for teaching appropriate personal behaviour, self-control and discipline in learning.

The concept of connectedness should feature in most planning operations and teaching/learning relationships, including conferencing before, during and after activities. Deliberate focus on life skills in general and lifelong learning skills in particular means that connected *practical* skills application is often initially given a greater emphasis than the traditional approach through *formal* skills development. Language activities, for instance, may initially focus less on formal grammatical lessons and more on practical writing and editing operations involving real world themes, perhaps also involving computer skills and use of the Internet. This is a more engaging approach that allows students to make early links with connected learning, that allows skills development through ongoing teacher conferencing, and that fosters individual styles of expression, as well as expanding horizons.

Teacher/student discussion of preferred learning options and outcomes, where appropriate, exemplifies the connection between negotiation and the achievement of desired ends. Parent-student learning-partnerships are another strategy that can be used to promote experiential and negotiated learning. Students have the opportunity to negotiate a day's visit to some out of school venue, with their parents. These visits link to thematic learning tasks in the classroom.

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[9] See Appendix C Items 9.1 to 9.7

Monitoring, by students and teachers, of what has been achieved in a proposed program of activity and what still needs to be done, connects time-management and individual responsibility to organisation and reduction of the workload, and emphasises the connection between personal effort and results. The relationship between learning skills, problem-solving strategies, and completion of assigned tasks can also be observed and emphasised

It is likewise important to stress the connections which exist between students, as learners, and teachers (and others) as mentors; and the interpersonal relationship bonds formed with other students, as fellow-travellers and companions in the learning journey. In both these areas of relationship there are connections between background knowledge and quality of interaction, that can profitably be noted in teaching exercises, because they emphasise the value of individual experience and knowledge, and their place in witnessing the worth and potential helpfulness of others and in enriching social and educational experiences.

Most important for the promotion of an inclination towards lifelong learning are those interactions which connect classroom learning with activities in the outside world, showing how theory - and learning generally - link with reality. But not all activities have to extend to further exposure outside school, as many are planned to culminate in sharing outcomes with wider audiences within the school, such as talks and various other types of presentations given to other year groups, or as school open-day exhibitions.

Outside links are best achieved through practical extramural activity based on recent or ongoing classroom studies, either within the immediate community, or more elaborately, in some 'exotic' setting - such as a distant major city, or a wilderness environment, (or even a foreign country, for those who can afford such a trip) - giving students access to surroundings and experiences beyond the norm.

School camps and excursions are one obvious way of allowing such connections to be made. Camps, especially under canvas, can be used to relate such things as survival skills, or nature study, or pioneering history, or conservation studies, to real life experience. Students can be given assignments before, during and after such undertakings, perhaps studying route maps, or making lists of equipment needed, or working out timetables and likely duty rosters before a trip; orienteering and similar adventures, or using AV material to record wildlife and plants observed, during the camp; further research on things observed, writing up reports, or presenting accounts of experiences to other members of the school community after the trip. All these activities can provide an opportunity to connect a variety of skills and theoretical knowledge to actual events and experiences and, when brought back into the school community, can become intra-school links and items of interest and inspiration for others.

In promoting the value of lifelong learning, programs of connectedness should emphasise employability skills wherever possible, thus relating the value of learning to the student's future. Enterprise activities are rich areas of practical connectedness, and an introduction to the world of work. With appropriate guidance and supervision, students can provide services, or can make, market, and personally sell products to the local community - (car-washing for example, or the manufacture of cement pavers, or more artistic products, such as silk-screenings). Students can become involved in these activities in a variety of ways, from planning, to labouring, to accounting, to point of sale.

Enterprise can be used in other ways to make connections within the school, where students can be given monitored responsibility for organising various events, from simple student in-school art shows, to more complex inter-school sporting competitions that might involve such things as invitations to local dignitaries, arranging transport, and even the ordering or provision of catering facilities.

Other types of work experience can be provided through organising more extended periods of training with local businesses or industries, with appropriate mentoring. Especially for less-academically inclined older students, such programs can provide not only experience, but certification of their achievements from recognised technical education institutions. One school, for instance, might offer an introductory course in motor mechanics, with certification through an associated tertiary institution, and allowing credit towards a tertiary course should the student wish to pursue that pathway after finishing school. In larger centres, several schools might each offer a different course, which is then made available to linked schools, thus providing a larger choice to all students in a cluster.

Another innovation that offers multiple practical experiences is the idea of the 'City School' for students from more remote country areas. A school facility is established in a major town or city, perhaps housed within the grounds of a tertiary institution. Country students, who might otherwise not have an opportunity to experience city life, spend a week or two in the city and attend this school. They might have the additional task of organising their own (supervised) travel and accommodation. Excursions around the city; visits to museum or zoo; meetings with police or firemen; eating prepared food from an exotic culture (Indian, for instance); strolls around the cityscape or through a large park or botanic garden; can all form part of the experience - (perhaps videoed, or to be otherwise documented or diarised, by students). While at the City School they can be mentored by tertiary students (particularly Education undergraduates) in various locally-oriented projects and they might sit in on tertiary lectures in a subject that interests them (pottery, for instance) from which a supervised project can be undertaken with their mentors' assistance. This combination of activities broadens the students' perceptions of life outside their own small community and introduces them to the value of education beyond school. Socialising with friendly and helpful tertiary students also provides a glimpse into an adult academic life and enhances self-esteem and communication skills.

Use of information technology (IT) - including the internet - is another way of expanding horizons and connecting theory with practice. Information technology and AV materials tend to be regarded in middle schools as major tools for the promotion of lifelong learning and are employed across as many disciplines as possible. Students exposed to any of the foregoing experiences can connect those learning experiences with IT theory by being assisted, for instance, to establish a webpage recording the event, and perhaps thereby share their discoveries with like-minded students in other parts of the country, or even other parts of the world. Various types of AV equipment can also be used in such a project, increasing skills in those areas.

Focus on both social and academic outcomes for students
This is the fourth most prominent factor of the Initiation phase that linked up with other factors in the reform trajectory of most innovative schools.[10] Recognition of the importance of basic skills and their concentrated application across an integrated

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[10] See Appendix C Items 10.1 to 10.6

curriculum helps to connect academic disciplines and to foster the acquisition of deep knowledge that can be seen to have practical application. Skills developed along the way are found to be transferable between academic tasks and frequently into more practical real-life situations. A learning-community culture promotes the development of empowered learners. By being taught *how* to learn and how to *think*, and by being encouraged to think critically and to assess their own learning styles, preferences and outcomes, students become more engaged, more responsible, and more aware of their own learning achievements and expectations; more independent and more confident about decision making. They are better prepared to take risks in learning processes, more enterprising, and better skilled to achieve academic results. As they progress through their learning community, they become more aware of the connection between learning in general, and learning for life outside the school.

The emphasis on forming deep and enduring relationships and the promotion of collaboration, cooperation, student negotiated conflict resolution, sharing knowledge, and helping others in need, acceptance of difference, celebration of cultural diversity, and other socialising values, equips students with important interpersonal skills to guide them towards responsible citizenship.

The Development Phase (2-5 years)

The overall second phase of reform is generally focused on teachers and the development of processes and systems that engage teachers in realising the vision and practice that has been initiated at the school. In essence, the main task is to make the reform an integral element of the culture of the school – 'the way we do business around here'. This can be a difficult and often frustrating period in the reform process. As Michael Fullan reminded us in *Change Forces* some time ago, 'change is complex and non-linear'. It generally takes more time and energy by more people than was originally anticipated.

Improved alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems

A major concern during this phase is to develop *alignment* – coherence among all the key processes and procedures used to drive the reform through the school. In particular, an important and difficult task is to improve systems used to plan a curriculum, implement that curriculum through appropriate pedagogies, and align curriculum and pedagogies with assessment procedures. This appears to be a significant challenge for schools in meeting the needs of students in the middle years of schooling.[11]

Key concepts in both 'middle years of schooling' reforms, and 'lifelong learning' orientations, are 'relationships' (between people, between things - and between people, places and things); 'critical thinking' – its techniques and applications; and 'the recognition and development of the whole individual'. These three ideas (and concepts developed from them) can help guide school administrators to find an alignment, or balance, between the three educational 'message systems' of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (CPA).

Middle schooling culture should be based on strong student, peer, teacher, parental and community relationships – with all these parties having a meaningful and valued role to play in the education process. Teaching practices, and the learning techniques taught,

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[11] See Appendix C Items 11.1 to 11.6

should be influenced by the diverse cultural, social, linguistic and personal orientations of students and teachers, capitalising on the wealth of individual differences and talents in the learning community. Different learning styles and rates need to be recognised and supported - perhaps within structures such as vertically-grouped classrooms that ease pressures on academically weaker, but more practically-oriented students, and assist all to experience a sense of achievement. Such a school culture obviates the concept of failure, by recognising that there are different ways of achieving and demonstrating 'excellence'.

Keeping the individual (and the real world) in mind, and considering the need for social and intellectual development, and the growing importance of communication skills, teachers should aim to provide relevant, enjoyable and challenging experiences for all students - employing a range of whole-class, small-group and individual learning opportunities; using techniques of explicit teaching, coupled with practical applications, to develop strategies for decision-making, problem-solving, risk-taking, negotiation, leadership and conflict-resolution. Students should be encouraged to use appropriate dialogue and negotiation techniques with teachers, with regard to their behaviour and their learning techniques and achievements, and to employ critical assessment of the outcomes of their activities, as part of the process of self-perception and self-management.

The curriculum should be skills-based. Learning programs should be planned to connect students to the outside world, and make use of up-to-date technologies, so that they keep pace with technological development. Teachers should be thoroughly trained in IT and AV applications, as well as in techniques and philosophy of both middle schooling and lifelong learning processes. The focus should be changed from a single-value education system (in which academic and intellectual performance are favoured) to one that recognises the importance of other high-order skills, such as communication, thinking, information handling and decision-making. Acquisition of these skills by students enhances self-esteem and orients them towards an acceptance of lifelong values.

As innovations are developed and implemented, teachers should constantly reassess their teaching strategies and curriculum content (best done through team thinking and review sessions), evaluating them against government education authority requirements, and considering the relevance of their planning, teaching and review to the key learning areas and to subject integration. The curriculum is stripped of factual clutter and built around the acquisition of techniques that can be applied across disciplines to gain appropriate and inter-related knowledge as it is needed. Teachers build on what individual students know and understand and on what they can do. Students are encouraged to negotiate learning and assessment tasks that are pertinent, challenging and achievable; these are then built around integrated themes.

Assessment is an ongoing process, using a variety of methods to meet the diverse capacities and needs of students and to allow for teachers' professional judgements to be part of the process. Students' involvement in assessment helps to develop their personal responsibility for learning, increasing their independence and confidence, encouraging academic risk-taking, honing problem-solving techniques, revealing preferred learning styles and interests. Skills matrix rubrics allow students to become aware of their own development and progress. Self-assessment, and peer or group assessment can be moderated by teacher conferencing. Student work diaries and

portfolios can be used subsequently as part of reporting procedures. Each element of the structure informs the other elements helping to maintain an appropriate balance.

Enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge
A particularly difficult undertaking for school staff is to 'up the ante' consistently in terms of what is expected in the *intellectual quality* demonstrated by students. Again, this appears to be most difficult for students in the middle years of schooling. Initiatives need to build upon well-developed strategies for both providing ongoing support, and demonstrating to students the relevance and connectedness of learning. There also needs to be a well-established climate of high expectations for quality learning, with challenge and involvement for students.[12] Taking on realistic learning challenges in a supportively critical environment helps to develop intellectual rigour. Honest and constructive feedback by teachers, or within student group discussions, permits learners to judge the standard of their achievements and to have a concept of higher levels to be reached.

Classroom activities should be designed to highlight the kind of understanding required of different tasks and responses; to explore the ways in which language changes for different audiences and purposes; to promote deep understanding and provide opportunities for substantive conversation.

Careful planning and goal setting by students enables them to work more independently and take more responsibility for their work. Appropriate questioning by the teacher encourages students to reflect on their performance and identify both the quality of their achievement and possible opportunities for improvement. Students can self-assess, or peer-assess within small group activities, in which partners engage in proof reading each other's work, providing useful feedback on presentation styles and pertinence of the content of work under review.

Lateral and creative thinking strategies assist students to think about, record and share their ideas around a key idea or issue. Discussions about multiple intelligences enable them to think about themselves as learners and approach learning from different perspectives. Open ended learning tasks build on basic concepts and foster deeper understanding and knowledge about complex issues and problems. Teaching programs should be designed to elicit higher order thinking processes, deep knowledge and deep understanding of what is learned: more thinking and intellectual rigour - more depth, less breadth. This can be achieved largely through a focus on meta-cognition derived from adoption of the 'Thinking Classroom' approach to teaching and learning.

A hierarchical series of structured tasks, culminating in rich tasks that employ problem solving strategies and challenge student thinking, can generate substantive conversations as students develop shared understandings and ideas. Teacher use of meta-language is a common strategy in supporting these outcomes. A combination of practical and theoretical experiences, especially involving IT and AV equipment, enables students to move confidently from lower order reasoning and understandings to much higher order extrapolations and discussion. Experiential learning provides the contextual need, while thematic activities provide creative interest. Technology supplies the challenge of virtual manipulation, prediction and justification.

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[12] See Appendix C Items 12.1 to 12.4

The ultimate goal in developing lifelong learners is to develop intellectual quality to the point where students acquire a sufficient depth of knowledge and skills to be independently aware of required outcomes, accountability frameworks, and how to be strategic about their learning in meeting these requirements as well as their own interests.

Other factors that appear to be important in the second or Development phase of reform, include schools focusing over 2-5 years on:
- evidence-based policy development processes (for introducing new policies and practices);
- sustainable innovation - (models of innovation that can withstand change and resistance);
- linking school culture change with innovative structures; and
- professional learning communities, with teachers as learners.

Evidence-based policy development processes
Reforming schools generally find it initially difficult to develop evidence-based approaches to developing new policies and practices, though some primary schools were attempting to integrate data from a range of standardised tests.[13] Some reforming schools have developed more comprehensive models of data-gathering and analysis, on a greater range of key variables.[14]

A clear and documented school policy statement, detailing a plan for reform and the reasons behind that plan, not only gives inspiration and direction for management and staff, but allows regular comparisons to be made between objectives and achievements. The main purpose for collecting evidence is to ensure that practice and outcomes align with policy, and that the time and energy put into formulating and sustaining reform are used effectively and efficiently.

Evidence collected on an ongoing basis, measuring and observing student achievements and behaviour (as well as levels of staff satisfaction and related factors), allows comparison before and after the introduction of an initiative, as well as permitting comparison with published state or other relevant education authorities' benchmarks for curriculum content and student outcomes. Management teams can then discuss and assess results and determine appropriate action. Recent research literature - especially when based on actual and successful practices in other parts of the country or overseas - can also provide evidence for innovations that might be considered for local application. All staff should be encouraged to peruse and evaluate such literature as part of their own continuing professional development.

Assessments of the changing standards in students' work under new initiatives; the evidence of contextual knowledge employed to complete assigned tasks; students' ability to focus in groups of different sizes and different memberships; degree of involvement during school camps and excursions; the popularity of various learning, teaching and assessment styles; 'hand-in' rates and depth of treatment of themes in project work; degrees of planning ability, independence and responsibility exhibited by students; standardised test results; external evaluations; the relevance of curriculum documents produced within the school – all bear witness to the effectiveness of

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[13] See Appendix C Item 13.1
[14] See Appendix C Item 14.1

particular programs and indicate where adjustments to procedures might need to be made. The system should not be allowed to become static.

Students can be taught to monitor the quality of their own work and to strive to improve it. A capacity matrix is one form of self-assessment tool used by students to gauge their level of learning on particular concepts and topics. The matrix contains three main areas: 'topic breakdown', 'learning process' and 'evidence'. The 'evidence' is completed either by having the students record the type of task they have completed to demonstrate their understanding of a particular topic, or by the teacher signing off that individual students have demonstrated to them their particular level of understanding.

Student focus group discussions and parent and community feedback can be other valuable sources of information for continually evaluating both academic and social needs. So can regular staff surveys designed to measure level of support for recently introduced programs of reform, and to invite suggestions for improvement or change. Such surveys can remind staff that their opinions are valued, and so can help maintain their loyalty and enthusiasm. Even anecdotal evidence should be taken on board and considered; this is generally offered under less structured circumstances and can provide a less contrived insight into the ambience and cohesiveness of the learning community than that which might be obtained from more formal investigations.

Sustainable innovation

All reforming schools face a challenge in developing sustainable models of innovation that can withstand further changes (from within and without) and the often corrosive effects of resistance, cynicism and burn-out expressed by some staff. Commitment to reform over the longer term requires active participation by many and a sense of shared ownership. Innovative structures need to be developed and supported, providing links with efforts to change the school culture. Investment in key infrastructure across the school, such as information and communication technologies (ICT), can be a key issue in many schools.[15] Others emphasised the input and support that could be provided by volunteers from the community, as well as by students themselves.[16]

For reform to be sustained there must be strong, sensitive and consistent leadership to initiate and legitimate change; staff acceptance of, and commitment to, innovative programs; adequate funding to support those reforming programs; continuing professional development of teachers who have been thoroughly trained in both lifelong learning and middle schooling philosophy and techniques; and teacher teams working cooperatively towards shared goals. Staff stability is a highly desirable factor, permitting continuance of established concepts. There must be a long-term shared commitment by all; preferably a clear documentation of pedagogies; and ongoing collection and evaluation of evidence of the impact of innovations, so that programs can be fine-tuned, to meet changing demands as restructuring develops, and to keep innovations fresh and viable.

The school culture needs to evolve into one favouring renewal; breaking with tradition and focusing on professional risk-taking and experimentation; making effective use of research in evidence based planning; setting high standards of expectation for staff and students alike; modelling continual learning in a professional learning community;

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[15] See Appendix C Item 15.1
[16] See Appendix C Item 16.1

embracing challenge; balancing and linking changes in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; connecting student learning to the world outside the school; maintaining close links with a supportive community.

Linking school culture change with innovative structures

Changing the roles of senior teachers to sustain the reform and re-culture the school was a priority in various school sites. This was viewed by some school leaders as essential to ensure that the reform flowed through the school, in both formal and informal ways.[17] Other reforming schools have also seen the benefit of providing ambitious programs that operate to engage students in a co-curricular learning mode and provide new challenges and roles for both school staff and community members.[18]

Professional learning communities, with teachers as learners

By far the most important investment any school can make to sustain the momentum of reform involves developing the skills and knowledge of teaching staff. All reforming schools placed a high priority on developing a professional learning community of teachers as learners, with varying emphases, but with a shared concern to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity of learning new approaches and skills. Some schools provided on-site opportunities; others deliberately took teachers to other school sites to improve their perceptions of what alternatives were possible, and what they looked like in practice. Such approaches supported the notion that investment in teachers was a necessary precursor to the school's being able to progress on its reform journey into the final, Consolidation phase.[19]

In schools promoting the ideal of lifelong learning, classrooms are seen as learning communities, with a focus on close relationships, respect, equality, cooperation, sharing and mutual help; as well as critical and strategic thinking, problem-solving, self-motivation and self-management. These classrooms are learner-centred, and teachers model the learner role by being seen as learners themselves. They move away from the didactic, authoritarian role employed in traditional education, to play a more approachable part as mentors and facilitators, making explicit the goals and expectations of learning programs and encouraging students to employ novel and individual techniques to deal with the diversity of challenging tasks and learning activities with which they are confronted.

Thorough training in the philosophy and methods of the middle school; the techniques of thinking and learning; teamwork; and the teaching of lifelong learning, is an essential foundation for teaching in such classrooms. Teachers are also encouraged to undertake additional courses of education at their own expense and to keep themselves up to date about developments in their profession by reading the latest research literature and by attending seminars and workshops in their own time. But most schools, if they have the funding, also present opportunities for staff to attend conferences and relevant training sessions as they become available. Some schools employ special staff members whose duty it is to keep other teachers informed of new ideas, or to train them in the latest technologies (such as IT) and in methods of applying such new technologies across a wide range of subject fields. The specialised skills and subject interests and the diversity

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[17] See Appendix C Items 17.1 to 17.2
[18] See Appendix C Item 18.1
[19] See Appendix C Items 19.1 to 19.9

of cultural and experiential backgrounds of all staff members are also utilised within the learning community for the mutual benefit and satisfaction of all.

The Consolidation Phase (5-10 years)

As stated earlier, relatively few of the investigated schools had advanced their reform agenda sufficiently to be unequivocally positioned in this final phase. South West Sydney High School was the only site where this was obviously the case at the time of the research visit. Nonetheless, many schools demonstrated that elements of their reform initiative had made the transition to this phase, and were able to show evidence of a much clearer focus on student learning and a more inclusive approach to meeting the present and likely future needs of the full range of young people in their care.

Changing social and economic conditions demanding a broader skill set
In this final phase, there was a recognition that changing social and economic conditions demand a broader set of 'basic' or 'essential' skills, conceptualised to embrace the ICT-based multi-literacies increasingly demanded in knowledge-based economies and societies.[20]

But it is not simply ICT-based skills that are required, important and pervasive though the need for those skills might be in modern life. The world has become a more complex and more competitive place. An individual needs to be equipped to deal with far more challenges than faced the average citizen in a simpler age. According to one school (Marine Bridge Years 6 to 12 School, South Australia) basic skills and competencies required for a lifelong learning world include:

> information handling; design making; problem solving; presenting communication formally; discussing communication informally; learning to learn; listening; memorising; entrepreneurial ability; making practical decisions; critical judgement; reasoning; thinking; vision; planning; flexibility; adaptability; versatility; mediation; tolerance for others; self-esteem; self-management; self-awareness; creativity; sense of humour; empathy.

This is a formidable list, but there are constituent parts to some of the skills listed above, and life presents other more mundane challenges; so it is possible to include the skills of:

> literacy and numeracy; reflection; enquiry; goal-setting; risk-taking; research; study; cooperation; work habits; time-management; independent learning; resume and letter writing; community living; self-confidence; independence; employability; bush-craft (and other recreational skills); survival; leadership; cooking; professional and trade skills; planning; budgeting; promotions; management – to name just a few.

The majority of these skills are not new, but the need for their acquisition and concurrent application in greater numbers, by more people, increases constantly. The school cannot teach all these skills, and individual students will not need to acquire all of them, though quite a few will be essential for living a full and productive life in an adult world. Many of

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[20] See Appendix C Items 20.1 to 20.3

these will be developed along a continuum of learning for life, through learning programs that make links within the curriculum and extend beyond the classroom, and through projects that exercise the multiple intelligences: verbal-linguistic, math-logic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, inter-personal, intra-personal, naturalist; and the thinking styles: word, logic and maths, space and vision and people. Thus equipped students and school-leavers will find it easier to acquire other useful skills when the circumstances require them to do so.

Learner- and learning-focused programs and Student engagement in learning

In reforming schools that are in transition to the Consolidation phase there is a serious focus on learning as a process, on learners and their needs and on engaging students fully in learning, with particular attention being given to strategies that encourage students to become responsible for their own learning.[21]

A basic concept in middle years of schooling philosophy is the centrality of the student as a member of a learning community. Put simply the aim of educating for lifelong learning is to develop individuals who will be able to take their place in the modern world and be able to meet the challenges of daily life in work and at play, maintaining valid and effective interpersonal relationships as citizens of an increasingly complex society; viewing the world critically; and acting independently, cooperatively and responsibly.

The ultimate goal of the educator is to bring students to a stage of personal and intellectual development where they have gained sufficient knowledge, skills, strategies and accountability to be fully and critically aware of the requirements and appropriate outcomes of a school learning program, and to be able to meet these requirements independently in their own preferred way, while pursuing their own interests, developing their own personalities and planning their own pathways through life – carrying these acquired skills with them for continuing application. Not all students will reach this high plateau of attainment on an academic level, being less intellectually capable, or more practically oriented. Not many will be able to develop all of the skills and attributes required for total proficiency either academically or practically. Not everyone will even need to. But quite a few will; and all will find themselves more capable and more enriched as a consequence of the skills they do acquire and as a result of educators' efforts to develop them.

Greater diversity in adolescent needs and capacities

Many of the diverse needs and capacities that have to be considered during the middle years of schooling are not peculiar to adolescents, but are rather common characteristics of most students of whatever age in various stages of education – though some of these characteristics are more relevant to middle years students. But while adolescence is a time that brings is own problems, challenges and needs – (mostly associated with a growing self-awareness; physical, emotional and behavioural changes; and the necessity to jockey for a social position in the complex web of groups and cliques that form and dissolve during this time) – it is also during these years that students begin to develop more fully the intellectual and personality traits that will help them to address the issues confronting them; albeit they will generally require direction and assistance to bring those capacities properly into play.

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[21] See Appendix C Items 21.1 to 21.3

In common with the rest of the world, Australian society has changed dramatically over the past few decades, as a result of a variety of influences, including most significantly, powerful civil and human rights movements, exponential advances in science and technology, and growing trends towards globalisation. Many individuals who were previously marginalised, institutionalised, or in special-care facilities, such as special schools, have been brought into the mainstream of society and of education, with only those most critically in need of alternative care being kept isolated.

Australia has also become a multicultural society – in one school alone, case-studied during this Project (called 'St Resolute's Catholic Primary School, Victoria'), the community from which students are drawn has a population in which 30% of residents were born outside Australia; they came from more than 150 different countries and speak as many as 75 languages. In addition, a high number of residents are the Australian born children/grandchildren of earlier migrants.

In another school (called 'Coopersplains Community College, Queensland') a total staff of 200 (120 of whom were teachers) catered for 1850 students in years P-10, only 73% of whom identified as Australian (0.38% of Aboriginal or Islander descent) with the remaining 27.5% of students representing 26 different ethnic backgrounds, including:
• 3.95% New Zealand;
• 3.76% European;
• 3.12% Chinese.
The college is coded for students with disabilities in Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Impairment and Speech/Language Impairment, with 58 students coded accordingly.

These statistics alone help to suggest the heterogeneous nature of today's schools and the challenges facing educators, through the mix of cultural, ethnic and language backgrounds of students in their care and the parents with whom teachers must communicate. But there are many other complicating factors in different schools: transitory students who come and go with family movements in the area; issues of gender equity and of gender-specific learning-orientations for certain subjects (maths and English in particular); the perennial problem of literacy/numeracy impairment; students emotionally or academically 'at risk'; student alienation, perhaps stemming from adolescence-associated issues and the apparent lack of relevance of many routine school activities; gifted children; poor self-esteem and poor self-image, particularly among young teenage girls; boundary testing and challenging, particularly among adolescent boys; bullying and other anti-social behaviours. All these issues and many others need to be addressed.

The net result of schools sustaining their reforms into a Consolidating phase appeared to be renewed focus on meeting this greater diversity of needs and capacities of young adolescent students through innovative and often ambitious programs,[22] including counselling, mentoring, pastoral care programs; arts oriented experiences; vocational education programs that combine work experience with school and TAFE study; and provision of a rich variety of learning experiences for students with disabilities, enabling them to develop their communication, problem solving and decision making skills, to maintain and increase their physical movement, and to enable them to access a wide range of post school options.

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[22] See Appendix C Items 22.1 to 22.3

4.3 On track for developing lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling

As indicated earlier, the first main point to make about the reforming schools in this study is that, at the time of investigation, most were operating in the second (or Development) phase of school reform. The main features of this phase are a concentration on teachers and teaching, and on the development of a set of systems that support and direct their efforts:

- aligning curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems;
- enhancing pedagogy, particularly for greater intellectual challenge;
- developing processes to make better use of evidence of progress in policies and practices;
- sustaining the innovation and its key design features through multiple challenges;
- building-in innovative structures to support and direct the reform further; and
- developing as a professional learning community, with teachers learning new ways of reaching, inspiring and directing students.

These factors lie at the heart of taking the reform into 'the mainstream' or the 'core business' of the school. Priorities abound, hard choices have to be made, numerous meetings litter the school calendar, procedures are created and re-created, and the resources and time available never seem enough for the size of the tasks confronting a staff having to realise the detail of a 'dream'.

Even with dynamic and consistent leadership, spread across the school, the effort required to maintain the momentum of reform is enormous, and it is not uncommon for enthusiasm to wane, especially if funding is not sufficient to meet adequately all of the very high costs usually associated with the quality of renewal required. Most reforming schools in the Development phase undergo a significant 'dip' in their implementation efforts and the efficiency with which they are able to operate. This is particularly so after the excitement and creative challenges of initiating a reform, based on consensus-building and building of a vision and philosophy, have been completed. This 'typical pattern' can be represented diagrammatically as in Figure 4.3:

Figure 4.3: A 'typical' implementation trajectory in a reforming school

III Consolidation Phase

II Development Phase

I Initiation Phase

An implementation 'dip' or 'pit' experienced for 2-3 years
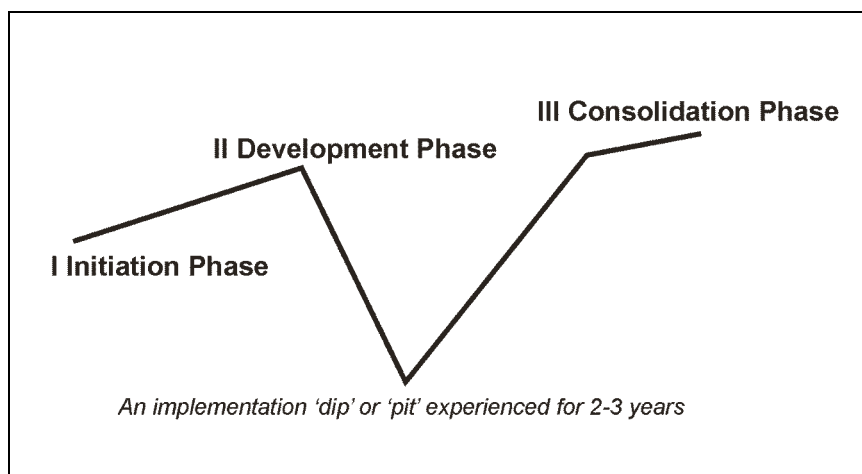
Yet for some reforming schools (or indeed elements within a single school site) the implementation experience is often less traumatic, and teachers can experience smoother sailing. Usually this can occur only when several key factors are aligned and sustained:

• Team membership across several years;
• Congenial, philosophically-aligned dynamics among team members;
• Sensitive and sustained leadership;
• Early adoption and shared risk-taking among members who challenge each other to extend themselves;
• A strong emphasis on team problem-posing and problem-solving; and
• Effective use of research in evidence based planning.

Under these optimal 'fast track' conditions the pattern may look more like that illustrated in Figure 4.4:

Figure 4.4: A 'fast track' implementation trajectory in a reforming school
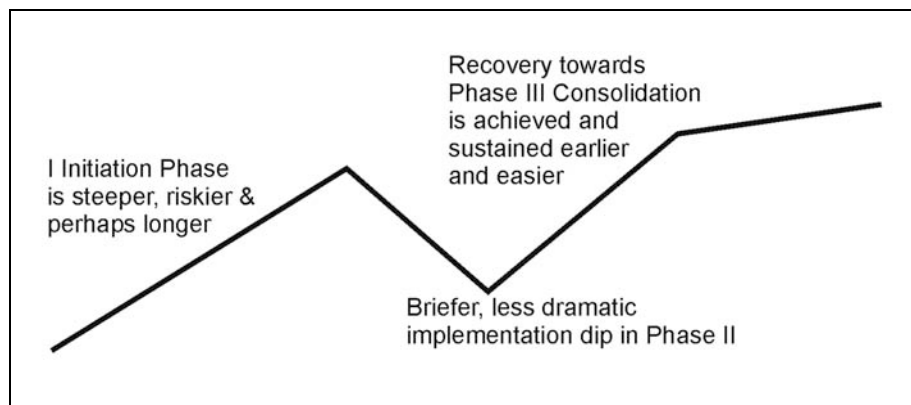
The implementation trajectory of a school reform can be affected (often dramatically) by numerous and various events occurring both within and beyond the school. Factors such as rapid growth (or dramatic downturns) in student numbers, significant turn-over of staff (especially in those leading the reform) and break-down in team dynamics can be particularly influential. As a result, the decline in enthusiasm experienced by some staff members may seem more like an inescapable 'pit' rather than either a 'dip' (Fig. 4.3) or a 'blip' (Fig. 4.4). Their trajectory may then feel and look more like that illustrated in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: A 'slow track' implementation trajectory in a reforming school

Phase I Initiation is long & difficult, with less risk and harder learning for staff

Phase III Consolidation seems far away, & not so desirable, as when achieved it is not as good as for other teams or teachers

Phase II Development has a dramatic implementation slide downward, perhaps with 'bouncing in the pit' sapping morale
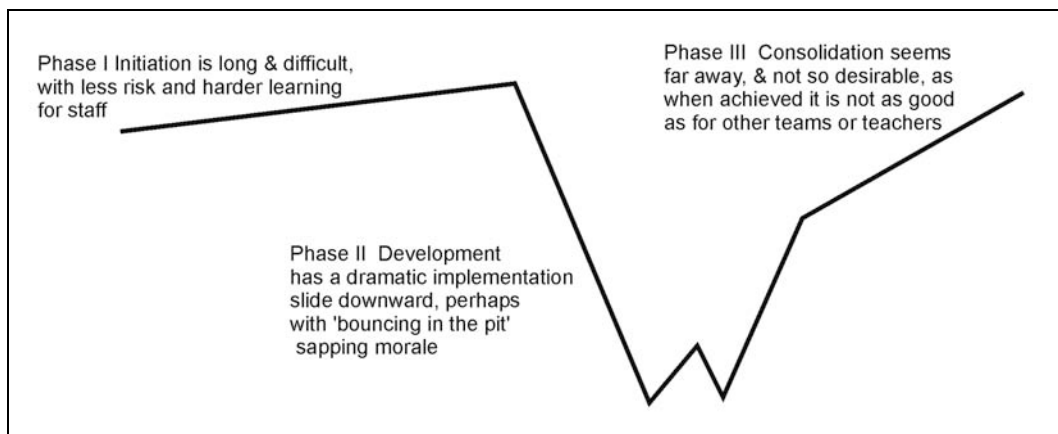
The overwhelming implementation experience of the reforming schools investigated in this study was more like Figures 4.3 and 4.4. This is as might have been expected, since sites were recommended by system representatives as demonstrating some of the best, most interesting, most innovative reforms occurring in the middle years of schooling. But it is worthwhile speculating whether this experience can (or should) be transferred (or translated) to most schools, which after all, are quite likely to experience the kinds of disruptions and challenges that underlie the pattern illustrated in Figure 4.5. So the three-phase implementation trajectory -- with core components and 'typical pathways' neatly identified -- could be a chimera for most schools that find the reform road much rockier and more pot-holed than this tidy model would suggest. It is perhaps time to undertake a study of 'failing reforms' in order to shed light on what factors stop or prevent innovation or limit implementation of desired reforms. Such a study clearly has significant implications for the students that programs in schools are meant to serve.

The processes of reform as conceived and at least partly implemented by schools in this study have been found to bring valuable results that are highly regarded by the majority of stakeholders experiencing those innovations – students, staff, parents, community members – though there are pockets of resistance and at times a little criticism. Educational elements in these schools which still receive the most negative comment, however, appear to be mainly only those which are remnants of previous traditional practices, such as the occasional "talk and chalk" approach, or the distribution of duplicated notes to all class members, regardless of ability or interest, or the larger problem of retaining a traditional approach in the senior school, which could present transition problems for students coming from a reformed junior environment. Anti-social behaviour (bullying and intimidation) still presents itself as a significant minor problem in some schools, though on the whole, reforms have been found to produce improvements across the whole school environment, including the behavioural front, resulting in a general level of satisfaction and approval. The reforms appear to work, given the appropriate circumstances in which to flourish. Many schools are so satisfied with their outcomes that they are oriented towards total conversion to the new system across the school, not just for middle years classrooms.

Possible inhibitors of reform, as noted or suggested in the foregoing discussion, include weak or inconsistent leadership, insufficient dispersal of leadership, poorly conceived or poorly expressed vision statement, uncooperative or non-supportive staff, inadequately

trained staff, discontinuity of staff, rigid traditionalism among staff majority, failure to provide an appropriate support structure, failure to redirect and redefine the school culture, insufficient funding to provide essential equipment or to finance innovations, failure to align CPA, resistance from the community, dramatic upward or downward trends in student population, impatience and loss of enthusiasm resulting from slow progress in the process of renewal. No doubt there are other possible negative influences.

4.4 Summary

The present study has demonstrated that many reforming schools emphasise the importance of developing lifelong learning in their vision and philosophy statements and that students in such schools tend to acquire knowledge, and develop skills and attitudes associated with such learning in four main ways:

- most importantly, as a result of the role models provided by individual teachers - both as learners themselves and as illuminators of specific attitudes regarding the importance of learning in our lives. Even in a school where reforms may be failing, such teachers exist and continue to be role models;
- as a result of the social learning engendered in working collaboratively and cooperatively with other students;
- as outcomes from specific curricular and co-curricular programs; and
- as required to complete specific tasks determined for school assessment.

Learners in the middle years are generally viewed by school staff as providing significant challenges to realising their goals of lifelong learning for all. As well, there is a realisation of the limits of the school in developing positive attitudes towards learning throughout a person's life. The important roles played by the home, the media and the broader community are acknowledged.

In summary, this study demonstrates that schools can make a difference for students in encouraging them to have positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and to want to become lifelong learners. But it must be emphasised that the process of reforming a school so that it is more likely to achieve these Outcomes is a long and usually difficult one. While there is no single, 'right' way to undertake reform in the middle years, typically there is progression through three phases that involve the systematic linking of many components of a school's operation. Despite the difficulties, all the schools surveyed in this study believe the journey to be a worthwhile and important one, particularly for the futures of their students.

With regard to the research question posed:

> **What practices, processes, strategies and structures best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the 'middle years of schooling'?**

This project, particularly through the wealth of information recorded in the case-studies, has provided some early insights into what will become a significant area of future research.

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List of Key Acronyms, Initialisms and Abbreviations

ACER   Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSA   Australian Curriculum Studies Association
AEU   Australian Education Union
ATSI   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
BCEC   Brisbane Catholic Education Commission (Qld)
CECV   Catholic Education Commission, Victoria
CEO   Catholic Education Office (W.A.)
CLOs   Core Learning Outcomes (Qld)
CSF   Curriculum and Standards Framework (Victoria)
DART   Development Assessment Resources for Teachers
DE&T   Department of Education and Training
DEST   Department of Education, Science and Training
DETE   Department of Education Training and Employment (South Aust.)
DP   Deputy Principal
EMA   Education Maintenance Allowance (Victoria)
EQ   Education Queensland (Qld)
ESL   English as a second language
ETWR   Experienced Teacher with Responsibility ETWR (Victoria)
GPS   Greater Public Schools
HPE   Health and Physical Education (Qld)
HOD   Head of Department (Qld, NSW)
HOT   Higher Order Thinking
ICT   Information and communication technologies
IT   Information Technology
KLAs   Key learning areas
LAP   Learning Assistance Program (W.A.)
LBOTE   Language Background Other Than English
LOTE   Language(s) other than English
MAYOP   Move At Your Own Pace
MCEETYA   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MYRAD   Middle Years Research and Development Project … (Victoria)
NCVER   National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NESB   Non-English Speaking Background
NGOs   Non-Government Organisations
PAC   Performing Arts Centre
PASP   Priority Action Schools Program
PBL   Problem Based Learning
PD   Professional Development
PE   Physical Education
PLT   Professional Learning Team(s) (Victoria)
PP   Productive Pedagogies
PSFP   Priority Schools Funding Program … (NSW)
QBSSSS   Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies
QSA   Queensland Studies Authority
QSE 2010   Queensland State Education 2010

QSRLS	Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Survey
QTP	Quality Teacher Program
SACSA	South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (South Aust.)
SOSE	Studies of Society and Environment
TEE	Tertiary Entrance Examination (Western Aust.)
TORCH	Tests of Reading Comprehension
UK	United Kingdom
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (Victoria)
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education. (Victoria)
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VUT	Victoria University of Technology
VYDP	Victorian Youth Development Program … (Victoria)
WWW	World Wide Web

Appendix A

Case-studies of school sites

Appendix B

Questions for the Middle years survey Instrument 'School and me!'

This survey is about you and your school. Your answers will tell us what you think about your school. By filling out the survey you will be telling us something about how well what your do at school meets your needs and where you think it might be improved.

Your responses are anonymous and will be handled in the utmost confidence. In other words none of your teachers, or anyone else at the school will see your answers. We will only report what students in your level of school feel about schools.

The survey has 4 parts. It asks question about;

What are your lessons like?

How you work.

Your Feedback.

About you.

Part 1

This section concerns what you do at school, and how it impacts upon what you learn. The questions are about your lessons and how you work with teachers. Please answer every question. You may feel that some questions do not apply to you, we understand and expect that and you will have an opportunity to make some comments about such issues at the end of the questionnaire. Meanwhile simply mark the best response (for example strongly disagree), this will be more meaningful for us than a no answer at all.

The following is a list of statements about what you do in school. Select the radio button adjacent to the statement to indicate if you;

Strongly **A**gree - **SA**

Agree - **A**

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree - **D**

Strongly **D**isagree - **SD**

What are your lessons like?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am taught how to solve problems using rules.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I don't understand why the rules I am taught give the right answers.	5	4	3	2	1
3. When we have a class on some topic we look at it depth.	5	4	3	2	1
4. We don't look at any one thing in depth in class.	5	4	3	2	1
5. My teachers want me to use their solutions to solve problems.	5	4	3	2	1
6. My teachers encourage me to come up with my own solutions to problems.	5	4	3	2	1
7. My teachers have shown me how to break down a problem to make it simpler to solve.	5	4	3	2	1
8. My teachers emphasise working out what I am being asked to do before beginning a task.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I usually get to practice on a number of similar problems in any given unit of work.	5	4	3	2	1
10. .I have a say in the sorts of things we do in class.	5	4	3	2	1
11. My teachers use a range of different activities to cater for different learning styles.	5	4	3	2	1
12. My teacher uses examples to show me what good work looks like.	5	4	3	2	1
13. My teachers encourage me to think about subjects from my own cultural perspectives.	5	4	3	2	1
14. Class activities require students to draw on	5	4	3	2	1

What are your lessons like?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
and share their cultural experiences.					
15. Classes have nothing to do with who I am.	5	4	3	2	1
16. Classes have nothing to do with my culture.	5	4	3	2	1
17. I feel that I do contribute to classes	5	4	3	2	1
18. I feel that I can contribute to classes.	5	4	3	2	1
19. My teachers respect me for who I am.	5	4	3	2	1
20. My teachers respect students.	5	4	3	2	1
21. Students respect each other.	5	4	3	2	1
22. I feel good about who I am.	5	4	3	2	1
23. Teachers are important role models.	5	4	3	2	1
24. It is important what my teachers thinks of me.	5	4	3	2	1
25. I don't care what my teacher thinks of me.	5	4	3	2	1
26. I have a good relationship with one or more teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
27. All teachers are pains.	5	4	3	2	1
28. I want to be like my Mum or Dad.	5	4	3	2	1
29. I want to be like my brother or sister.	5	4	3	2	1
30. It's important what other members of my family (uncles, aunties etc) think of me.	5	4	3	2	1
31. I can talk to some of my relatives as an adult.	5	4	3	2	1
32. I have some adult friends who I can talk things through with.	5	4	3	2	1
33. It's important to take risks sometimes.	5	4	3	2	1
34. I never take risks.	5	4	3	2	1

What are your lessons like?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
35. I feel safe at school.	5	4	3	2	1
36. My teachers make me feel safe enough to talk in class even if I am not sure I am right.	5	4	3	2	1
37. I know I won't be laughed at in class if I get it wrong.	5	4	3	2	1
38. I won't participate in class if I think I am going to be laughed at.	5	4	3	2	1
39. My teachers let me know when I do well.	5	4	3	2	1
40. Our teachers let us know when we do well as a class.	5	4	3	2	1
41. I often feel like I don't know if I'm on the right track.	5	4	3	2	1
42. I always try to work out if I have the right answer.	5	4	3	2	1
43. I never check my answers.	5	4	3	2	1
44. .Teachers talk to us about how we can do better.	5	4	3	2	1
45. Teachers are very clear about what we can do better.	5	4	3	2	1
46. It is always clear what we are supposed to be learning in class.	5	4	3	2	1
47. .I never really know why I am doing things in class.	5	4	3	2	1
48. We always have clear goals in class.	5	4	3	2	1
49. My teacher likes us to have a say in what we do in class.	5	4	3	2	1
50. My teachers value my opinions.	5	4	3	2	1
51. My teachers listen to me.	5	4	3	2	1
52. I get a say in what we are taught in class.	5	4	3	2	1

What are your lessons like?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
53. Sometimes I get to work on projects that interest me.	5	4	3	2	1
54. Teachers have to nag me to keep working.	5	4	3	2	1
55. I get to work on projects on my own in class.	5	4	3	2	1
56. I get to work on projects in small groups in class.	5	4	3	2	1
57. My teacher tells us exactly what to do.	5	4	3	2	1
58. When we work in groups the teacher leaves it up to us to decide what to do and when.	5	4	3	2	1
59. When I work alone, the teacher doesn't mind what I do as long as the work gets done.	5	4	3	2	1
60. I get time to think about what I am doing.	5	4	3	2	1
61. We always get an opportunity to talk about topics as a class.	5	4	3	2	1
62. We use class discussions to understand issues or solve problems.	5	4	3	2	1
63. We use class discussions to decide what to do next.	5	4	3	2	1
64. Lessons don't seem relevant to the real world.	5	4	3	2	1
65. Lessons usually apply to real world contexts.	5	4	3	2	1
66. Many lessons are set up like real world problems.	5	4	3	2	1
67. My teacher makes learning fun.	5	4	3	2	1
68. I like going to school.	5	4	3	2	1
69. Most school work is boring.	5	4	3	2	1

Part 2

How you work.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Learning is important to me.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I set aside time to learn even when I am not asked to.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I love to learn how things work.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I like learning new ways of doing things.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I feel that I can learn anything I want.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I am confident in my ability to solve problems.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I think learning will help me in the future.	5	4	3	2	1
8. My learning helps me now.	5	4	3	2	1
9. It makes me feels good to learn new things.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I set my own plans as to what to do next.	5	4	3	2	1
11. Its important to work as a team member.	5	4	3	2	1
12. I prefer to work on my own.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I get more done when I work with others.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I wish I was a better communicator.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I am a good communicator.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I have things to say that need to be heard.	5	4	3	2	1
17. It's important to remember everything to be successful at school.	5	4	3	2	1
18. It's important to know how things work in general.	5	4	3	2	1
19. It's important to know how to find information when I need it.	5	4	3	2	1
20. It's important to learn the rules for solving problems.	5	4	3	2	1

Part 3
Your Feedback

In this part I will be asking you for some feedback about your classroom experiences.

1. How do you rate the work you do in class? Why?

2. How could the work you do in class be improved?

3. Does your school provide a safe and supportive environment for students? Please explain.

4. Do you feel confident to take risks at school (like asking questions and giving answers in class?

5. How does your classroom work connect to what happens outside of classes in the *"real world"*?

6. What would you do to improve your school?

7. What have you learnt about yourself this year?

About you

We would like to something about your age and grade level. Please answer the following questions to tell us something about your self.

What month were you born in?	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

What year were you born in?

Gender				Male			Female		
What Year are you in at school?	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Where do you go to school?

Thank you for participating.

Dr. M. Bahr

Appendix C

Extracts from Case-study reports illustrating the Three Phases of reform

1.1   ST RESOLUTE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

In 2000, after a period of lengthy debate, research and discussion, the whole staff produced an initial draft of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Statement. The statement was the school's attempt to identify the learning environment best suited to bring about successful student learning, and the teaching and assessment methods which enabled such an environment to emerge. It clearly identified that teaching was more effective when teachers considered themselves as being lifelong learners and that effective learning occurred in a supportive environment that encouraged thought and initiative, recognised individuality and boasted a meaningful and rigorous curriculum.

1.2   METRO BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (QLD)

The Middle School at MBGS is a student-centred learning community that promotes the social and emotional, intellectual and personal growth of boys during Years 7-9 through a partnership between teachers, parents and students. The Prospectus documents emphasise:
- That students learn by making meaning in context;
- The importance of a process-focused curriculum learning how to learn and think;
- That there exists a collaborative teaching, planning and learning culture at the school in which there is a shared responsibility for pastoral care.
- The MBGS Middle School is "where boys step into possibility".

1.3   MURRAY HIGH SCHOOL (VIC)

Murray High School promotes high achievement and learning for life so that students achieve their potential. The acquisition of skills to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world and the development of enquiring minds and high levels of self esteem are seen as essential in becoming lifelong and independent learners. To this end, Murray High School promotes an ethos of encouragement, support and high expectation. A rich range of artistic and cultural activities and cutting edge learning technology complement innovative and engaging teaching practices across a broad and challenging curriculum. Murray High School demonstrates its commitment to working as a learning organisation by striving for continuous improvement, supporting staff with relevant professional development, working in teams towards common goals and by living the school values.

2.1   INNER CITY PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

For the duration of its current School Charter (2003 -2005), this school has established Engaging to Learn as a priority area for improvement. Essentially, this priority will focus the school on developing and implementing an inquiry based approach to curriculum delivery using a Thinking Classroom model for organising the teaching and learning program. The school believes that, in a Thinking Classroom, teachers create a safe environment for thinking, where thinking is a valued activity. In such classrooms, there is explicit instruction in thinking skills, and classroom activities are structured to promote thinking – not artificially, but through the promotion of meta-cognition across all areas of

the curriculum. Within this priority area, there is a particular emphasis on engaging students in the middle years of schooling, as there is a firm belief that such engagement lays the foundation for learning throughout life.

3.1   FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

The school renewal in the major areas of leadership and curriculum reform has as its focus the middle years of schooling … linking the years between primary school and the senior high school. There is a focus on teachers as learners, and students as lifelong learners. Some of the strategies used to assist in the formulation of this philosophy have included:

Renewing the school vision and motto "Many Kinds of Excellence" and establishing school values through a conference involving staff, students, parents and community members;

Research by staff into the best practice of other schools across Australia, with almost all teaching staff involved in visits to a range of locations (e.g., SA, WA, VIC, across QLD);

Sharing staff discoveries and learning on specific initiatives through full staff meetings and faculty meetings in an ongoing, collegial atmosphere;

Participating in professional development in a range of areas, including unpacking and coming to terms with the mandated eight junior curriculum Key Learning Areas which underpin change in the Years 1-10 curriculum across Australia;

Accessing the input of professionals in the middle schooling arena, including leaders of the University of Queensland's School Reform Longitudinal Study of effective teaching practice in the middle years of schooling;

Accessing an educational consultant as a critical friend on an ongoing, independent basis to assist the principal and staff through the middle years reform process;

Initiating a mandate for change focusing on the principles of middle schooling, based on teachers working across disciplines in Years 8 and 9 in transdisciplinary learning teams;

Developing a focus on curriculum and teaching practice change that goes hand-in-hand with a more supportive pastoral care program across the whole school; and

Designing a Curriculum Framework to support change through a focus on the student Outcomes to be achieved, both academically and socially, supported by specific teaching strategies and underpinned by changes in Fairstar's structures, leadership format and culture.

3.2   SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)

At the beginning of 2001, collaboratively-derived organisational structures and procedures relating to curriculum and welfare were in place and were considered sound. According to the principal, there was "a sense of calm" owing to the hard work already done by the extraordinarily committed and talented staff. However, there was an imbalance in planning, financing and dialogue about welfare and a desire to re-focus on the core business of the school, teaching and learning. Therefore, in 2001, the pursuit of a shared vision (articulated by the principal as "The Dream") to create a genuine professional learning community began with a deliberate, planned process of re-culturing. The first step in this process was for the whole school community to collaboratively derive a "Values Platform" that would essentially provide the framework for all core aspects of the school's operation including pedagogy, administration, resourcing, behaviour management and welfare programs [see Appendix 1]. For the values platform to become a reality in the classrooms at South West Sydney a "Learning Platform" was developed by the administrative team and staff were immersed in extensive professional development programs that focused on the relationship between

pedagogy and cognitive learning theory. The principal describes the final overarching framework [see Appendix 2] as "the heart and soul of things" and explains that the values platform and learning platform are "mirrored processes" that provide staff with a way of maintaining equilibrium and motivation in the face of often challenging daily realities experienced at South West Sydney HS.

4.1 COOPERSPLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE (QLD)

The college operates under a whole school team philosophy, with a seamless curriculum from pre-school through to Year 12, "promoting the concept of lifelong learning". There is a focus on the development of the individual as a "creative problem solver and a confident lateral thinker". This focus on teams is a fundamental philosophy for the college, with teaching teams and learning teams central to the understandings of middle schooling. The college uses a flexible teaming process is formally known in the college as MAYOP – Move At Your Own Pace – which is utilised in all Year levels. This allows for the needs of all students to be catered for by enabling them to learn in different ways and rates through flexible pathways. The College's stated values and beliefs are:
Learning;
Teamwork;
Respect;
Environment;
Maximising potential;
Developing positive partnerships;
Creating a sense of safety and belonging; and
Celebrating our achievements.

4.2 RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (SA)

Rivervale's vision is the development of a whole school community that shares a 'Thinking Culture' to meet diversified needs and empower learners (staff and students) with skills that transfer across and enhance everyday life and lifelong learning. The vision was initially discussed and negotiated in 2002. Collaborative research identified an appropriate direction for the school that focused on approaches to teaching, learning and thinking skills. This now is the Autonomous Learner Model, implemented throughout the school. A school thinking skills matrix has been developed and serves as a continuum that allows for ongoing development of skills complexities. Together these form the basis of a whole school 'Thinking Culture' that is embedded in curriculum planning and supported by resources and professional development.

4.3 ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE (ACT)

School culture founded on Catholic ethos. This ethos is central to the pastoral curriculum and its inter-connection with the academic curriculum. Together, these two wings of the curriculum have as their focus the social, intellectual, spiritual and physical development of all students. More specifically, the Middle School curriculum encourages students to develop their confidence and independence in relation to decision making, learning, respectful relations and life choices. Second, the Catholic ethos underpins the development of classroom practices, school structures and community relations that reflect and foster Christian principles.

5.1 INNER CITY PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

Given the spread of post primary destinations, the school recognises that transition for students from primary to secondary school may not be an optimum process, with students potentially disengaging in learning. This partly explains the reason for class rotations in Year 5/6 which enable students to gain experience in moving from one teacher to another. Another strategy relates to the development of student 'passports' as a bridge for both students and teachers, though these have only been developed where larger numbers of students have moved to a neighbouring secondary college.

5.2 INNER WEST GIRLS COLLEGE (VIC)

The staff are well aware of the difficulties, even traumas, that can occur as girls make the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. In order to reduce these difficulties, each Year 7 class has a base or home-room in which they have most of their classes. Students can decorate their room with their work and establish a sense of belonging. This is an essential step in the 'settling in' phase, as the girls come from over 30 different feeder primary schools. The students benefit from being in smaller classes for a longer period of time, with a limited number of teachers. There are stronger relationships, and teachers have greater opportunity to provide more interesting, varied and productive activities.

5.3 RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

The school made the decision to look more closely at their Year 8 cohort and primary – secondary transition needs. There were high incidents of friction associated with the transition, plus disengagement from learning, which for some students meant they did not progress or learn much more. These social and educative reasons were the prime drivers to examining current practices and beliefs and the need to look for more appropriate practices.

5.4 MERCY COLLEGE (QLD)

The underpinning approach to study in Year 8 is designed to facilitate a smooth transition to secondary school, and to this end many middle school signifying practices are evident. The Year 8 program is vastly different to the Year 9 and 10 programs, where students study a broad core curriculum with opportunity for electives, allowing them to keep subject options open for selection in senior years. The Middle School has a clearly articulated curriculum, with defined beliefs and values.

6.1 METRO BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (QLD)

When students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning, students reverted to a phrase from the school philosophy "the making of men". The boys saw their learning as contributing in a collective way to their formation of manhood. They were familiar with the concept of lifelong learning and believed that they had experienced this through learning experiences that were competitive, that applied processes to new situations, and that provided opportunities for problem solving. They generally believed they experienced these activities during their residential program. There was group agreement that the residential program enabled them to "be responsible for our own learning, not rely on parents to force us".

7.1   FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

In 2003 implementation of the mandate for change across the school commenced. The first cohort of Year 8 students began their high school year with teachers from trans-disciplinary Learning Teams. Each Year 8 class has a Learning Team of teachers of between 5 and 6 (usually only 5). Fairstar has a Workplace Reform in place that has seen management positions sacrificed for increased teacher allocations. This has meant reduced class sizes to about 20 in the Year 8 classes (where they were typically 30). This trans-disciplinary team of teachers plan together, looking at ways both support curriculum delivery, and individual students.

7.2   GREENFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

Pedagogical practice within the Learning Journeys Program centres on providing experiential learning which is reflective and based on real world problem solving. A critical feature of the Learning Journeys Program is the transformation of the role of teachers from content delivery to learning mentors. Each member of the learning journey team has formally applied for their role through a selection process which has been designed to maximise commitment to the program. Teachers in the program act as learning 'mentors' to a small group of students (approximately 15). The mentoring role requires teachers to step back from more traditional roles in which they might control the delivery of content and set work requirements, to establishing a more facilitatory role - guiding individual students through learning experiences.

7.3   SUNNYSIDE P-12 COLLEGE (VIC)

Middle Years 5-9, which includes the operation of team teaching and 'block' timetabling across Year levels 5/6 and 6/7, as well as vertical groupings in Years 8-10, which have been established to promote student ownership of learning opportunities and to cater for individual needs and interests, including the social needs of students.

7.4   COOPERS PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE (QLD)

Years 7-9 are the middle years at Coopers plains Community College. Middle years students are members of 'pods'. There are five pods, each with 120 students, ranging across Years 7-9. Year 7 students are identified as Phase 1, Year 8 as Phase 2, and Year 9 as Phase 3. Each pod has a purpose built facility with access to computers, wet and dry areas, flexible teaching spaces. There is a Head of Department and four teachers for each pod, along with two specialist teachers known as Integrating Facilitators, and in some cases there are learning support teachers. Each pod operates according to the decisions made by the team of teachers. Pod planning meetings include all staff noted above. Planning meetings occur on a weekly basis, with 1.5-3 hours of class time allocated. In alternate weeks, approximately an hour and a half is dedicated to pod planning at staff meetings. The planning meetings determine all levels of the implementation of the curriculum, including timetabling, arrangement of students within pods, running of sessions/classes as optional, essential, and so on. The team members in each pod develop depth studies which include deep understandings; a concept map of learning experiences and resources; models for learning groups and delivery; and the culminating activity.

7.5   NORTH CANBERRA SCHOOL (ACT)

The middle school structure is organised around Year level home groups for the students. Key aspects of the curriculum, namely the Integrated Studies units, specialist

electives and pastoral care, are conducted within these home groups. Each home group has their 'own' classroom and a home group teacher who is responsible for teaching the Integrated Studies units, maths and facilitating the pastoral care program. The Integrated Studies units encompass the Outcomes linked to the KLAs of English and HSIE, (however in practice there are typically numerous connections with other curriculum areas).

7.6   MURRAY HIGH SCHOOL (VIC)

The school believes significant change in middle years pedagogy is enhanced by the use of 'professional learning teams'. Support of these teams by provision of adequate blocks of time where they can plan and work together; Staff who are dedicated to change in the middle years and are not distracted by demands at other levels; and a timetable structure that is largely freed from the constraints imposed by staff involvement in other levels. Under the proposal, Year 7 will operate in two groupings of either three or four classes (depending on enrolments). The classes will be staffed as a block by teachers who will usually only teach within one grouping. Each specialist Year 7 teacher will teach just 2-3 classes each for 2-3 subjects and generally not teach outside the Year Level.

8.1   SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)

A major factor in the success and sustainability of the reform efforts at South West Sydney HS is the exemplary leadership demonstrated by the executive staff. The principal is clearly an outstanding leader who, when he joined South West Sydney HS in late 2000, became part of a well-established team for which he provided new structures to consolidate their thinking. He practices a dispersed leadership style and actively promotes his ideas through messages such as "We are all leaders at South West Sydney High School" to every relevant audience. This is another message received and adopted by all staff interviewed who were always quick to praise the school executive for providing opportunities to show initiative as well as the support required to take risks and implement new ideas.

8.2   METRO BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (QLD)

A position of Head of Middle School existed but was upgraded as the school moved to create three semi-autonomous 'sub-schools'. The traditional leadership role of Director of Studies who oversaw curriculum from Year 1-12 was abolished and in 2002 a new appointment of Curriculum Coordinator Middle School signalled a commitment to changes to the curriculum approach in the Middle Years. This commenced with a review of the existing beliefs, traditions and structures in the Middle School. Generally speaking, these did not reflect what is considered to be effective middle schooling practice, according to the research base informing the field.

8.3   FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

Coinciding with the renewal of the school facilities, a new school principal was appointed in 2002. …. The newly-appointed principal initiated a whole-school process of reform, based on gathering and analysing data. This process identified issues symptomatic of the need for significant change in leadership, curriculum and structures to improve student engagement in learning. Issues included low achievement and tertiary entrance scores, and high truancy rates. Student non-engagement also manifested as low participation in cross-curricular activities, with violence and vandalism indicative of

deterioration in school-community relationships. Planning for a whole-school approach, including re-conceptualisation of across-school leadership roles enabled implementation of a new focus in 2003. Specifically, a Head of Middle School was appointed and the new role of Dean of Students was established to engage senior teachers in greater formal leadership responsibilities and to drive the reforms through the staff.

8.4   SOUTH WEST COUNTRY HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

A critical aspect of the Middle School at SWC is the leadership provided by the principals of both the primary and the high school. This leadership has encompassed curriculum vision as well as the provision of structural supports. For example, the shared infrastructure, staffing and resourcing of the Middle School has depended on strong collaboration and commitment by the two principals. Second, the principals have provided the necessary conditions for staff to take responsibility for and develop the curriculum. Third, while each principal acknowledges their own distinctive style and approach to leadership, they have worked to build a complementary set of practices that have enabled the schools to develop a seamless approach to curriculum and pedagogy across K-12. The principals of both schools have been instrumental in developing and sustaining the middle school over the past ten years. Both principals have brought to their role a strong commitment to middle schooling, and more broadly to the development of close links and curricular exchange between the primary school and high school.

9.1   SUNNYSIDE P-12 COLLEGE (VIC)

Two clear strategies are adopted by the school in this domain. Firstly, wherever possible but particularly through the vertical curriculum in Years 8 -10, the school endeavours to immerse the curriculum within the local environment. Sunnyside students are involved in a range of curriculum and co-curricula activities within the local environment. Of equal importance is the need to connect to the wider world beyond Sunnyside. Here too, evidence derived from the themes undertaken in Years 5-7 and the vertical units in Years 8 – 10, as well as the school camps and excursions program, indicates that the school is making a conscious effort to draw on students' contextual knowledge and connect learning with the wider world.

9.2   THE LAKES GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

The unrelenting emphasis on connecting the curriculum with the experiences undertaken by the Year 9 students has led to high levels of engagement with the program by the students. Many examples exist which incorporate a more active learning approach with increased involvement in community, environmental and 'out of classroom' activities. This is particularly the case with the Melbourne experience, where students find that they are both challenged by the unconventional nature of the program but, at the same time, are very appreciative of the flexibility and loosened boundaries of the timetable. Teachers indicate there is an opportunity, in fact a need, to further develop links between Outdoor Education and the remainder of the curriculum and seize the opportunity to add value to the school experience.

9.3   COOPERSPLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE (QLD)

This domain was considered to be achieved to a high degree by teachers. The integrated curriculum, MAYOP principles, pod structure, and the global learnings were

each seen as facilitating factors in what was perceived as a highly successfully domain. Teachers believe the practices in the school "stand out' in this regard.

9.4   METRO BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (QLD)

The middle school curriculum is delivered over the two campuses. The school argues that this split delivery optimises lifelong learning for boys in the middle years of schooling, as it enables practical, hands-on educational programs at a time when research indicates there is a decline in student interest in learning. In this way, the school supports the belief that middle school students are a distinct developmental group, and actively seeks to provide educational experiences that are based on firm principles and best practices in Middle Schooling, especially in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Staff at the main campus generally indicated that it was left up to the residential experience with its focus on 'learning in context' to make Connections, as there was little time in an already full curriculum to develop this aspect. Students were also likely to have 'overloaded lives' beyond their school commitments and there was little time to focus on this element. In support of this view, the external residential campus based teachers argued that Connectedness is a key element of their teaching repertoire, with Connectedness to the World, Problem-based Curriculum and Knowledge Integration featuring as the basic platform for their approach to learning. However, there was a belief that the main campus curriculum could more effectively establish connections and set up opportunities to emphasise this element when students are undergoing the residential component, regardless of the current imbalance.

9.5   CHAUCER PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

In relation to the principles of lifelong learning, it became apparent that these were so firmly embedded in the professional practice of teachers at Chaucer PS that they found it difficult to critically reflect on these attributes or practices. During the interview process teachers were able to clearly articulate a consistent teaching philosophy that was based on a whole-school approach to every aspect of students' lives but needed some prompting to match this with a philosophy of lifelong learning. Once assisted in clarifying their ideas, teachers were able to affirm that their collaborative approach to teaching and learning, their emphasis on connectedness and real-world learning experiences and a focus on learning-to-learn is clearly demonstrating and imparting some important lifelong learning skills. This was supported by data obtained from a focus group of students whose ability to articulate their ideas about lifelong learning was quite remarkable.

9.6   FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

The trans-disciplinary curriculum focus is intended to facilitate the development of a more vital curriculum program that has stronger Intellectual Quality and supports students to understand the Connectedness of their learning. For Fairstar High, curriculum that is trans-disciplinary:
- has a student-centred focus rather than a subject/content focus;
- means a shift from the focus on teaching to focusing on learning, which is achieved by teachers - talking and planning across disciplines to support learning;
- means that disciplines/subjects/KLAs remain the core of the learning curriculum and links are
made through the learning experiences when appropriate;
- enables the curriculum to find the areas that are linked and ensure curriculum is not repeated;

and
- provides students with the opportunity to test their understanding of learning across disciplines by completing some tasks that reach across disciplines.

9.7   INNER WEST GIRLS COLLEGE (VIC)

The College has engaged with City West Water to write curriculum materials that promote water wise approaches in daily life and specifically in setting up a Waterwise Garden. Year 8 teachers and students have trialled the program with such success it is now used as a curriculum document by other schools. The program is conducted with Year 8 classes and is regarded as an excellent example of an integrated Middle Years of Schooling project.

10.1   TREELINE STATE SCHOOL (QLD)

The focus of teaching and learning in the middle years classes is social and emotional wellbeing, such that students become independent learners ready for high school. Literacy and lastly numeracy Outcomes are seen by teachers as a bonus. There are efforts made to conduct excursions into the real world, which is seen as particularly beneficial for this student cohort. This includes visits to the art gallery, on trains, other public access places of interest. Classroom teachers see the 5 keys of the Words of Wisdom (confidence, persistence, organisation, cooperation and resilience) as providing a common language that is seen as somewhat similar to lifelong learning.

10.2   CHAUCER PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

Chaucer PS has implemented the Commonwealth mental health initiative developed by the Curriculum Corporation called Mind Matters. Although developed for secondary schools, the program has had some success in upper primary. Mind Matters uses a whole school approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention. The program aims to enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful. The rationale of the program is based on the notion that social and emotional wellbeing have been linked to young people's schooling Outcomes, their social development, their capacity to contribute to the workforce and the community and to reducing the rate of youth suicide.

10.3   RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (SA)

Teachers indicate students are more engaged and more independent with their own learning, as well as helping others. Year 9 and 10 teachers support these claims as students make their transition to the senior years….. Feedback from the main regional feeder Senior High School indicates local students make the transition more readily and are generally more reliable, more organised and better independent learners, in comparison to other students. These local cohorts have all gone through the middle schooling culture, which as teachers across the school claim, is why they are better prepared for lifelong learning. The changes brought about by relationship development have influenced the whole school… Their relationships with each other are positive and supportive as they are of the school, where for example, over 94% attend sporting carnivals, a significantly larger number than similar schools. There is ample evidence in student data collection and teacher perceptions that past anti social behaviours have largely been overcome. Teachers comment about more positive relationships, especially in the middle years, where collaboration and cooperation have become part of the

culture. Consequently students are more engaged and where once some would ' opt out' ongoing student learning is now more likely.

10.4 THE LAKES GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

Through a broad curriculum, The Lakes Grammar provides a range of offerings to produce adolescents prepared and confident to take their place in society and equipped to meet the challenges and demands of a rapidly changing world. There is an overt acknowledgement that each child has a preferred learning style and that the college makes every effort to accommodate all learning modes and requirements. Significant emphasis is placed on the skills of multiple literacies, communication, cooperative learning, reasoning, problem solving and research. The school encourages adaptability, flexibility and effective application of knowledge and skills to a given situation. Students are required to be actively involved in their learning by making decisions, assuming responsibility, evaluating, analysing and taking action. Learning is enhanced by the regular provision of feedback. There is a belief that there is no learning without emotion and challenge. Teachers are encouraged to embrace new ideas and innovative practices….

A key strategy which the school has implemented to overcome this transition phase centres on the introduction of a peer support program. Through this program, Year 10 students are given significant responsibility for supporting the transition of Year 7 students into the school. Training in peer support is incorporated into the Year 9 program, with full implementation occurring in Year 10. This additional responsibility is perceived to be a key element in enabling students to 'move on' and adapt to new circumstances within the senior section of the school.

10.5 ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE (ACT)

Each class has a Pastoral Teacher who has responsibility for day-to-day student welfare, as well as for teaching the pastoral program. This teacher is, where possible, one of the Principal Teachers. The link that each class has with a cluster also supports the process of student welfare and connections that students have to a Cluster (each Cluster has a Pastoral Coordinator)

10.6 SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)

An important element of the welfare program are extended roll calls held each Wednesday where the focus is on building positive relationships in the school community. In the middle years of schooling these groups are divided up according to Year level and gender, with the rationale for the latter being the fostering of more appropriate behaviour in a low-risk, safe environment where gender-specific issues can be openly discussed. Some of the 'lessons' involve guest speakers e.g., the police and other community members who discuss students' legal rights and responsibilities as members of society. For Year 10 students, this time is also used to develop leadership skills and for training in the mentoring program with primary transition students. Resources are collaboratively designed by staff and sometimes the students (as an example, for a forum on drugs). Values are an underpinning element of this initiative and are 'played out' through a game in which students are given a series of value statements and must physically line up on a Lickert scale and justify their stance according to the strength of their conviction.

11.1 FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

The school has determined not to assess and report on all of the Core Learning Outcomes (CLOs) of the KLAs, and this is consistent with education policy in the state. Instead, common CLOs across disciplines that can be taught in a trans-disciplinary way are being determined.

Other areas of middle years reform the school has identified include the capacity for students to develop more meaningful relationships. Reforms with pastoral care initiatives, such as students having interactions with fewer people and more time to develop their relations, with both classroom teachers and those supporting students to achieve social outcomes have been implemented. The House sub-school structure the school has implemented enables this to occur. For instance, students see the same Manager for all support and behaviour issues, and the Managers monitor the absences of students on a weekly basis. Secondly, a clear behaviour management approach is needed that supports students, parents and staff to form a stronger partnership, including putting in place a Behaviour Flowchart.

11.2 ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE (ACT)

The curriculum Outcomes focus on a range of skills, knowledge and dispositions relevant to the process of learning, the specific integrated unit, and broad domains of knowledge and inquiry. Outcomes concerned with learning skills include working in cooperative and collaborative ways, working independently, using divergent thinking, locating information from a range of sources, making meaning holistically by analogies, similarities, dissimilarities and logical connections. The Outcomes also focus on integrated understandings and knowledge as well as discipline-specific skills and understanding. .. Rich assessment tasks incorporating application of skills, knowledge and processes from a variety of KLA's are used. At the moment the assessment system is tightly aligned with the curriculum and pedagogy that has been developed at the school. The curriculum implications associated with standardised literacy and numeracy tests for students in Year 9 are currently being considered within the school.

11.3 INNER CITY PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

The school has adopted a comprehensive approach to monitoring student learning. In addition to implementing government mandated assessment and reporting processes, teachers at Inner City Primary School use a range of assessment strategies to measure and monitor student learning. Within the middle years program, assessment rubrics are a key component of the approach to gather data and monitor student learning, particularly in Key Learning Areas, such as Science, Technology and Studies of Society and Environment. The assessment rubrics are complementary to planning materials, which guide student activity and subsequent learning across two domains
- Bloom's Taxonomy – Knowledge, Comprehension, Application and Analysis; and
- Thinking styles – Word, Logic and Maths, Space and Vision and People.
Students, too, contribute information about their own learning and that of their peers through evaluative activity, which requires individual reflection.

11.4 ST RESOLUTE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

The school's approach to integrated studies includes all Key Learning Areas and Religious Education into the various units of work over a two year cycle. Units are usually one term's duration. The school realises that equal coverage in each KLA in

each unit of study is not always possible, nor is it necessarily best practice. It may lead to a superficial coverage. Instead one, perhaps two, branches of learning become the central focus, and the other KLAs are included where relevant. This is more inclined to bring desired depth to the learning activities, rather than breadth. Team planning is an essential feature of the program. This ensures that there is no unnecessary repetition of content, all KLAs are included over time and in appropriate proportion, and there is potential to incorporate a variety of teaching and learning styles. A variety of grouping structures are regularly used.

11.5   SOUTH WEST COUNTRY HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

The key curriculum focus is continuity across sets of skills and knowledge. The curriculum for Yrs 5, 6 and 7 is, by and large, based on the NSW Board of Studies syllabus documents. A key way in which staff have worked with these syllabus documents is through a series of curriculum mapping exercises that have aimed to enhance curriculum consistency. The mapping involved a comprehensive review of Syllabus guidelines across Yrs 5, 6 and 7 in the areas of English, Maths, Science, HSIE and Design and Technology. The purpose of this was to identify the connection and progression between skills and knowledge across Year levels and curriculum fields. The mapping provided a way of conceptualising how skills and understanding could be built and extended over a three-year period. A specific teaching project associated with this mapping involved the use of varied text types across the curriculum and Year levels as a way of explicitly building literacy skills. In Year 7 students study English, Maths, science and HSIE with one home teacher. Having one teacher across these areas enables concentrated encounters, integration across content areas and the current focus on building of literacy and numeracy skills in relation to these areas. The Rotas provide a base for the acquisition and application of a range of specialist skills and knowledge.

11.6   COOPERS PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE (QLD)

The College maps student progress from Year 1-12 using Global Learnings, a hybrid of lifelong learning and employability skills:
Researching and consulting;
Analysing, synthesising, relating and selecting;
Negotiating and personalising;
Planning, designing and creating;
Judging and deciding;
Operating and making and acting;
Evaluating and revising;
Presenting, performing, explaining and communicating.
Students' school-based assessment occurs in the five knowledges and on the Global Learnings, using the standards: developing, consolidating, proficient, exemplary. Students, parents and teachers conference progress at the end of term one and one written report is issued each semester. As Coopersplains Community College is a New Basics school, students also receive a report at the end of Years 3, 6 and 9 detailing their achievement on state-moderated rich tasks.

12.1   SUNNYSIDE P-12 COLLEGE (VIC)

Through participation in a range of professional development activities, the school is highly focused on providing students with teaching and learning activity which has a high intellectual quality. For example, in the Year 5 -7 program, teachers use

Plus/Minus/Interesting (PMI) and a lateral and creative thinking strategy to assist students to think about, record and share their ideas around a key idea or issue. Other strategies, such as De Bono's Six Thinking Hats and discussions about multiple intelligences, are utilised to enable students to think about themselves as learners and approach learning from different perspectives. Similarly, open ended learning tasks are utilised in Years 8 -10 to build on basic concepts and foster deeper understanding and knowledge about complex issues and problems.

12.2   THE LAKES GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

The Lakes Grammar has a strong academic tradition which it maintains with rigour. Planning of assignment and assessment requirements is based on Bloom's Taxonomy and Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences. Depth of learning and a degree of negotiated choice of content and learning experiences are evident in all planned units. The school is addressing the need for increased depth of thinking as part of its professional learning strategy.

12.3   INNER CITY PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

Classroom observations indicate that the middle years pedagogy adopted at the school has a strong focus on promoting higher order thinking skills, deep knowledge and deep understanding. This is largely achieved through the focus on meta-cognition derived from adoption of the 'Thinking Classroom' approach to teaching and learning.

12.4   NORTH CANBERRA SCHOOL (ACT)

A key aspect of the pedagogy at the school is the focus on practices that encourage critical thinking and reflection, depth of learning, connections and coherence in relation to all subjects and life outside of school, responsibility for own learning, and an awareness of the value of learning now and in the future. These practices are developed through the integrated approach to curriculum, the methods of assessment (particularly portfolios), and the interactions between students and teachers in classrooms.

13.1   ST RESOLUTE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

The Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) is completed in Years 3 and 5. Teachers routinely administer a battery of tests to inform of student achievement, progress and learning needs, and to enable the planning and selection of appropriate teaching and learning opportunities in literacy. The measurement instruments include:

- Schonell Spelling Test;
- Concepts About Print (student knowledge of language conventions and word usage);
- The BURT Word Test (ability to decode multi-syllable
- words);
- Peters Spelling In Context (writing dictated text to indicate the strategies used to spell words and listening comprehension); and
- TORCH Comprehension Test (demonstrate text understanding through written responses).

14.1 INNER WEST GIRLS COLLEGE (VIC)

The documentation submitted by the College outlined a range of strategies and initiatives used to address many literacy issues within the Middle Years of Schooling. These strategies included:
• Holistic approaches to literacy across the KLAs (Deakin University Literacy Research Project);
• Extensive professional development of staff;
• Literature Circles – an innovative method to studying class texts;
• Lexile Levelled Reading Framework – (reading measure matching students to texts);
• RESTART – a DE&T initiative to improve the literacy levels of Year 7 students most at risk of not achieving satisfactory reading levels;
• Homework Club – volunteer tutors providing assistance for newly arrived African students, but now extended to students with literacy difficulties and open to all; and
• Literacy Extension which includes interschool debating, Australian Writing Competition and a wide range of public speaking endeavours.

In 2001, a cohort of 25 students was randomly chosen from the three classes of the same Year level, beginning in Year 7 in 2001. The College has established a relationship between DART (Development Assessment Resources for Teachers) Reading Test, CSF levels and TORCH stanine levels, which has enabled a comparison of each student's progress over several years. In Year 7, 76% of the group was contained within the 'very low', 'low' and 'below average' range of indicators. By 2003 (Year 9), this same cohort has reversed the trend, with only 28% in the same low categories; 72% are now performing at 'average', 'above average' and 'superior' levels.

There were also significant results in two other areas: a turnaround in the rate of student absence and dramatic improvements in apparent retention rates.

15.1 RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

The school is well equipped with IT resources, sharing computer laboratory costs and facilities and with the community, enabling access to more IT and multi media support than would otherwise be possible. Classrooms also have computers that are used regularly as students move through their learning pathways. IT is a school focus. The school has invested a significant part of its overall budget not only into hardware, software, networking and multi media, but also into IT Coordinator time and expertise in developing staff skills and support for IT implementation into classroom practice as a tool for learning. Students in the middle years are well skilled in IT research, publishing, communications and presentations. Technology is central to learning programs.

16.1 RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

The school volunteer program operates on both school sites and involves some twenty students, offering emotional and social support. Staff identify students for the program as being at risk, socially, emotionally, academically, or other. The option to participate is up to students and families. In addition, the program links school, student and the home in strengthening support and understanding. This is especially so in the Middle School, where the term "building bridges to homes" is commonly used. Volunteers come to the school to interact with students, developing positive relationships through chatting, playing games and other activities. Students appreciate having a friend to share and assist with school and personal problems. Each individual relationship ceases once

students no longer feel the need, or their aims have been met, or the interaction is not working.

The Peer Support Program was introduced into the school over two years ago as an outcome of school focus on building relationships, improving the learning environment and developing a school community 'Thinking Culture'. The program aimed to:
• improve the sense of community within the school;
• promote a more caring and sharing environment;
• enhance self-awareness, self-esteem and communications skills;
• provide a comfortable situation in which to develop trust;
• encourage the sharing of ideas and feelings in a non-judgemental atmosphere;
• increase awareness of individual responsibility;
• make the transition into a new school environment more comfortable and less threatening; provide senior students with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in a way which benefits them and the school; and
• provide strategies whereby students are able to deal with harmful influences

This Program has been a success with benefits to both Year 7's and Year 10's. The Year 7 students enjoy being involved with the older students and have responded positively to their leaders. The Peer Leaders take on a significant commitment in planning and evaluation sessions, helping students with problems within their group.

17.1   FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)
The changes to leadership structures included new positions as Deans of Students and Learning Team Leaders, working together with the restructured Heads of School, and all within a House sub-school structure. This shared leadership enables shared responsibility for student support and behaviour management, and for more effective monitoring and support of students in terms of their educational engagement. This has led to a new school culture being developed that is based on the concepts of collective responsibility.

17.2   CHAUCER PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)
Apart from the principal, two Phase 3 (Years 5/6) teachers were formally interviewed for the purposes of this research. Their insights into changes that have occurred at the school over the past few years were very positive but there was some trepidation as to whether these reforms were sustainable considering the lack of ongoing funding for initiatives. Both teachers were experienced and long-standing members of the Chaucer school community and both had found the recent professional development programs in Productive Pedagogies as energising their practice and providing them with new, effective approaches to classroom teaching and learning. They felt that their different teaching styles were complimentary and they clearly enjoyed working collaboratively.

18.1   SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)
The Boys' Own program grew from a 'wilderness' camp that was established some years ago by two enthusiastic and adventurous teachers who wanted to provide 'at-risk' boys with a challenging program that required 'adult' ability levels but focused on choice or pathways. The success of the original program was measured in terms of the improved self-esteem and behaviour of all boys who participated. The Boys' Own program is now more structured targeting boys across the whole spectrum of behaviours from 'at-risk' to

potential leaders. The teachers who run this program are very clear about their roles as mentors in this exercise and aim to establish a relationship of trust and loyalty with the boys who participate. These days the program includes a number of self-directed projects and has refocused on relationship building within the school community. It is expected that in 2004 all boys will be part of the program and a similar program for girls is to be trialled… This five-day orienteering course takes students out of their 'comfort zone' with anecdotal evidence suggesting they all expressed improved self-esteem by merely completing the course. Wherever possible, the school tries to encourage its students to participate in community events that promote active citizenship. The HT (Arts) played an integral role in establishing the community networks that enabled students to become involved in these events. For example, she nominated South West Sydney students to work on a Housing Commission mural project and also got them involved in a beautification scheme for a neglected playground in the South West Sydney Housing Estate. This teacher was adamant that once involved, her role was not to supply ideas but to guide the students through the project so that they could claim ownership of their work and acquire some important skills in work-related issues and a sense of independence.

19.1   FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

At the core of the reforms at Fairstar High is a focus on teacher professional development. A restructuring of leadership within the school, combined with the curriculum changes for the middle years, required commitment from teachers for any possibility of effectiveness. Staff were and continue to be engaged in the reform processes, as active participants. This process has involved professional development about middle years, including interstate school visits, conference attendance, as well as staff training in leadership roles and responsibilities. Whole-of-school professional development activities were undertaken to facilitate the reforms, and the dispersed leadership model now in place provides greater opportunity for staff exercising management roles. The school was recently successful in gaining a National Award for Quality Schooling in School Leadership based on these reforms.

19.2   INNER WEST GIRLS COLLEGE (VIC)

Extensive research has been undertaken by the leadership team into all aspects of middle years reform leading up to, during and following the commencement of the College's middle years initiative. Staff have been involved in numerous local workshops and larger conferences. The College's decision to bring about change in structure, curriculum and methodology was greatly influenced by the staff insights gained through professional development provided by DET and its investment in the Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) project. Inner West Girls College has gone on to contribute to the wider professional community through presentations at state-wide conferences, including Education Foundation MYOS Conference, Deakin University Literacy in Middle Years Research Project and the Catholic Curriculum Forum. Some teachers have had to reinvent themselves. Others have seized the opportunity and found it refreshing to work in new ways and subsequently rekindled energies evident in previous times. By working in an integrated curriculum structure, teachers are able to observe what other teachers are doing and identify opportunities to build on what others are doing. Teachers are now looking for opportunities and making use of them. It is most apparent there is a strengthened movement towards a redefined pedagogy within the College.

19.3   CHAUCER PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

Since Chaucer PS joined the other cluster schools in the Chaucer Research Group, their access to funding and resources for professional development has benefited the whole school in relation to a more coherent approach to pedagogy across the curriculum and a range of improved student Outcomes. Although teachers in the middle years yielded the most rewards initially, the benefits have 'trickled down' to other teachers in the school through peer training and workshops and simply because of improved transition student Outcomes which, in a small school like Chaucer, have a significant effect across the whole student cohort. The principal's enthusiasm for pedagogical reform has enabled the majority of the teaching staff at Chaucer to become aware of the benefits of adopting the principles of both backward mapping for planning and Productive Pedagogies for classroom practice.

19.4   SOUTH WEST COUNTRY HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

A range of professional development opportunities have been taken up by teachers in the schools in order to develop the Middle School and extend professional knowledge:
- Site visits. Prior to the development of the Middle School staff visited other schools that had established some form of middle schooling.
- Presenting and attending conferences and workshops.
- Participating in school-based projects that have systemic or cross-school support. The negotiation and collaboration between teachers across school sites in order to establish the middle school represents one key example of school-based professional development. Teachers involved in developing the program extended their knowledge of their different school sectors and took a critical role in designing the curriculum.

19.5   SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)

South West Sydney HS provides unparalleled opportunities in T & D in the form of weekend residential conferences (held 3-4 times per year), timetabled Faculty and Focus Group meetings as well as whole staff meetings timetabled on a regular basis, plus scheduled after-school workshops where necessary. This 'organisational learning' approach to professional development was intended to alleviate the pressure form daily school activities and develop 'thinking time' for individuals and dialogue between staff members. This approach means that staff are treated like professionals who feel they can take risks and present new initiatives and challenges for consideration by other staff in a less threatening environment. Over the last three years in-service for all staff in C.L.A.S.S. and 4MAT (including primary feeder staff) has provided teachers with a common language to critique the learning activities they engage in with their students, plus providing a consistent approach to pedagogy and programming. The principal is explicit about the learning that staff undertake in the school when he is talking to students (and parents) at assemblies and other public gatherings and this has the effect of enabling students to clearly perceive their teachers as lifelong learners. In 2004 the T & D program is set to further develop the pedagogical and relationship skills of its teachers through a structured peer observation program utilising C.L.A.S.S. and 4MAT models so that teachers can select categories and set up observational rubrics the help to de-personalise observation sessions and remove any threat of uninvited critique. In essence, in 2004 every teacher at the school observes another teacher in a classroom at least once every two weeks on a rotational basis. The focus for these observations is a collaboratively-developed observation rubric relating specifically to the unit of work being taught. Each Faculty has control over the logistics of the schedule, and each Head

Teacher monitors and discusses the Outcomes of all observations with the Faculty. This represents high quality professional learning which is structured around explicit observation of teachers teaching……

19.6   GREENFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

To support the introduction of the Learning Journeys Program, teachers have had extensive involvement in professional development, which has included the three hour timetabled commitment for all teaching staff at the school in which the Learning Journeys team engages in professional development together on a weekly basis. During these sessions, professional development activity has focused on a range of topics to foster shared understanding related to middle years pedagogy and practice

19.7   NORTH CANBERRA SCHOOL (ACT)

Teachers at the school have access to a range of professional development options. These include attending conferences and PD workshops. As well, the school is highly regarded both in the ACT and across Australia for its innovative approach to middle schooling. This has meant that teachers have had numerous opportunities to run workshops for other teachers, present at conferences and share their expertise with visitors to the school.

19.8   ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE (ACT)

A range of professional development opportunities have been taken up by teachers in the school in order to develop the Middle School and/or extend professional knowledge about pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and student matters. Teachers at the school were involved in the initial negotiation of the middle school which constituted an important form of professional development in terms of considering current research and visiting schools.

19.9   RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

In addition, middle school staff are also required to undertake professional development in collaborative team strategies and approaches to integrated studies. All staff have equal access to whole school professional development budgets. Outside school, staff access a range of programs specific to needs as well as conferences and seminars. The school is fortunate in having a local Curriculum Improvement Officer to coordinate and provide leadership within the middle schooling context. This Officer also provides leadership for other schools within the district. The networks developed by the teacher are shared with local staff, making links with other schools and bringing back ideas and strategies to enhance local learning cultures.

20.1   SOUTH WEST COUNTRY HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

South West Country High School has a well-established set of pathway programs in Years 9 and 10. A vocational education program that combines work experience with school and TAFE study caters in particular for students who have special needs, who do not want to pursue an academic pathway, or who are at risk of not completing Year 10. Each student has an individualised program that seeks to build particular sets of skills (eg communication, organisation, mathematical) in various workplace settings and to combine this with focused programs of study and certification. This program has been independently evaluated. The school also operates an Enrichment Program as part of

the elective choice. A range of self-directed modules are negotiated with students and they focus on such things as high level communication skills, public speaking, advanced technology skills, and current affairs. The enrichment program aims to extend students' confidence and forums for civic and intellectual participation.

20.2 MURRAY HIGH SCHOOL (VIC)

Students were generally quite definite about their preferred teaching/learning styles. Although some individual variations existed, all were adamant they disliked copying from the board or working out of a book or being told step by step. They did like having a choice in the manner in which they completed tasks, having help on hand for when they needed it and having subject matter that they liked and was real. They liked things that were different [meaning innovative] and the fact that they could develop a sense of responsibility by doing things their way. The Capacity Matrix was seen as a positive and worthwhile innovation.

"Doing the test at the start is good because if you know a lot of the stuff you can skip over it."

"I like the checklists because you can mark things off …… it makes you feel good even though there's lots more to do."

20.3 FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

Fairstar has identified what it terms 'essential learnings' that all students should possess when they finish middle schooling. The primary goal of pedagogy and the curriculum is for students to become lifelong learners, and by that, they mean that students:
• not only possess knowledge but that they also possess a range of flexible skills;
• are critical thinkers and can apply these abilities to their learning;
• understand the connectedness of their learning to the world around them; and
• can see the importance of continuing to be learners throughout their lives.

21.1 FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

Students articulated a high degree of relevance in many of their KLA areas, and equated this with keeping them interested and "not getting bored". Students noticed a shift this year to more collaborative, team work approaches to learning, and found this to be satisfying, socially supportive, and academically appropriate. Students recognised their relationships with teachers had changed to allow for their growing maturity, and there often was scope for independence and a range of solutions to problems, rather than set answers, as was typical of primary school. They indicated that group work helps you "keep touch with reality" and gives an opportunity to interact with others with whom they might not typically choose to work. This was seen as a positive attribute of group work. Students liked school when it was relevant, challenging, made them think, and had 'hands-on' elements. The students respected their teachers when they considered them to be: learned, interesting, enthusiastic, funny, technically competent, and different. Through the pastoral care House sub-school structure the ownership of the school by staff and students is demonstrated in a range of activities and actions. Feedback from students in forums and from senior leaders shows that students have embraced the changes and are more positive about school life than in previous data sets…. Participation rates in athletics carnivals have increased. Increased student access to resources has seen a change in the way staff have embraced new technologies…There is a growing pride in the school by students, and the school motto is used widely. There is a reduced litter problem in the school …

21.2 GREENFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

Through the ongoing interaction with their learning mentor, as well as individual goal setting and evaluation processes, students gain valuable insights into their own learning styles, strengths and weaknesses. These insights form a critical component of a tripartite mid-year review of the learning program in which parents, teachers and students engage in a student led conference to reflect on the learning journey to date and planning for the remainder of the year.

The student led conference is complemented by a detailed written assessment of student learning which is reported to parents each semester as a component of the school's overall reporting process. Students report that the Learning Journeys Program provides opportunities for extended engagement in activity, particularly in relation to the way in which small group discussions can lead to new understandings.

"It's different to when teachers just give you information or ask you to answer questions. We listen to others opinions and question our own…. . People get really passionate about their ideas."

"We tackle problems in the real world ….. UN Week was about real life issues."

The students are conscious that the program enables teachers and students to develop positive relationships. The mentor role assumed by teachers is highly appreciated by students.

"The teachers know you better …. we talk about things in more depth and they treat you more as an equal."

They also suggest that the structure of the program - incorporating a block of time and small groups - promotes both independence and interdependence in learning.

"We learn from each other – there is time to talk and work things out."

"[The program] enables us to learn together …. we work out problems and discuss issues and know that there is often more than one way to solve things."

"Smaller classes give you confidence to share opinions – we can say what we think without being laughed at – some kids might disagree but they don't put you down because of it."

21.3 RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

Students enjoy the fun and humour they can share in class because of these relationships. They also feel comfortable about being able to share concerns and problems, which otherwise they might not do, whether it be with friends, peers or teachers. They see their environment as being friendly and fair. Students enjoy employing IT as part of their learning. They appreciate the opportunity and school resources which enable this. Students are positive about their Peer Support program, saying it has helped develop a sense of community and become part of the school culture where older students gain leadership experience that will benefit them throughout life. Comments from Year 7 students support the success and continuation of the program. These include:

"…the pluses of Peer Support are the interesting activities that we have to do."

"…I think it would be a good idea to make the Peer Support sessions a bit longer and twice a week instead of once".

22.1 SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)

The members of the school's executive team (who also position themselves as teachers) that were interviewed tended to describe their perceptions of the Outcomes of the

reforms implemented over the last three years in relation to its effect on teachers and students. All expressed the improved sense of professionalism amongst staff, a trend perceived by one DP to be due to the new approach to pedagogy that has enabled teachers to believe in themselves. This deputy also suggested there is a direct correlation between the improved student/school Outcomes and the change in pedagogy. When teachers made specific reference to lifelong learning, they spoke of the importance of building positive relationships, providing a safe environment, valuing individuals and overt recognition of difference as well as modelling learning for their students. One teacher inferred that the emphasis placed on the purpose of learning and the connections between learnings instils resilience in students at South West Sydney HS. All teachers interviewed clearly saw themselves as lifelong learners. One teacher attributed this situation to the principal, claiming that, "his focus on professional and personal development in a risk-free environment ensures that for teachers, the notion of being a learner is clear". According to a DP, students are also able to see their teachers as learners because of the principal's public messages regarding staff T & D and also because they are taught a modified version of the same information that teachers receive on learning theories.

22.2   THE LAKES GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

In recent years, the school has enrolled larger numbers of students who experience ongoing literacy and numeracy difficulties. An emerging trend or concern, especially amongst Year 8 boys, is their disconnectedness to the academic curriculum, as demonstrated through their disinterest in school and inability to cope with the academic workload. This situation has a tendency to bring about low self esteem and increase the risk of leaving school early.

The school identified that students in this group were frustrated with the school curriculum in that it lacked 'hands-on' activity and had little relevance to their interests and hobbies, which usually involved small machinery such as motorbikes. In 2003, the school obtained financial support for a pilot project called GEAR UP, so named because it has a connection with vehicles and also is an acronym for:

G –   Guys and girls in Year 8
E –   Expertise and enthusiasm that the students bring to the project
A –   Academic focus (literacy/numeracy and credits towards possible Vocational Education and Training or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning qualifications)
R –   Resilience and responsibility to commit to the project
U –   Understanding each other – utilising skills
P –   Pro active and positive participation

To be eligible for the project, students need to be operating at least two years below their peers in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, numeracy and, in some cases, general reasoning. Some are attracting Commonwealth funding through diagnosed learning disorders. All are at risk of leaving school early, have low self esteem, are disconnected from most interest groups but have a real interest and aptitude for automotive and mechanical pursuits. In the project, the students attend TAFE one day per week for 20 weeks, which equates to 100 hours of course delivery. Two groups of six students, each with a TAFE teacher, is to facilitate the engineering process and have assembled a recumbent vehicle (tricycle) from design plans to completion. They complete TAFE modules and gain competencies in machining, welding, design and drafting, and occupational health and safety. At the completion of the project, the students will receive a statement of results that will provide a direct credit towards a

relevant VET course or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, should they continue on this pathway in the future. Students will also derive benefit from team building, communication, planning and organising, time management, literacy and numeracy. The project creates a new focus for the Language Recovery class that the students attend.

22.3   METRO BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (QLD)

The Warwick campus external program is the centrepiece of the Middle School reforms at Form. It is a residential program which all Year 7 students attend for one week, Year 8 students for three weeks, and Year 9 students for five weeks. The three-year sequential program has a strong emphasis on the development of student-directed learning as an integral part of the schools overall aim to develop self-managed learners. The program claims to be student- centred to allow high levels of choice, and aims to reinforce problem solving, critical thinking and modes of learning introduced at the Brisbane campus. The students are engaged in project-based, guided group experiences called 'challenge units' and 'depth studies' requiring completion over an extended period. The theme for these units is Studies of the Murray Darling Basin. The residential programs set out to provide students with opportunities to:

- Live and learn together;
- Apply theory in practical situations;
- Work in teams to achieve Outcomes;
- Test and increase individual capacities through participation in a range of challenging tasks, including structured, sequential outdoor education experiences.

Appendix A

Case-studies of school sites

SUNNYSIDE P-12 COLLEGE (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Location

Sunnyside is located on the Victorian coastline, 190 kilometres southwest of Melbourne. The combination of the surrounding Otway ranges and rugged coastal scenery ensures that the town is a popular tourist destination, despite its relatively remote location.

Apart from the tourist industry, which has contributed to significant growth in the town over the last 10 years, Sunnyside is sustained by a strong fishing industry, which specialises in harvesting lobster from Bass Strait, and agricultural production.

About the school

Sunnyside P-12 College is a school of 270 students, extending from Prep to Year 12. The school is committed to providing a safe and friendly environment which allows all students to achieve personal excellence in all endeavours. The school makes extensive use of the local environment for a range of outdoor education programs.

UNDERSTANDING THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Philosophy

With only enough students to provide classes at each Year level, the school is highly conscious that this situation has the potential to impact negatively on students. In particular, the school has a strong belief that negative social stereotyping may perpetuate across a child's schooling, and students generally may suffer from a narrow social grouping.

It is for these reasons Sunnyside P-12 College deliberately structures its class grouping across a number of Year levels, such as P-2 in the early Years and 8-10 block electives in the middle Years. These structures enable students to interact across broader age ranges and foster a strong sense of connectedness and support, which is apparent across the whole school.

This case-study focuses on the teaching and learning programs in Years 5-9 at the school, which incorporates the team teaching program across Years 5-7 and the vertical groupings currently operating in Years 8-10.

School structure

The school has established specific programs to cater for student learning needs according to the following age cohorts:

- Early Years P-4, which includes a special emphasis that is placed on the introduction to schooling, a developmental approach to learning and the involvement of parents in many facets of their children's education;

- Middle Years 5-9, which includes the operation of team teaching and 'block' timetabling across Year levels 5/6 and 6/7, as well as vertical groupings in Years 8-10, which have been established to promote student ownership of learning opportunities and to cater for individual needs and interests, including the social needs of students; and

- A diversified VCE program which is achieved through school based programs, distance education and linkages with other secondary colleges within the same region.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy – linking pedagogy and curriculum with lifelong learning in the middle years

Years 5 – 7

Though the students are grouped in distinct Year level classes - Year, 5 Year 6 and Year 7 - there is a strong commitment to team teaching at this level in the school. Being co-located in adjoining classrooms with direct access between each room enables a high level of interaction between the three classes. This interaction is further complemented by teachers swapping classes for specific subjects.

The 5-7 program is driven by an integrated approach to curriculum delivery, where class programs are organised around a particular theme which incorporates activity across a number of key learning areas (KLAs).

The approach adopted by teachers in Years 5-7 builds on what the school recognises as successful practices, which have been fostered by Victoria's 'Early Years Strategy'. Teachers highlight strengths of this approach to include:

- The capacity of students to work cooperatively across a number of Year levels; and

- The benefits of group work which provide students with the opportunity to collaborate with others and take responsibility for their own learning while, at the same time, enabling teachers to undertake focused teaching with small groups.

While student cooperation and collaboration are seen to make a valuable contribution to the program, it also benefits from the teamwork which exists within the staff in this area of the school. Teachers regularly meet to discuss themes, teaching strategies and issues related to student learning. During these discussions, the teachers draw on *Thinking Orientated Curriculum* material which has been developed as a result of the *Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD)* commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Training. This professional dialogue is supplemented by participation in regionally conducted professional development activities and state-wide middle years conferences.

It may be noted that the thematic approach is only applied where logical connections may be made across a number of curriculum areas. Mathematics, for example, is rarely taught with reference to a theme. Instead, mathematics is taught in isolation with classes split according to gender to better cater for individual differences.

Years 8- 10
The aims of the Years 8-10 program are:

- To create a wider peer group for students who would otherwise spend their 13 years of education substantially with the same group of students;

- To provide for the personal growth of each student;

- To provide a curriculum which is appropriate for all students;

- To provide a balanced curriculum which maximises options for VCE and beyond; and

- To provide a wide range of experiences for each student.

This structure enables the school to:

- Fulfil its aim of broadening peer groups across a number of Year levels;

- Promote choice and a sense of responsibility and decision making, particularly in relation to determining pathways into the VCE and beyond; and

- Achieve some flexibility in its timetabling, given its limited number of teachers and their respective areas of expertise.

Curriculum delivery for Years 8-10 is achieved through a vertical elective structure. Students are able to choose individual courses based on a range of unit offerings across the eight KLAs. The units have been assigned according to two levels – Level 1 and Level 2. All students are able to choose Level 1 units. Students entering Year 8 are expected to choose only Level 1 units, while students in Years 9 and 10 may mix units or study only Level 2 units. To maintain a sense of balance, students are expected to undertake at least one unit from each of the KLAs each semester.

Middle years curriculum

Years 5 – 7
During the case-study, we observed a series of lessons related to the Australian electoral system. This theme was established to provide the students with insights into Australia's system of government prior to an excursion to Canberra later in the month.

The lessons were based around a mock election process, which had the following features:

Year	Activity	Features
7	Political parties	■ Develop policy related to local school and community issues and disseminate via posters and media releases ■ Plan policy launch and make policy speech to the electorate ■ Respond to questions from the electorate and media
6	Media	■ Report progress of election campaign and critically analyse policy information to determine the viability of each party's

Year	Activity	Features
		promises
		■ Publish findings in a newspaper
5	Electorate	■ Respond to policy information
		■ Critically question policy statements
		■ Vote

While the focus KLA for this theme centres on Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), it also clearly draws on English (speeches, policy documents and newspapers) to provide cross curriculum learning outcomes.

Years 8 -10 program
Where possible, curriculum units for students in Years 8-10 involve students interacting with the local environment and community. Examples of this interaction are illustrated as follows.

KLA	Unit title	Features
Arts	Production Band	Community involvement, where musicians from the local community work with students in the school's band in specific instrumental areas
	Radio	Media production for pre-recorded radio programs which may be put to air on local radio stations
Health and Physical Education	Swimming and Aquatics	Swimming – pool and surf
		Water safety – tides, rips, safety procedures and survival techniques
		Surfing – theory and practical sessions
		Canoeing and kayaking in harbour area and Barham River
	In the wild	Camping and bushwalking skills, which incorporates theory and practical skills sessions within the school environment, as well as the opportunity to apply acquired skills in the Otways Region and beyond.
Science	Solar System, Earth, Rock and Fossils	Incorporates the study of local land forms
	Cells and microbes/ seashores	Includes the study of the physical and biological features of Australia's coastline, with a particular emphasis on those found in the Sunnyside region. The unit incorporates the study of ocean currents, coastal landforms and beaches, tides, waves, sand dunes and coral reefs. Students also study common forms of animal and plant life within the local area.
	Environmental science	Involves scientific monitoring of the local environments. Links to community projects, and research by tertiary

KLA	Unit title	Features
		institutions, are incorporated in the unit. Findings are reported to the local community through key interest groups, the local newspaper and historical society.
SOSE	Shipwrecks	Exploring the maritime history of the 'Shipwreck coast' with an examination of primary and secondary records collected by the local historical society.
	Indigenous people	Involves excursions in the local area to study the lifestyle of aboriginal people prior to white settlement
	Rural studies	An oral history project to interview surviving pioneer settlers on lifestyle changes which have occurred in the local area
	Too many people – too much power	In addition to examining issues of a global nature, this unit requires students to complete a guided research project which explores a local issue associated with the fishing industry, water supplies, tourism or logging.

Students in Years 8-10 also have designated home groups based on their actual Year level. In addition to their administrative function, home groups provide teachers with the opportunity to provide guidance, counselling and support for each student in the group through the agency of a health education program which is delivered within home groups as part of the school's curriculum program.

Home groups also provide the vehicle for student participation in the Victorian Youth Development Program and other broader recreational and community service pursuits. The school places a strong emphasis on connecting with the local community and making use of the local environment. This results in students across Years 8-10 being involved in a range of pursuits, including:

- The Duke of Edinburgh Scheme;
- Surf Life Saving Training (including Surf Bronze Medallion);
- First aid training; and
- Surfing and snorkelling.

Assessment and reporting

Assessment and reporting strategies vary across the middle years program. Assessment of student performance in thematic studies in Years 5 - 9 centres on teacher judgments about student engagement in class activities, and on self-assessment by students. In addition to contributing to formative judgments about learning and program planning, this information is also included in comments to parents in written reports.

In Years 8 – 10, assessment processes centre on judgements against CSF Strand outcomes. To enable this process to be completed, the school has undertaken an audit of the Vertical Units offered to Years 8 – 10 to ensure content aligns with the CSF. Again, information collected in this way contributes to the documentation of reports to parents.

Professional development

The school has established a budget of $14,000 for professional development. With a small staff and the requirement to provide a curriculum from P-12 across the eight KLAs, the school often finds it necessary for teachers to cover areas of the curriculum which are beyond their fields of expertise. As a result, part of the professional development budget is allocated to involve teachers in courses which supplement and broaden skills across a wider range of curriculum areas.

Over recent years, the school has also invested heavily in professional development for teachers in the early years of schooling, including the training of staff members as Reading Recovery teachers.

As the need for training in the early years diminishes, the school has placed a greater emphasis on professional development related to the middle years of schooling. This professional development has included:

- Participation in state-wide middle years conferences;
- Regional programs;
- School visits; and
- Targeted professional development specific to components of the middle years agenda, such as multiple intelligences, thinking curriculum and engaging boys.

Where possible, Sunnyside P-12 College will involve teams of teachers in professional development programs. The school sees a real benefit in this approach as it allows staff to support each other in their learning. This approach is particularly important where staff are seeking to address identified issues but do so from different 'philosophical' points of view.

External professional development is complemented by activity undertaken within the school. As noted in Section 2.4, funding derived from the Schools for Innovation and Excellence initiative has enabled the middle years teachers to support each other in professional learning related to teaching in the middle years.

Special programs

Schools for innovation and excellence
Sunnyside P-12 College is a member of a cluster of schools established under the Victorian *Schools for Innovation and Excellence* initiative. With links to the MYRAD project, the initiative has been established with the objective to improve education outcomes, particularly for students in Years 5-9.

The cluster, which currently involves a total of five schools has established an action research project to investigate and share understanding of effective approaches to sustain engagement in learning for students in the middle years of schooling.

> *"… we see an issue, try an idea or three, see how they work, share the ideas and off we go again. We all want the kids as our main focus. [As a result of the project] people are talking about what happens in classrooms, how kids learn and what they think of school."*

Sunnyside College has utilised the resources made available through the project to free up time across the two components of its middle years. This has enabled teachers in Years 5-7 to spend regular and significant time (two hour blocks) together supporting each other in their professional learning.

The Year 8-10 team is using the resources to target the needs of individual students in a Restart program, which focuses on literacy support and intervention for students in Year 8. An across the school lunch time activities program has also been introduced as part of the initiative, with Year 9 students taking a leading role as cross-age helpers.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

Productive pedagogies

Intellectual quality
Through participation in a range of professional development activities, the school is highly focused on providing students with teaching and learning activity which has a high intellectual quality. For example, in the Year 5 -7 program, teachers use Plus/Minus/Interesting (PMI) and a lateral and creative thinking strategy to assist students to think about, record and share their ideas around a key idea or issue. Other strategies, such as De Bono's Six Thinking Hats and discussions about multiple intelligences, are utilised to enable students to think about themselves as learners and approach learning from different perspectives.

Similarly, open ended learning tasks are utilised in Years 8 -10 to build on basic concepts and foster deeper understanding and knowledge about complex issues and problems.

Connectedness
Two clear strategies are adopted by the school in this domain. Firstly, wherever possible (but particularly through the vertical curriculum in Years 8 -10) the school endeavours to immerse the curriculum within the local environment. As described in Section 2.3.2, Sunnyside students are involved in a range of curriculum and co-curricular activities within the local environment.

Of equal importance is the need to connect to the wider world beyond Sunnyside. Here too, evidence derived from the themes undertaken in Years 5-7 and the vertical units in Years 8 – 10, as well as the school's camps and excursions program, indicates that the school is making a conscious effort to draw on students' contextual knowledge and connect learning with the wider world.

Supportive environment
Classroom observations noted a high level of consistency across this domain. Teachers provide some flexibility for student choice and negotiation within the broad parameters of classroom programs. Social support from teachers and peers is quite high, and most students were observed to be engaged actively in learning. Middle years students are aware of required performance criteria and were observed to assume responsibility for regulating their own behaviour.

Recognition of difference
Although observations varied across this domain, with some criteria not being apparent and others most evident, the school stresses the importance of recognising and valuing

students as individuals and, where possible, drawing on the insights students bring to the classroom to enrich the learning of others.

Lifelong learning

Teachers reflect that students are displaying and articulating a more positive attitude to learning as a result of innovations adopted in Years 5 – 7. At the same time, the school continues to strike a balance between the provision of a general education (as a basic point of reference to return to later in life, if required) and 'stretching comfort zones' and tailoring programs to provide challenges and accommodate student interests. The school argues that the balance is essential both to retain student interest and to provide students with generalist knowledge, which they may turn to should they wish to change careers or return to formal training or further education.

As Sunnyside is a small community and teacher turnover is quite low, the school has a strong pool of knowledge about students and their pathways beyond post-compulsory schooling. Given that a high proportion of students remain at the school to complete Year 12, and that they then progress to employment, or further education or training, the school expresses some satisfaction with the way in which existing structures inculcate a positive approach to lifelong learning.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Students have a positive regard for the sense of community at Sunnyside P-12 College. Throughout the focus group discussions, a consistent message was conveyed about the benefits of a stable staff, the mixing of students across Year levels and the supportive learning environment.

> *"Everyone knows everyone else – everybody has a friend and there is no bullying."*

> *"The teachers really know you. They have been here a long time and know where your learning is at."*

At the same time, students readily identified preferred teaching styles. The students were critical of 'chalk and talk' lessons, which incorporated oral presentations by teachers and the transcription of notes from the blackboard.

> *"Some teachers talk too much."*

> *"You have to try and write and listen to them at the same time – it's too hard, so you miss things."*

Students were also critical of the use of photocopied sheets, where everyone in the class did the same work regardless of ability.

By contrast, the focus group participants identified a number of approaches to teaching and learning, which they perceived to support positive learning outcomes. These approaches include:

- The use of class and small groups discussions –

> *"You get different ideas for other kids …. students explain things better for other kids."*

> *"When you learn together it keeps you interested."*

- Splitting mathematics classes according to gender;
- The provision of choice through 'blocking' of elective units or choice within classroom activities through the use of a Bloom's/Gardiner's matrix, where students may work on the same topic area but use different approaches to fulfilling work requirements; and
- Experiential learning through camps and excursions and activities, which connect students with the local community and environment.

Students also commented positively on the school's 'Ag-Hort Centre'. This facility has been established to provide practical experience as part of the Years 8-10 'The farm – rural studies' unit. In this unit, students complete activities that enable them to experience and develop skills in a range of agricultural and horticultural practices, which may include rearing animals, propagating plants, sowing crops, repairing machinery and marketing produce. In addition to this curriculum orientation, the Ag-Hort Centre is also open at lunchtimes to enable students from across the school to interact with the animals.

Lifelong learning

Students indicate that the school's emphasis on experiential learning and connecting the curriculum with the local community and its environment provides them with a preparation for life beyond school. Similarly, students have a positive regard for the intermixing of different age groups as it enables them to benefit from a wider peer group and learn with others from different age groups. Students believe that this approach will assist them in interacting and learning with others when they leave school.

OUTCOMES

The impact of the school's middle years program across Years 5-10 may be assessed in two ways. Firstly, analysis of the school's annual report data from the last four years demonstrates a high level of student retention to complete Year 12. This contrasts markedly with the prior experience of the school, where significant proportions of students would leave the school at Years 9-11 to attend private schools in other locations.

Equally, in addition to high retention rates, students leaving Sunnyside P-12 College navigate pathways into further education, training or employment with high levels of efficiency.

GREENFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Greenfield Grammar School was established in 1881, originally as a provider of education for boys. Through mergers with another school and its own growth, largely sustained by a decision to provide a co-educational program and the establishment of a campus at Wheelers Hill in Melbourne's south eastern suburbs, the school now has a total enrolment in excess of 2,700.

Further expansion sees the school offering K-12 education across six campuses, inclusive of a residential camp in rural Victoria and a campus in Nanjing, China, which is utilised for an extensive (normally five weeks) residential program for students in Year 9.

This case-study centres on the Year 9 program, which operates across the two senior campuses – Elsternwick and Wheelers Hill. The site visit was conducted at the Elsternwick campus.

UNDERSTANDING THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Philosophy

The school states that one of its distinguishing characteristics is its commitment to learning in all its forms, inside and outside the classroom, and at every stage of life by:

> *providing students with a broad range of learning experiences in order to prepare them for many different challenges in their lives;*

> *providing staff members with personal and professional development experiences which enable them not only to model lifelong learning for our students, but also, importantly, to ensure that they can respond to the individual learning needs and styles of students;*

> *providing parents with learning experiences which enable them to give better assistance to their children in their own learning; and*

> *providing past students with meaningful forums to facilitate new ideas, business opportunities and social and sporting activities.*

The broad range of learning opportunities at Greenfield Grammar emphasises the school's commitment to developing the whole self - to enable all students to be active members of their community, including being able to interact confidently in a range of life situations. This aim is achieved through exposing students to challenging, academic, sporting, artistic, cultural and social experiences. Learning programmes - such as internationalism, earth studies, the arts, sciences, community service and leadership - provide some of these life lessons.

From kindergarten to Year 12, students are 'taught' the value and importance of strong leadership and decision-making skills. Careers classes also teach students the skills of professional resume and letter writing, which play a vital part in the employment process. One-on-one interviews, conducted by professionals outside the school, provide the students with a practical rehearsal to real-life situations.

As a complement to the Year 9 internationalism program and in response to an identified need to provide a more meaningful educational program for Year 9 students prior to embarking on the formality of VCE, Greenfield Grammar implemented its Learning Journeys Program at the beginning of the 2003 school year.

The Learning Journeys Program has evolved from the school's ongoing process of review and renewal of its curriculum and teaching and learning program. It builds on the development of integrated units at primary level and within Years 7 and 8.

During 2002, the school made a significant investment in the program by taking a teacher (and future coordinator of the program) 'offline' to undertake research related to middle years education and develop the overall design and structure of the program. The program was then implemented at the beginning of the 2003 school year. The Learning Journeys Program draws extensively on contemporary middle years research, including that which has been conducted by the Centre of Applied Educational Research at The University of Melbourne, the New Basics Project in Queensland and international research conducted by Marzano et al (1997) and Costa and Kallick (2000).

This research has influenced the overall ethos of the Learning Journeys Program, which seeks to provide students with an approach to learning that is built on hands-on experiences with sustained interactions and the opportunities to assume some responsibility for their own learning.

> " … students learn best when they are given greater independence, ownership, freedom and scope to develop a sense of belonging, the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them, and the recognition that students at this age and stage of development learn best by doing through first hand experiences.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy – Linking pedagogy and curriculum with lifelong learning/learning in the middle years

Pedagogical practice within the Learning Journeys Program centres on providing experiential learning which is reflective and based on real world problem solving. A critical feature of the Learning Journeys Program is the transformation of the role of teachers from content delivery to learning mentors. Each member of the learning journey team has formally applied for their role through a selection process which has been designed to maximise commitment to the program.

Teachers in the program act as learning 'mentors' to a small group of students (approximately 15). The mentoring role requires teachers to step back from more traditional roles in which they might control the delivery of content and set work requirements, to establishing a more facilitative role - guiding individual students through learning experiences. This process requires teachers to have a detailed knowledge of each student in their group, based on each student's interests, approach to learning and areas in which they may require additional support. The organisation of the program enables this knowledge to evolve. With group interaction spreading across the better part of a school day, students and their learning mentors are able to interact for extended periods of time. Group discussions move beyond question and answer sessions to the exploration of issues, ideas, values and beliefs at a deeper level than

that which may occur through the normal 50-minute lesson. The extended duration of the Learning Journeys sessions also enables teacher mentors to provide students with immediate feedback on their learning through interactions on a 1:1 basis to discuss progress, organisation, learning and future directions.

The program is complemented by a high level of interaction and collaboration across the Learning Journeys teaching team, enabling team members to reflect on the program's strengths, identify areas for improvement and facilitate planning.

Through this reflective process, the team has become increasingly aware that, although some students are thriving on the open-ended nature of the program, others have floundered as a result of the lack of structure. In response to this, guidelines have been developed as a support mechanism for those students who benefit from a more structured approach to learning. For example, to assist with the current 'Design Unit', students have been issued with a set of guidelines which provide an organising framework for learning. While giving students a structure to work through, the guidelines are sufficiently flexible to ensure that the more independent learners do not feel constrained.

Despite undertaking significant research regarding the potential benefits of the Learning Journeys Program, the school recognised the need to assure parents that the program would provide both short- and long-term benefits for their children. Accordingly, the school has conducted information evenings for parents and produced handbooks and other materials which outline the rationale for the program and describe the envisaged benefits for students. These benefits are articulated in terms of the program's academic rigour and the way in which it supports lifelong learning.

> *"University staff report that those students who arrive on campus with independent learning skills do best. Similarly employers continually call for workers to be committed, self motivated lifelong learners who have effective analytical and problem solving skills."*

Middle years curriculum
All students undertake common core subjects: English, Mathematics, Science and Physical Education, with the Learning Journeys Program drawing together skills and concepts across other subject areas which include: History, Geography, Religion and Society, and Personal Development. Elective subjects in areas such as Art, Languages, Music and Drama complete the curriculum offering for Year 9.

It is the school's belief that this structure enables a balance to be achieved between specific preparation for the rigours of senior secondary schooling and the development of the life skills required to be an active and contributing member of society.

The Learning Journeys are structured with a focus on extending content from the individual and their place in the community to an exploration of national and international issues and influences. To date, the Learning Journeys Program has explored:

- Sustainability – a local response to drought through planned approaches to reducing the school's water consumption;

- National identity – the diversity of Australia's population and the key influences in the formation of a nation through activity related to four broad themes:

  o Immigration and family backgrounds;

  o Images of Australia's development;

- o Welfare and approaches to responding to community needs; and

- o Indigenous issues;

- United Nations Week – Role play and simulations of the workings of the United Nations, including exploring the interests of individual countries within General Assembly and Security Council meetings, juxtaposed with the workings of commissions in areas such as human rights, terrorism, climate change, HIV/AIDS, disarmament, education, refugees, water, poverty, and nuclear energy; and

- Design – Considering design processes from the perspective of the fashion industry, motor vehicles, landscape gardening and set production.

Students also have the opportunity to develop their own learning journey; a discrete activity during the course of the year in which they are encouraged to set learning goals, undertake planning, record their learning and nominate assessment criteria.

Assessment and reporting
Unlike student performance in other areas of the curriculum, grades and marks give way to a more diagnostic approach to assessing student progress, which focuses on knowledge, values and demonstrated learning. With reference to research conducted by Marzano et al, the learning journey's team has developed an assessment rubric, which enables both formative and summative assessment of student learning to occur across a number of domains, including:

- Complex thinking skills – comparing, classifying, abstracting, constructing support, analysing errors, analysing perspectives and problem solving, as well as learning to translate issues and situations into manageable tasks with a clear purpose;

- Information processing skills – including gathering, processing, interpreting, synthesising and making judgements about the relative value of information;

- Communication skills – clear expression of ideas, communicating in a variety of ways for different purposes and diverse audiences;

- Collaboration and cooperation skills – working towards achieving group goals, use of interpersonal skills, contributing to group dynamics and performance of different roles within a group; and

- Productive learning and effective study habits – self-regulation, critical thinking, creative thinking, organisation, time management and study skills.

Students also contribute to learning information through reflective writing in a journal, which they maintain as a record of their learning throughout the year. This requires students to determine what they have learned, analyse how this learning occurred, evaluate their contributions to discussions and research activities and determine areas in which they may have been overly challenged by the Learning Journeys Program.

Through the ongoing interaction with their learning mentor, as well as individual goal setting and evaluation processes, students gain valuable insights into their own learning styles, strengths and weaknesses. These insights form a critical component of a tripartite mid year review of the learning program in which parents, teachers and students engage in a student-led conference to reflect on the learning journey to date and on planning for the remainder of the year.

The student-led conference is complemented by a detailed written assessment of student learning which is reported to parents each semester as a component of the school's overall reporting process.

Timetabling and staff/student organisation
The Learning Journeys Program is embedded within the overall Year 9 program, so that students both participate in a 'traditional' academic program and undertake the Learning Journeys through four periods on a given day, with a further follow up period on another day. The school believes that blocking the Learning Journeys Program in this manner enables students and teachers to spend time developing deeper understandings of issues.

Although individual teachers have sole responsibility for the learning program for their mentor group, the groups do not necessarily operate in isolation. Groups come together on a regular basis for organisational information and sharing understandings and may be split into interest-based groups when students participate in excursions.

Professional development
To support the introduction of the Learning Journeys Program, teachers have had extensive involvement in professional development, which has included the three hour timetabled commitment for all teaching staff at the school, in which the Learning Journeys team engages in professional development together on a weekly basis.

During these sessions, professional development activity has focused on a range of topics to foster shared understanding related to middle years pedagogy and practice including:

- Theory and practical insights based on the research of Marzano, Ezette, Grauff (Queensland New Basics) et al;
- Student monitoring system, examining student-needs training;
- Assessment issues facilitated by Patrick Griffin and Peter Ferguson - University of Melbourne;
- Inquiry learning, facilitated by Kath Murdock; and
- Differentiating Curriculum, facilitated by Carol Anne Tomlinson.

Other sessions have centred more on the structure and focus areas of the program, including:

- Understanding by design, facilitated by Grant Wiggins; and
- A writers workshop, facilitated by the National Gallery of Victoria.

The school has also established a number of structured mechanisms for disseminating knowledge related to the Learning Journeys Program to the remainder of the school and beyond. These include:

- Formal reporting to the school principal and heads of campus on two occasions each term;
- Briefings for staff; and
- Contributions to school publications.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

Productive pedagogies

A close alignment is apparent between the approach to teaching and learning that Greenfield Grammar is seeking to implement through the Learning Journeys Program and that which was apparent in the classroom observations. This is particularly the case in relation to the intellectual quality domain, where significant professional development and planning have been undertaken to ensure that the program elicits higher order thinking processes and deep knowledge and understanding of what is learned.

Equally, the program's structure and content places a clear emphasis on connectedness to the world outside the classroom. The Learning Journeys team are confident that part of the program's appeal to the majority of Year 9 students is that it enables them to explore in depth, authentic issues that exist in their world.

The program's structure also contributes positively to the provision of a supportive learning environment. Teachers involved in the program recognise that, through a smaller class, *viz.,* mentor group of 15 students (approximately half the size of a standard Year 9 class) and the 'blocking' of a significant proportion of the school day, the program facilitates a classroom environment, which is both supportive and challenging. The responses from students to questions in this area confirm the views of staff that there is a marked difference in the tone and climate of classrooms within the Learning Journeys Program in comparison to those which are experienced on a day to day basis during the remainder of the week.

Lifelong learning

Discussion with staff, about the contribution of the Learning Journeys Program to lifelong learning, brought into the question the positioning of the program within the school's overall approach to student learning. Teachers are highly conscious of the importance placed on academic 'results' by many stakeholders within the school community and, although they are confident that the Learning Journeys Program can contribute to these outcomes, they also believe that the program has the potential to foster more intrinsic values, skills and understandings, which will enhance the capacity of students to sustain engagement in learning beyond their time at school.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Students report that the Learning Journeys Program provides opportunities for extended engagement in activity, particularly in relation to the way in which small group discussions can lead to new understandings.

> *"It's different to when teachers just give you information or ask you to answer questions. We listen to others opinions and question our own.... . People get really passionate about their ideas."*

> *"We tackle problems in the real world ….. UN Week was about real life issues."*

The students are conscious that the program enables teachers and students to develop positive relationships. The mentor role assumed by teachers is highly appreciated by students.

"The teachers know you better …. we talk about things in more depth and they treat you more as an equal."

They also suggest that the structure of the program - incorporating a block of time and small groups - promotes both independence and interdependence in learning.

"We learn from each other – there is time to talk and work things out."

"[The program] enables us to learn together …. we work out problems and discuss issues and know that there is often more than one way to solve things."

"Smaller classes give you confidence to share opinions – we can say what we think without being laughed at – some kids might disagree but they don't put you down because of it."

The students reflect the concern expressed by teachers regarding the need which some students have regarding structure. A particular concern expressed by students related to time management, when they recognised their initial inadequacies in this area. But this concern was expressed more as a threshold issue in coming to terms with the requirement of the program. In this respect, time management may be regarded as one of the learning outcomes that the program enables. Another point of interest is the propensity for the program to promote an understanding of learning styles. Student participants in the focus groups session articulated their valuing of kinaesthetic learning as opposed to the usual emphasis on visual and auditory learning. They readily appreciated the difference between 'teacher talk', 'sheets' and 'text books' and approaches to learning which centre on 'experiences', 'practical activities' and 'writing/reflecting understandings'. Students also appreciated the opportunities that the Learning Journeys Program presents to negotiate learning, at both an individual and a group level.

"It does this by allowing students greater freedom and choices when it comes to excursions and even allows students to have a choice on what their assignments should be. Learning journeys enables a student to literally take charge of his or her learning.

I found this experience much different to any before, [sic] some people liked it, others found it hard to know what direction they should go, and then of course that is where the mentor comes in.

Lifelong learning

Students conveyed that the Learning Journeys Program has given them confidence as learners; they understand more about themselves as learners and their learning is better organised as a result of participating in the program. Participation in mentor group discussions, field trips and individual learning activities has heightened their awareness that learning takes place in a variety of contexts, as well as having given them an understanding that group interactions contribute to individual learning and shared understandings. The provision of choice within the overarching structure of the Program has also enabled students to develop passionate interests in aspects of their learning.

OUTCOMES

Given the recency of the introduction of the Learning Journeys Program, the teachers involved in the Program were not able to identify any definitive outcomes in relation to lifelong learning. But a number of observable indicators are apparent. These indicators included the propensity for students to be:

- More efficient and effective learners within mainstream classes; and

- Largely more focused and motivated in project oriented activity both within the normal routine of school programs and particularly when the students are involved in project activity while visiting the school's campus in Nanjing, China.

Equally, students who had not previously experienced a great deal of success in the regular academic school program, did so through the chosen learning journey which was set up to enable individuals to undertake a project of their own choosing. This was often a practical application of skills which provided an opportunity for them to shine and invest a lot of time and energy into a project they were passionate about.

The Learning Journeys team has also identified two specific challenges which arise in consideration of the Program's outcomes. First, a small number of students, often those who are highly able academically, question the lack of explicit links between the 'open ended' and 'learning' focus of the Program, and express their desire for 'teaching' which contributes directly to academic results, viz., VCE outcomes. Second, staff are highly conscious of the importance of balancing the need or desire for a more structured approach for some students and the benefits which may be derived by students in meeting and overcoming the challenge of determining their own structure and approach to organising their learning.

In response to both challenges, the Learning Journeys teachers shared a consensus view that the inherent benefits of the Program and its organisational structure will enable these challenges to be overcome. That is, through involvement in the Learning Journeys Program, students will become better learners, both for the short term benefit of achieving optimum VCE outcomes and for the longer term benefits of becoming effective lifelong learners. Equally, through the structure of the Program, with its significant 'blocking' of time and enhanced teacher learner relationships, teachers will be in a strong position to make informed judgments about individual students and their learning; stepping in to provide more structure, guidance and support for those students who require it and encouragement for those who do not.

CONCLUSION

Although the Learning Journeys Program is still in its infancy, the school is keen to build on its initial success. A mid year review of the Program highlights the opportunity for further individualisation of the Learning Journeys by offering more choice for some students, with more structure for others, as well as flexibility in timing to enable students with a sustained interest in a particular learning journey more time to explore issues in greater detail and allowing other students to move on more quickly to the next focus area.

Furthermore, with strong support from parents, the Program has the potential to expand in two areas. Firstly, within the overall Year 9 program, it may expand to incorporate more of the core subject areas, which are currently taught in the traditional manner. Secondly, the pedagogical insights and assessment strategies are expected to be incorporated progressively into other areas of the school.

ST RESOLUTE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Location

St Resolute's Catholic Primary School is located in Coburg within the City of Moreland in Melbourne's northern suburbs. Over time, the area became a major centre for manufacturing. Today, a mix of strong manufacturing and commercial activity, along with 'high tech' investment, is generating a vibrant local economy.

The City of Moreland has one of the highest population densities of all Melbourne's metropolitan municipalities. Its current residential population of 137,000, which is contained within an area of just 51 square kilometres, is expected to climb to 150,000 by 2011.

The Moreland community is culturally diverse, with a population which shows 30% of residents were born outside Australia, they come from more than 150 different countries and speak as many as 75 languages. In addition, a high number of residents are the Australian born children/grandchildren of earlier migrants.

About the School

St Resolute's Catholic Primary School opened in 1941. The school was run by the Sisters of Mercy and provided Catholic education for the children of the small parish of East Coburg. The school has a long-standing tradition of high standards in education and Christian values. Following the departure of the Sisters in 1990, the first lay Principal was appointed.

As a Catholic school, St Resolute is committed to the delivery of faith development programs, positive modelling and liturgical celebrations. While Catholic values and beliefs are promoted, an acceptance of others' faiths is encouraged through an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges the faith backgrounds of families within the school community.

Pastoral Care has always been a major priority within the Catholic School system. St Resolute's response has been the development of a policy which encompasses several operations, including student welfare, discipline, personal safety, student counselling and referral, integration (disabilities and impairments), and the Seasons Program. Issues of sexuality, special needs, sexual harassment, workplace safety and staff welfare also fit within this framework. The implementation of a policy and program to deal with bullying has been a major focus in term 3 this year.

An integrated approach is taken to the teaching of Religious Education and the eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs). The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) is used as the main resource when planning curriculum programs. The school has a strong belief that the development of the children's literacy and numeracy skills provides essential components of each child's preparation for success in life. Italian (75%) and Arabic (25%) are the foreign languages available. There has been considerable revamping of the Integrated Curriculum, especially in making it richer and more meaningful. Inter-school Sport is available to the senior students. A school camp, which includes a broad base of outdoor education experiences, provides an opportunity to develop personal

skills, such as community living, independence and self-confidence. A Student Representative Council meets regularly to seek solutions to issues raised by the student body. Students in the Middle Years (5 – 6) participate in Class Council which meets weekly to discuss school, local and broader issues. Improvement indicators include more willing participation and higher confidence levels. Peer Reading is a voluntary option for these students to be trained to assist younger children in reading.

After completing their primary education, the students from St Resolute's usually transfer to one of several single-sex Catholic Secondary Schools which are accessible because of the availability of public transport. There are very limited co-educational options and limited opportunities for children with special needs. The school is well aware of the complexity of these Primary-Secondary transition matters and makes provision within its Middle Years structure for sustained attention to the issue.

The school consists of 10 permanent classrooms, one of which is a fully networked information technology laboratory. Three portable classrooms and several spaces for withdrawal groups are also on-site. A newly constructed multipurpose hall is used for meetings, school assemblies, community events, and specialist programs (physical education, music and drama). A fully automated library, school canteen and staff room complete the facilities, which have all undergone recent renovation.

Students/Staff/Community

The school has a current enrolment of 282 and is located in a quiet residential pocket of East Coburg. These numbers have stabilised and commenced regrowth in recent years following the loss of more than 40 students in 1999 to the Maronite Catholic Primary School which opened in the immediate neighbourhood. The area has generally been one of declining enrolments, but this situation is beginning to change. A new housing estate on the former Pentridge Prison and Newlands High School sites has the potential to generate up to 3000 residents, thus all schools in the immediate vicinity are planning for a possible enrolment boost.

The teaching staff of St Resolute's is relatively stable and boasts a comfortable mix of experience, qualifications, gender and cultural background. The 11 classroom teachers are supported by teachers in Library, Languages (Italian and Arabic), Music, Physical Education, Reading Recovery and a Literacy Co-ordinator (Prep – 2). Three teacher aides assist class programs. A school counsellor attends one day per week, and Speech and Psychologist services are arranged through the Catholic Education Office.

The St Resolute's community is proud of its cultural diversity. More than 75% of the students have language backgrounds other than English. There are high proportions of Italian and Arabic (particularly Lebanese) backgrounds and, to a lesser degree, Greek and Vietnamese. Many other Asian and European countries are represented but usually by just one or two families. The vast majority of students (96%) were born in Australia. Students from Italian and Greek families are usually second and third generation Australian born.

The school's families are predominantly engaged in trades and blue collar occupations. Approximately 40% of families are in receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowance. The population is relatively stable. Pupil movement is minimal. Only 50% of the students actually reside within the parish boundaries, but the majority of the remaining half are generally just a relatively short distance from the school. Some students who travel a considerable distance to school do so to maintain family links or because they come from families who have shopped around and chosen St. Resolute's.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Philosophy

St Resolute's provides an environment whereby all aspects of the child's development are nurtured through a cohesive and coordinated approach to integrating pastoral care, leadership and faith development with a comprehensive curriculum. The school's discipline policy and social skills program are based on a strong belief that all children should be responsible for their own behaviour and that school should be a happy, secure and rewarding place for all members of its community – students, staff and parents.

In 2000, after a period of lengthy debate, research and discussion, the whole staff produced an initial draft of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Statement. The statement was the school's attempt to identify the learning environment best suited to bring about successful student learning, and the teaching and assessment methods which enabled such an environment to emerge. It clearly identified that teaching was more effective when teachers considered themselves as being lifelong learners and that effective learning occurred in a supportive environment that encouraged thought and initiative, recognised individuality and boasted a meaningful and rigorous curriculum.

The St Resolute's community believe that learning is more successful when:

- Students are actively involved and aware of the purpose of their learning and given opportunities to reflect and self-assess;

- Students are exposed to a comprehensive curriculum that is relevant and meaningful;

- Students are taught to think logically, critically and imaginatively and to develop effective problem solving strategies;

- Students prior learning experiences and preferred learning styles are acknowledged and accommodated;

- Knowledge, skills, values and actions are made explicit and integrated towards a common purpose;

- Students are given opportunities to be challenged and are aware that their efforts are valued;

- Each student is supported and respected in order to develop resilience and positive self-esteem;

- Students can access and organise information and use it to enhance their learning;

- Students have access to a range of new technologies and can utilise them effectively;

- Students are taught to be self reliant and can work both independently and interdependently;

- Students are able to communicate in oral, written, visual, electronic and body language forms;

- There is a partnership between student, parent and teacher;

- Students are exposed to positive role models;

- Personal growth and community service are encouraged;

- Students are aware of and appreciate others cultures;

- Students experience success and enjoyment;

- The learning environment is safe, caring and respectful; and

- It involves interaction, cooperation and teamwork.

The document was further revised as part of the 2001 School Review and eventually finalised in 2002. It is examined annually to ensure it is still relevant to the school community and serves as a reference point in staff self reflection and review.

School Structure

In addition to the Principal, there is a Deputy Principal (with classroom responsibilities) and 10 other classroom teachers, four of whom are in Positions of Leadership (POL). Five specialist teachers and three teacher assistants (aides) complete the team.

A three year School Development Plan was developed in 2001 after a school validation process conducted by the Catholic Education Commission, Victoria (CECV). The plan outlines all major curriculum initiatives and policy review and formulation up until the year 2004 and is overseen by the School Development Team to ensure its effective implementation. Professional Learning Teams (PLT) are in place for Numeracy, Religious Education, Integrated Studies and Welfare for 2003 – 2004. The Student Welfare Committee consists of a core group of staff members who identify (and monitor) support for students experiencing difficulty in the areas of behaviour, learning, and social/emotional development. The School Education Board, consisting of the Parish Priest, Principal, and staff and parent representatives, oversees general school management and direction. The Parents' Fundraising and Social Committee is a major support group.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

Teaching has been identified in the school's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Statement to be more effective when teachers align closely to students in the learning process. The statement suggests that effective teaching requires the whole school committing to agreed teaching strategies, planning and working collaboratively, and teachers:

- Explicitly modelling problem solving strategies; and

- Committing to their own personal and professional development and seeing themselves as lifelong learners.

Developments in Literacy, Integrated Studies and Numeracy are further testimony to the position the school has adopted. In addition, two Middle Years staff members have attended a full day workshop with Lane Clark, a leader in the design and delivery of

curriculum. As a result, the school has declared its interest in extending the depth of the training to the breadth of its staff as part of its future planning. Participation in the *Lifelong Learning in the Middle years of Schooling Project* has provided further professional learning.

Middle Years Curriculum

The school expects students in the middle years to develop their own self discipline, independence and organisation so as to maximise their learning opportunities. It is expected that they acknowledge both their individual and group responsibilities in all that they do. The curriculum is based on the eight Key Learning Areas of the CSF and Religious Education using an integrated approach.

Integrated Studies
The school approach to integrated studies incorporates all Key Learning Areas and Religious Education into the various units of work over a two year cycle. Units are usually one term's duration. The school realises that equal coverage in each KLA in each unit of study is not always possible, nor is it necessarily best practice. It may lead to a superficial coverage. Instead one, perhaps two, branches of learning become the central focus, and the other KLAs are included where relevant. This is more inclined to bring desired depth to the learning activities, rather than breadth. Team planning is an essential feature of the program. This ensures that there is no unnecessary repetition of content, all KLAs are included over time and in appropriate proportion, and there is potential to incorporate a variety of teaching and learning styles. A variety of grouping structures are regularly used.

A local initiative is to include a homework program which either links to the Integrated Studies curriculum directly or complements it in a beneficial way. At the commencement of each term, students are presented with a table outlining a range of weekly mini projects which are to be completed as homework. For example, in term 2 (2003), the compulsory activity was:

> *'Plan a weeklong holiday around Australia. Plot your route on a map of Australia.'*

The table then lists 16 mini projects to add substance to the main theme. Two projects are listed beside each of the multiple intelligences: verbal- linguistic, math-logic, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intra-personal and naturalist.

For example:

Area of Intelligence	Project A	Project B
Verbal - Linguistic	Write an explanation of how a paddle steamer works.	Write a detailed itinerary for each day
Math - Logic	Establish the cost of staying two nights in one of the places you visited. Include food, entrance to tourist attractions and accommodation.	Using your holiday plan, measure the distance between each town you visit and work out the total distance travelled.

These activities have direct relevance to the central theme and to what was happening elsewhere within the class during the term. In English, the writing genre centres on the 'Explanations', especially focusing on the use of technical terms, work written in timeless present tense, and factual and precise language rather than imaginative. The major content area within Technology was 'Billy Carts' – their features and the systems involved in each. The student could negotiate a change from paddle steamer to chair lift if more appropriate to the travel plan. Likewise in maths, there was a logical connection to units of measurement and decimal currency. Similar connections were apparent in the remainder of the mini-projects.

The mini–projects are open to negotiation and discussion. There is considerable choice, many of the tasks are open ended and numerous options are available in terms of presentation. Many learning styles are catered for. Each project broadens the students' knowledge and skills. The projects make links within the curriculum and extend beyond the classroom. Students complete one activity per week (9) and are expected to engage across the broad range of multiple intelligences.

The model has undergone some modification to fit within the parameters of the major theme. The curriculum emphasis, the scope of activities and the intellectual depth have increased, but the basic organisation and rationale remain intact.

Literacy
The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) is implementing a sector-wide strategic literacy plan known as the Literacy Advance Strategy. The program aims to provide literacy proficiency for all students, with a focus on continual individual student achievement. It advocates a whole-school approach, incorporating a choice of proven programs, and monitoring and researching the progress of literacy attainment. The strategy provides support for leadership and is committed to strengthening and supporting the expertise of teachers. Parental involvement is highly valued.

The Children's Literacy Success Strategy (CLaSS) is a program central to the Literacy Advance Strategy. It is a joint initiative between the Catholic Education Office of Victoria and the University of Melbourne. It is based on research undertaken to improve literacy outcomes in the early years and promote excellent literacy teaching. The initiative had an initial intake of 40 schools in 1998, which has grown to almost 300 schools in 2003. St. Resolutes's School joined the program as a Phase 3 school in 2000.

Acting on the success of the CLaSS program in Years P – 4, many of the key features have been implemented within the Year 5-6 area. These features include the daily two-hour literacy block and the actual structure of the session. A comprehensive assessment program (see assessment and reporting) has been adopted across the area.

This whole school approach and sustained emphasis on literacy is a positive step to ensure that students develop a love of learning and a strong foundation for the middle years of schooling.

Numeracy
Teachers endeavour to provide children with mathematical experiences that relate the theory of mathematics to real life. They do this by providing a sequential P-6 program that allows for support for those children that require it, as well as more challenging tasks for those that thrive on it. The CSF has been the reference source. Numeracy has been selected as a priority focus in the school's 2003-2004 School Development Plan. St. Resolute's is part of the CECV Numeracy Strategy (1998-2003), entitled *Success In Numeracy Education* (SINE) which aims to carry out comprehensive

numeracy assessment to establish numeracy benchmarks, identify students at risk and implement intervention practices, and establish best learning and teaching from P-6. In 2002, St. Resolute's School received a National Numeracy Award for maths intervention in Years 1/2. The school is introducing SINE upwards throughout the school in a manner similar to the development of Literacy. A Professional Learning Team is in place to assist the process.

Assessment and Reporting

The school's teaching, learning and assessment statement indicates that assessment is more effective when:

- Teachers include a variety of assessment strategies in teaching programs to provide multiple sources of information about student achievement;

- It involves a variety of assessment methods to suit the preferred learning style of the individual student;

- It is used to improve student learning by accurately determining areas of future need and exemplary performance;

- Students are actively involved in their assessment and aware of its purpose; and

- It is relevant and meaningful to the learner

St Resolute's acknowledges that accurate and comprehensive reporting of school and student performance aids in establishing open communication, helps to improve student learning, assists in establishing future direction, and helps to identify areas of exemplary performance, as well as those in need of support and assistance. Reporting of student achievement to the students themselves, to parents, other teachers and schools (as appropriate) is an accepted teacher responsibility. Parents receive two written reports indicating progress against the leaning outcomes of the Curriculum and Standards Framework in all key learning areas. Students are assessed continuously during the year by a wide range of assessment practices, including tests, assignments, research projects and presentations. The Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) is completed in Years 3 and 5. Teachers routinely administer a battery of tests to inform of student achievement, progress and learning needs, and to enable the planning and selection of appropriate teaching and learning opportunities in Literacy. The measurement instruments include:

- Schonell Spelling Test;

- Concepts About Print (demonstration of student knowledge of language conventions and word usage);

- The BURT Word Test (ability to decode multi-syllable words);

- Peters spelling – In Context (writing dictated text to indicate the strategies used to spell words and listening comprehension); and

- TORCH Comprehension Test (to demonstrate understanding of text through written responses).

Data are also collected through satisfaction surveys of parents, students and staff. The school has reporting obligations to the school community and Catholic Education Office.

A comprehensive report is prepared annually, and a school review and validation process occurs every five years.

Student self-assessment is a process that is gradually evolving within this structure. Opportunities exist in the reconstructed Integrated Studies, Literacy and Numeracy programs to include self-assessment as a key component within the learning framework. As teacher and student negotiate content, presentation and expectations within a piece of work, standards and timelines can be established which can serve as checkpoints along the way. Appropriate questioning by the teacher enables the student to reflect on his/her performance and identify the quality of achievement and possible opportunities for improvement. These practices are becoming a regular occurrence at St. Resolute's School. Students are also goal setting and self-assessing within small group activities. Partners are often engaged in proof reading each other's work and providing feedback on presentations.

Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

There are two Prep classes and three composite classes in each of the Years 1-2, Years 3-4 and Years 5-6 groupings. Average class size is 26, although all infant classes are below this figure. Classes are mixed ability and are reconstructed annually in an equitable and thoughtful way. The school day commences at 9.00 am, with a two-hour Literacy block. Two sessions, each of ninety minutes, operate between recess and lunch, lunch and dismissal. The timetable is a normal Primary school arrangement, with specialist sessions included across the week. There are opportunities for teachers to plan in Year levels, multi levels, whole school levels, Professional Learning Teams and special purpose or interest groups. Similar Year levels are located nearby wherever possible.

Professional Development

The school's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Statement has triggered considerable thought and professional dialogue. It presents as an articulated document which is most relevant in the planning and delivery of curriculum and self reflection by staff. It serves as a motivator for the implementation of excellent teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Professional Learning Teams are in place for Numeracy, Religious Education, Integrated Studies and Welfare for 2003-2004. The inclusion of these teams for specific curriculum has led to further development of professional standards and expectations. Professional Learning Teams ensure that the targets that the school is trying to achieve will be thoroughly supported. The teams meet fortnightly to carry out set tasks and provide professional advice to staff. The latter may take the form of professional development and training, documentation and recommended reading. School Closure Days (Curriculum Days) have been devoted to the areas covered by the Professional Learning Teams. In addition, the class coordinator is a member of the local literacy network which meets professionally once per term, and another middle years teacher is proactive in the START program in neighbouring schools.

Special Programs

Transition - Primary to Secondary School
The transition from primary to secondary school is a significant change for students, which can be exciting or indeed quite worrying. Schools have implemented a host of transition programs in an attempt to reduce the possibility of negative outcomes. Poor

transition may lead to serious middle years issues, such as anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, depression and even suicide. Successful transition enables the development of self-esteem and academic self-confidence.

Most transition programs involve familiarisation tours, school visits, information evenings, staff dialogue and questionnaires, professional information exchange, and the annual Orientation Day conducted state-wide in December. Some programs are most productive, others unfortunately are not. Transition is an important issue within the Middle Years of schooling and, to be effective, it needs to be viewed within the broad middle years agenda and not as an isolated short term event.

St. Resolutes's is well aware of its responsibilities in this area and has attempted to develop and implement a positive program. But the situation is complicated by the fact that the majority of students graduate to one of several Catholic Secondary Colleges. The central location of St Resolute's and the excellent transport facilities means at least seven possibilities. Some students elect to go to government schools; again, at least six alternatives. Other independent school opportunities also exist. With an exit cohort of just 37 students, there is a high probability of a very small number of students going to a large number of schools. School selection is not really a major issue, as the majority of students (families) have decided well in advance the pathway that the student will follow. The diversity of destination and, even more so, the ability to establish and maintain strong links with such a large number of secondary schools are the major concerns. In most instances, the transition process and communication channels are well defined and operate effectively but, in other situations, this is not so. This is not an isolated case; it is in fact common to many districts. For a number of reasons, it is not always possible to maintain optimum rapport in all primary-secondary relationships.

But schools can take steps to best prepare their students for the transition process. This year, St Resolute's, along with several other schools in the district, have utilised a new resource developed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) - Victoria to enhance its transition arrangements. Known as START – School Transition And Resilience Training – the program contains sections which include background information and a number of considerations (based on research) for developing a productive transition program: teaching and learning principles; tips for implementation and a discussion of the issues surrounding school organisation.

The program goes on to provide activities for students involved in transition from primary to secondary school. The Year 6 activities aim to prepare the students for secondary school and celebrate the completion of primary school. In a perfect scenario, on arrival at secondary school, the students will pick up the Year 7 activities which have a focus on building positive relationships and learning about secondary school.

The START Program will run for up to one hour per week for 10 weeks in Term 4. The three middle years teachers will each take three weekly sessions with all Year 6 students, not just their own class. There will be time for reflection on the primary school experience and thinking about secondary school (how I'm feeling about coming, fears, questions etc). A Passport document will be compiled by each student. It is a comprehensive document in which the students record their thoughts and feelings, their fears, their strengths and weaknesses, their ambitions and any concerns or queries they may have about the secondary school or the transition process. This forms part of the communication link which will be established between the student and Year 7 coordinator. Parents will be involved in feedback surveys and sharing thoughts and concerns with their child(ren).

St. Resolutes's School sees this as an opportunity to not only refine its own transition practices but also to influence other primary and secondary schools to bring about increased efficiency, more consistency and enhanced communication within the Middle Years agenda.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

There is a significant variation in the life experiences of the St Resolute's students which is a key planning consideration. The school appreciates the worth of creating links with the students' background knowledge and connecting to issues beyond the classroom but, to do so, some 'scaffolding' is usually required. Observation informs that options for students are available, especially in study content and presentation.

Productive Pedagogies

Opinions regarding productive pedagogies were sought from the school principal, the Middle Years and Curriculum Leader and Middle Years classroom teachers. As stated previously, the school was not generally familiar with the Productive Pedagogies as identified by the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study and the way they were grouped into the four dimensions of intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and recognition of difference. There was an awareness brought about by other sources, and their practice was apparent in many classroom activities and program planning.

Recognition of Difference
The staff indicated that the School Vision Statement addressed this dimension and in fact several of the dimensions.

> *"We dream of a school where:*
>
> - *the uniqueness of St Resolute Community and its individuals is celebrated;*
>
> - *a positive feeling of warmth, support and acceptance exists;*
>
> - *challenges and opportunities to grow in our relationship with God and one another are provided;*
>
> - *each individual's self -esteem is developed; and*
>
> - *learning is intrinsically valued and promoted."*

There is a strong sense of community, inclusion and citizenship which staff considered essential to daily practice.

Connectedness
The staff thought that primary schools (including their own) are generally competent in this area as there has been a long history of teaching based on student background knowledge and experiences, and on real life situations. Integrated Studies has been a practical way to address all Key Learning Areas and therefore blur subject boundaries to bring about a higher level of knowledge integration. This is further enhanced by the students' being with the same teacher for most of the school day, except for the more specialised subjects (e.g. Physical Education, the Arts), and by a far less rigid timetable.

Intellectual Quality
This is clearly a major focus, as evidenced through the planning team's stated intention to revamp the Integrated Studies program to make it a richer curriculum. The staff

recognises the importance of deeper thinking, knowledge and understanding and is addressing the situation by developing activities that are becoming more challenging, but admit there is still a long way to go. Proposed professional development next year includes developing strategies to help students to think more logically, critically and imaginatively and to develop effective problem solving strategies. Several teachers stated that teacher-student, student–student communication has shown noticeable improvement, particularly in Literacy and Integrated Studies, with some flow into general class activity.

Supportive Environment

The school prides itself on maintaining a supportive environment, as articulated in its documentation and practised in the classroom. Observation revealed high levels of engagement, irrespective of academic capabilities, and self-regulation where the need for teacher intervention to regulate behaviour is almost non-existent. Students can now exercise increased control in the selection of activity in an environment that boasts positive teacher and peer support. The emergence of teacher/student self-assessment and reflection is seen as an area of future development and professional learning.

Lifelong Learning

Staff saw themselves as lifelong learners or as people continuing to learn through life. Several members are completing formal university qualifications, all staff are involved in internal professional learning, and most engage in outside learning through hobbies and special interests. All agreed that this was another positive disposition they should model to their students. While there was not a lot of familiarity with lifelong learning definition and research, staff identified developing multiple literacies and generic learning skills (e.g. problem solving, reflection, enquiry), providing challenging and relevant learning, and assisting individual identities as important teacher responsibilities.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Middle Years Reforms

The students are really excited about their position in the school. Inter-school Sport was very popular and something special about being in Years 5 or 6.

> *"I was really looking forward to playing sport against other schools."*

There are many more areas where leadership can be developed.

> *"Even if you're not a School Captain or SRC (Student Representative Council) you still feel important. The little kids respect you…… and the Buddy program is good for that also."*

Special events, such as the Transition Program and Graduation, add to the glamour of these years. The students spoke of excitement about going to College, the new challenges, their concerns (very few); they generally felt comfortable and confident about moving on.

> *"I like my school but I'm really looking forward to College. It's a new part of my life."*

Group work was one preferred working model. Students believe that it provides an opportunity to share the workload and consider other opinions. They also suggest that group work adds value to what might be achieved individually:

> *"… it could lead to something better than you could do by yourself."*

Despite this recognition of the value of group work, all students enjoy doing some work on an individual basis and, at other times, whole class activities.

The weekly rotation through Art, Science and Drama is very popular amongst students.

> *"I'd like to do it more than once a week ….. it helps me for High School because I will have to get used to having more teachers."*

The students considered their teachers were very supportive. Two remarked that they received extra help because they found things a little difficult sometimes. Most were delighted with the level of choice offered by their teachers which enables students to select the learning tasks. Others were not as confident and liked tasks to be well defined.

Both focus groups spoke highly of the work that had taken place in the area of bullying. They had a clear understanding of the types of bullying and a good insight into the characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator.

> *"I know how to deal with it … ignore it …. get help from ….. it has really helped me with my schoolwork."*

The feedback from students regarding integrated studies is very positive. Their comments have indicated a general preference for 'choice' within the class units and the homework tasks. The choice of presentation is an opportunity to demonstrate and/or develop specific skills. Through these activities, the students see links to their environment and their future.

Lifelong Learning

Both focus groups thought well of their schooling. There was a sense of satisfaction, enjoyment and achievement. All students thought that the teacher and the way he/she taught them were the main reasons why they liked coming to school. Peer relationships were considered important.

> *"The classroom and the school are nice but not as important as the teachers and my friends."*

They did not articulate an understanding of lifelong learning but realised that learning would continue indefinitely.

> *"I guess we will always be learning something new. There are new jobs …. and lots of things are changing and getting better (reference to technology)."*

The students expressed a desire to work more with ICT. Competence in this area was clearly perceived as being most important for their future, particularly in relation to future learning and employment.

The week-long homework tasks are seen as valuable learning experiences. Again, the capacity to select issues and method of presentation were highly recommended. The students recognised that they were permitted to work any way on the Free Choice-Directed continuum. There was room to negotiate and pursue a broad range of issues

within the topic. Most liked this level of independence and saw it as a tool for future learning and not just a convenient arrangement for the time being.

> *"… and most of the time the things we study are things that are happening in the world. That makes it interesting."*

> *" … and when kids do it their own way we see lots of ways of doing things. We learn a lot that way."*

OUTCOMES

Academic Outcomes

Literacy Strategy
The strength of the Literacy Strategy lies in the fact that there is a whole school commitment to improving the acquisition of literacy skills. The shared responsibility of staff has led to a consistency in philosophy, delivery, professional learning and assessment across the school. There is an efficient organisation of student records year by year, which assists tracking student progress and reporting practices. The systematic development of CLaSS throughout the school has enabled the staff and community to see the effectiveness of CLaSS.

The current Year 3 (2003) is the first ClaSS group, having commenced the program in 2000 at the Prep level. Local data and those of the Achievement and Improvement Monitor (AIM) indicate the highest level of achievement, in terms of overall grade mean, that the school has achieved at that level in the areas of reading and writing. Prep-2 data indicate a similar pattern of improvement when compared to pre-ClaSS years. Given the school's whole school commitment to CLaSS strategies, the school is confident such improvement can be sustained. At the Year 5-6 level, local testing reveals most improvement and higher levels of achievement in sight vocabulary, word recognition and spelling. Comprehension is not matching these gains and has been identified as an area for improvement across the whole school. AIM data verify these findings and indicate that the achievement levels and rates of improvement are not as impressive as the Year 3 group when compared to the State benchmarks. The school recognises there is a concern within the boys' cohort regarding lesser achievement; but there is evidence to suggest this may be an ESL/gender issue rather than specifically one or the other.

Integrated Studies
Teachers report a high participation rate and an improved 'hand-in" rate. Students appear very interested in the study units. The quality of work has improved perhaps due to more careful planning by the student. There is evidence to suggest that most students are able to work more independently and take more responsibility for the performance.

The Integrated Curriculum will continue to be revamped over 2003–2004.   The Professional Learning Team will continue to bring more depth and richness to the study units and incorporate a broad range of teaching and learning methods.

Social Outcomes

Although the START program is only in its earliest stage, the feedback from the class teachers has been extremely positive. The involvement and commitment of students has exceeded expectations.

Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

A significant feature of the school is its lack of behaviour and attendance issues. It is most noticeable during classroom observation that there were few disruptions in class. In all five observations, Self-Regulation scored the highest ranking as a result of the teacher not making or having to make statements that aimed to discipline or regulate students' behaviour, movement or dispositions. Similar patterns were observed during travel around the school or in the playground. Any playground altercation appeared to be low intensity and resolved by the students or with minimal staff involvement. Student attendance is very high. Student transience is very low in comparison with regional patterns, as indicated by data which show that approximately 85% of students who graduate from St Resolute's School actually complete all of their primary years at that location.

INNER WEST GIRLS COLLEGE (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Location

Inner West Girls College is located in the suburb of Footscray (Maribyrnong municipality) in Melbourne's inner west. This is the most densely populated, yet smallest, municipality in the region, with a population of 60,000 within an area of 31 square kilometres.

Originally an industrial powerhouse, Footscray, like the remainder of the Maribyrnong region, is undergoing a period of significant change. A number of large development opportunities have emerged from changes in land use, and residential properties are increasingly being sought. By the year 2011, the population is expected to increase by 40% to 74,000. Today's multi–cultural population shows 40% of current residents were born outside Australia; they come from more than 100 different countries and speak more than 65 languages.

About the School

The College has developed a quality education package, which recognises the specific educational needs of girls, and is characterised by high expectations of academic achievement and student engagement. This enables students to develop leadership skills and strive for personal excellence. The comprehensive curriculum includes all eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and is further extended by a field of specialist programs related to the Arts, Languages, Outdoor Education and Sport.

The Senior School offers a broad range of subjects at both the Year 10 level and Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The curriculum is structured in semester units to maximise student choice. There are opportunities that allow acceleration into VCE subjects. Students are encouraged to make subject selections based on personal interest and prerequisites for further study. Pathways and links have also been established to enable a smooth transition from school to University, TAFE or the workforce.

Although the age and design of the buildings demand constant and costly maintenance, the school presents as a safe and pleasant environment. The neat, functional classrooms are complemented by an Arts Centre, gymnasium, library and VCE study centre. The construction of two new ICT pods and relocation of the main server has greatly enhanced the opportunities for computer applications. This has involved considerable upgrades to electrical supply, services and equipment.

The school grounds are most attractive, with several areas of well-planned vegetation. Other sections are designated for passive or active recreation directly suited to school and community needs. The College has engaged with City West Water to write curriculum materials that promote water-wise approaches in daily life and specifically in setting up a Waterwise Garden. Year 8 teachers and students have trialled the program with such success it is now used as a curriculum document by other schools. The program is conducted with Year 8 classes and is an excellent example of an integrated middle years of schooling project.

Students/Staff/Community

Inner West Girls College is the only girls' school in Melbourne's western suburbs. The single campus facility has an enrolment of 337 students. Although there is a reasonably strong intake from primary schools in the Footscray area, the school does not have a normal geographical catchment due to the fact that it is located within a high intensity commercial and administrative centre. It cannot expect the same level of population growth as the majority of the Maribyrnong municipality. Fortunately, the College is well served by public transport, which enables students to come from as many as 40 feeder schools in neighbouring suburbs to the west and north, but only in relatively small numbers.

The College is proactively addressing social justice issues. In cooperation with community agencies, the school offers a number of programs to address any perceived disadvantage. The College has a high proportion of non-English-speaking background students (65%) and a high proportion of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or Youth Allowance recipients (60%). This places the school in the highest level of disadvantage based on comparative student background data sourced from across the State. Currently, 34% of students are of Vietnamese origin, while more than 10% of students were born in Africa.

There is a high mobility factor as parents relocate in search of work or advance to the next stage of settlement in Australia. A large number of students have attended more than one or two schools before enrolling at Inner West College, while others have had minimal or severely disrupted schooling. There is an increasing number of students who are the victims of torture and trauma, and the majority of African families have come to Australia after substantial periods of time in displaced persons' camps. These groups bring some adjustment and ESL issues with them, but they also bring a motivation and vibrancy which enhances the Inner West Girls College image. The College appreciates the rich diversity of values and cultural experiences within this multicultural school population.

The College has an experienced staff of 32 Equivalent Full Time (EFT) teachers, with over 60% at Leading Teacher or Experienced Teacher with Responsibility (ETWR) Levels. There have been some issues regarding excess teachers, but this is being addressed by the school. The teaching staff is supported by ancillary staff in administration and integration. Psychological services are delivered through a shared district model, while Speech Therapy is brought in privately by the school. A Student Service team, including a Student Welfare Coordinator, Chaplain and Managing Individual Pathways (MIP) Coordinator, provide pastoral care to all students.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Philosophy

Mission Statement .
Inner West Girls College Girls College is a diverse and harmonious learning environment which aims to empower girls to achieve their potential and seek excellence. The school community is committed to maintaining a caring and cooperative environment, encouraging independent learning and focusing on the individual needs of the whole student body.

Vision and Goal

Inner West Girls College Girls College strives to live up to its motto 'Harmony and Success', offering a cooperative and engaging learning environment to its diverse community and enabling more young women to achieve self fulfilment and success in their adult lives. The College aims to develop a positive profile in the community so that it is the preferred government school in its target areas.

Values and Behaviour

The following have been identified as important values and behaviours to the school:

- Achievement and Success;
- Diversity;
- Self Confidence;
- Respect; and
- Care.

Strategic Direction

The Triennial Review process (2002) reinforced the value of the previous School Charter (1999–2001) focus on the implementation of practice and curriculum consistent with the middle years philosophy and increased flexibility in Senior School programs. As a result, the College is now forging a strategic direction which incorporates:

- Further consolidation and innovation in both student management and curriculum;
- A holistic approach to welfare provision;
- Improved teaching and learning practice to challenge and extend all students;
- Improved provision of academic and vocational pathways;
- Sustained improvement in the integration of learning technologies;
- Sound school management practices (e.g. attendance); and
- Improved congruence among staff in terms of goals and values, high expectations and consistent educational and management practice.

School Structure

The College operates a sub-school system of Junior School (Years 7–9) and Senior School (Years 10–12), with a Leading Teacher in charge of each sub-school. In the Junior School, the curriculum and pastoral care are delivered by small teams of teachers who work within integrated units which reflect the middle years of schooling philosophy and practices. All curriculum is developed in line with the CSF, and student achievement is measured against specified outcomes.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

In 2000, Inner West Girls College embarked on a Middle Years of Schooling initiative that was designed to develop and implement a more structured, meaningful and engaging curriculum in Years 7 - 9. It aimed to create a holistic learning experience for each student, with a particular focus on literacy and learning technologies. The school became very conscious of the credentials for successful 21st century functioning, especially in regard to personal management and the development of lifelong learners who can utilise a range of informational sources and generic work skills to enable them to adjust to constantly changing circumstances.

During 1999, Inner West Girls College accessed much of the Middle Years of Schooling research and professional development that was being undertaken at state and national levels. With particular reference to research undertaken in Western Australia and by Deakin University in Victoria, the College elected to reform its structure for three main reasons:

- Significant time and money had already been devoted to professional development and curriculum planning, but this generally had little effect in bringing about a change of classroom practice;

- Existing structures acted as blockers:

  o to integrating and streamlining curriculum;

  o to helping students feel more connected; and

  o to building better relationships between teacher and learner.

Changing traditional structures would create a fundamental shift in practice and ideology that would be more likely to act as a catalyst for change in the other key areas.

Middle Years Curriculum

The school realised that changing the middle school structure was only a starting point and had to be backed up with changes to teaching and learning and curriculum design and development. The change in structure would directly encourage change in some of these areas and set up conditions to allow the school to work on other fundamental issues.

In addition, there were some organisational issues to be resolved. The streamlining of the curriculum, with only 20 periods available, resulted in some shifts in curriculum allocations, which reflect a number of clear priorities.

Periods (72 minutes) per week (Total 20)				
KLA	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Change in minutes
English	3	3	3	+ 24
SOSE	3	3	3	0

Periods (72 minutes) per week (Total 20)				
KLA	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Change in minutes
Maths	3	3	3	+ 24
Science[1]	3	3	3	+ 72
Health , PE & Sport	■ 2	■ 2	■ 2	- 24
LOTE	■ 2	■ 2	■ 2	+ 24
Arts	■ 2	■ 2	■ 2	- 48
Technology[2]	■ 1	■ 1	■ 2	- 24
Pastoral Care	■ 1	■ 1	■	0

Assessment and Reporting

Literacy has been a major focus in the Years 7–9 program and, as such, has been subject to sustained assessment over the past three years (*refer Academic Outcomes 6.1*).

A wide range of assessment practices, including assignments, research projects and presentations, is undertaken continuously throughout the year. Data are gathered in Years 7-9 to assess student achievement in all Key Learning Areas. The Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) is completed at Year 7 level. The data from these sources allow the school to monitor its performance against state-wide benchmarks and 'like' schools. It also informs staff for planning, evaluation and better targeting of individual student needs. Data are also collected through satisfaction surveys of parents, students and staff.

Included in the Triennial School Review (1999–2001) was a Student Survey related to the Middle Years Initiative. Students expressed their satisfaction and positive reaction to the changes that occurred in the middle years reorganisation. They consistently reported a preference for the individual teacher attention which the program affords; the satisfaction of learning more, by being presented with challenging, as opposed to difficult, work; and the introduction of the four period day.

Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The previous structure consisted of six 48-minute periods per day, operating on a ten-day timetable. It precipitated a range of arrangements for delivery of the Key Learning Areas (KLAs), and curriculum balance was sometimes difficult to reconcile. Furthermore, teachers had concerns that the timetable contributed to time-wasting and

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[1] Inner West spends more than 50% more time on Science than most other government schools. This ensures that the girls have access to a variety of non-traditional subjects, such as Science.

[2] The low allocation of time to Technology is due to the fact that IT is integrated into the core subjects and is not an isolated stand-alone subject. Each subject incorporates computer tasks and the school's e-learning plan, Computer Skills Audit, specifies which skills are taught at each level. There is computer access in each of the Year 7, 8 and 9 homerooms.

tardiness at change-overs. School days were fractured for both teachers and students, while the time allocated was often not long enough for sustained activity (especially practical classes) and planning was generally short term.

The new structure created four 72-minute periods per day in a five-day timetable that ran across all Year 7–12 classes. The College now recognises that the move to longer periods has:

- Consolidated time so that programs were less fragmented;
- Encouraged change in teaching styles and practices;
- Provided opportunities for a range of teaching and/or learning activities within that time-frame;
- Made it possible to explore issues and extend activities; and
- Necessitated less movement for teachers and students.

This revised structure has enabled a move to teaching teams at Years 7–9. In these Year levels, two key teachers are allocated to a home group for at least two subjects each. One is designated Maths/Science and the other, English/SOSE. Either one or the other is in the homeroom for 65% of students' class time. The remaining 35% (7 periods) are the specialist subjects, namely The Arts (2 periods), LOTE (2), PE/Sport (2) and Technology (1). There is also an element of choice in the Year 9 Arts program.

Each team has responsibility for discipline and welfare issues in the home group. Year Level teams arrange meeting times with more flexibility and have greater curriculum development opportunities. These teams are a structural unit for most junior school issues. The development of integrated curriculum units is a major focus. The benefits of this move to a team program are clearly evident. The college indicates that these benefits include:

- A reduced number of teachers dealing more intensively with a class;
- Teachers spending a longer time with students – they get to know them better, they are better able to judge and cater for their range of needs;
- Students spending significant time in a more secure structure which encourages risk-taking and independent learning;
- A less fragmented structure is provided for teachers and students;
- Change in teaching practice and classroom organisation is encouraged;
- It promotes a more holistic view of students, with a strengthened welfare and discipline focus;
- Teamwork and support between teachers are encouraged;
- Opportunities for integration of curriculum; and
- A more comfortable transition from primary school in a similar structure.

There were industrial issues with teachers' time-allocations (for example, extras) which had to be worked through. There was concern that the timetable constraints would lead to teachers being categorised 'junior school' or 'senior school' teachers. At Inner West Girls College, this did not occur, as the majority of teachers had allocations in both areas.

Professional Development

Extensive research has been undertaken by the leadership team into all aspects of middle years reform leading up to, during and following the commencement of the College's middle years initiative. Staff have been involved in numerous local workshops and larger conferences. The College's decision to bring about change in structure, curriculum and methodology was greatly influenced by the staff insights gained through professional development provided by the Department of Education and Training (Vic) and its investment in the Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) project.[3] Inner West Girls College has gone on to contribute to the wider professional community through presentations at state-wide conferences, including Education Foundation MYOS Conference, Deakin University Literacy in Middle Years Research Project and the Catholic Curriculum Forum.

Inner West Girls College staff have adopted new and innovative methods for teaching literacy. This has flowed on from earlier work in the Deakin University Literacy Research Project. In this project, staff have investigated and used a host of literacy strategies, successfully demonstrating a positive improvement in literacy amongst the students involved. The most valuable product of this project was that innovative literacy strategies were routinely adopted by teachers and, more importantly, they have been sustained. Word splashes and write-on-reading activities were used across the KLAs. Data Charts and the Inner West Girls College Research Guide were utilised in full. The development of ICT literacies, such as the integrated ICT project at the Year 9 Environmental Web site, was another by-product.

The change of structure has required a significant adjustment for some members. No longer are they able to stay in their own faculty, work in isolation or fail to connect with other teachers. Some have been compelled, in a supportive way, to work with others; there is a clear expectation that staff will work as a team. For Inner West Girls College, this has fundamentally changed the definition of what it is to be a teacher. *'You are more than just a Science teacher.'*

Some teachers have had to reinvent themselves. Others have seized the opportunity and found it refreshing to work in new ways and subsequently rekindled energies evident in previous times. By working in an integrated curriculum structure, teachers are able to observe what other teachers are doing and identify opportunities to build on those observations. Teachers are now looking for opportunities and making use of them. It is most apparent there is a strengthened movement towards a redefined pedagogy within the College.

Special Programs

In Year 9, there are 31 girls enrolled in the Victorian Youth Development Program[4] 'Environmental Corps'. Parks Victoria is the service provider.

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[3] Completed in association with the University of Melbourne

[4] The Victorian Youth Development Program (VYDP) is a community based project, introduced to government secondary colleges across Victoria in 1997. A hands-on training initiative, it takes students out of the classroom and offers them a range of opportunities that promote youth leadership, participation team building, confidence and awareness of community. The program is voluntary for both schools and students.

Science provision at Inner West Girls College College is very high. Recently, the school was successful in obtaining a generous grant from 'Scientists and Engineers in the School' program. This will enable the engagement of a scientist from the engineering department of Victoria University of Technology (VUT) who will work with the science teachers at the College to plan an exciting program 'Electronics for Girls' at Years 8 and 9.

The Year 9 Integrated Project ~ Environmental Website is an example of a term project that runs across all four of the team subjects: English, SOSE, Maths and Science. In groups, students investigate different aspects of environmental issues. To complete the project, the group designs and creates a website based on the chosen environmental topic.

SOSE	ENGLISH	SCIENCE	MATHS
Natural systems Human impact Management plan	Writing folio piece Issues responses	Energy and food webs Ecological cycles	Designing and conducting a survey Analysing and presenting results
DESIGNING A WEBSITE			

- Learning to use Frontpage
- Designing the 'look' and structure of the website
- Choosing a selection of work from the four areas to include on the web site

Transition

The staff at Inner West Girls College are well aware of the difficulties, even traumas, that can occur as girls make the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. In order to reduce these difficulties, each Year 7 class has a base or home-room in which they have most of their classes. Students can decorate their room with their work and establish a sense of belonging. This is an essential step in the 'settling in' phase, as the girls come from over 30 different feeder primary schools. The students benefit from being in smaller classes for a longer period of time, with a limited number of teachers. There are stronger relationships, and teachers have greater opportunity to provide more interesting, varied and productive activities.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

Productive Pedagogies

Opinions regarding productive pedagogies were sought from the (acting) School Principal, the middle years Leader and middle years classroom teachers.

Recognition of Difference

Multiculturalism is a significant feature at Inner West Girls College. There is a sense of harmony as each finds the other's culture interesting. While there is a valuing of others' cultures, there is a feeling that this could be more explicit. Staff indicate that, while most students can see the relevance of citizenship in the outside world, it is not as prevalent in the school setting where 'self' is often the determinant of deed or word.

Connectedness

All planning attempts to make connections across subject boundaries, and explicit links to the students' background experiences and to the larger community. These are procedures the school has been employing well for a long time due to the special conditions prevalent in the community. The majority of planning and assignments show evidence of problem solving components.

Intellectual Quality

In many cases, it is clearly evident that a large number of students have had a deficit in terms of education opportunity due to past disadvantage. To many students, school is the only place where they will get a 'lift'. There is a narrow view of what it is to learn, of what learning and teaching is all about. The school is making clear links across the Key Learning Areas, but aiming for depth of thought rather than width. While this is succeeding in most classes, there is still a tendency in some quarters to plan from lesson to lesson. Such 'skimming' is being discouraged as units of work become more authentic in learning and assessment – with decision making, problem solving, connectedness and the explicit teaching of specific lifelong skills the key features. The Literacy strategy is an ongoing priority and, as students become more adept in the use of literacy skills, more thorough studies are undertaken.

Supportive Environment

Inner West Girls College provides a most supportive classroom environment. Expectations are high, and direct support to students from peers or teachers is positive. There are very few closed assessment tasks, and there are many choices in presentation. The work units are criteria based - *'…. here is the intended outcome, you decide how to get there.'* The school acknowledges the need for young people to feel a sense of belonging or attachment to their school, using the three foundations of communication, security and positive regard. Staff at Inner West Girls College believe that there is a structure in place which supports these principles and allows the development of programs and strategies to promote resiliency and connectedness in students.

Lifelong Learning

While the staff have not participated in any dedicated lifelong learning workshops, a large amount of their research and learning in their middle years reform has resulted in practice which is consistent with the literature surrounding the development of lifelong learners. There is recognition of, and attention to, the need for a depth of competency in literacy across many information sources. There is valuing of every student as a learner, development of self-esteem and preparation for a successful adult life. The students are taught how to think and learn. Students are assisted in acquiring generic skills, such as problem solving, self-reflection, goal setting, risk taking and communication. Teachers confirm the vital part they play in being appropriate role models. They indicated a thirst for knowledge, collaborative relationships, persistence and sustained improvement as essential features. It was evident in classroom observation that the teachers are eager

to engage in individual and small group conversation as opposed to whole-of-class dialogue.

Developing independent learners is the key lifelong learning priority for Inner West Girls College students, especially for those with limited access to education prior to arrival in Australia. Historically, a large number of girls have arrived at the school totally reliant on their teacher. They have needed constant direction, motivation and support as they have lacked many of the skills which are taken for granted in other contexts and which most students acquire through participation in basic education. Such students find it difficult to relate learning to other settings, have limited background experiences, and are invariably addressing a number of personal issues.

Staff generally think that it is essential that the students understand the relevance of the knowledge and skills that are being developed. This not only accelerates knowledge and skill acquisition but also enables greater connectedness between the classroom and the broader community.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Middle Years Reforms

Students participating in the focus groups were drawn from Years 7, 8 and 9 and were representative of the mix within the school population. From the outset, it was clear that there was a strong appreciation of the supportive culture within the school. There was a sense of closeness between teachers and students and warm friendships among students. The home rooms were 'open' and friendly. There was a sense of belonging and acceptance.

"People around here respect all religions and backgrounds."

Most thought that having no boys was good as it enabled them to concentrate better, although there was some admission to missing boys.

Most thought the idea of moving through Years 7, 8 and 9 with minimal alteration to class composition was a good idea.

"I'm happy with the same group."

".... only a few kids change but that's for a reason"

Having a reduced number of teachers

"... lets you get to know the teacher better"

"My friends at other schools have lots of teachers. I like it this way."

All liked the four period structure and most other organisational matters.

Year 7 and 8 students enjoyed the varied program, which involves such things as Food Technology, fashion, sewing and pastoral care. Year 9 viewed the Elective Program in a particularly good light, especially Drama, Photography and Art. The practical Science focus was also very popular. Sporting opportunities were also viewed positively, as many students were unable to participate in sport on weekends

"We have teams and compete against other schools. It is a chance to achieve something else."

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Students have a preference for being able to choose class activities and tasks, and they acknowledge that choices exist across most areas of the curriculum, as well as in specific class activities. Students see strong connections to the outside world in most activities. Students regard Literature Circles as a popular alternative for studying class texts. In this activity, students choose a text from a 'same theme' list and work as a group, instead of one text being studied by the whole class. Each person in the group has a role which is swapped amongst members.

> *"You might be the connector, or the summariser, illustrator, word wizard….. we all get a turn at doing something different."*

The students generally have a preference for working with ICTs and would like more access due to their belief that skills in this area will enhance both study and work opportunities and outcomes.

Several students spoke highly of the Environmental Cadets because of new learning, various settings and doing something worthwhile by helping the environment.

Lifelong Learning

Both focus groups have a positive outlook on school, life in general and the future. They see purpose in their schooling and realise that education will take them somewhere. They see opportunity ahead and plenty of options in work and study.

OUTCOMES

Academic Outcomes

Inner West Girls College is proud of its most recent academic achievement. In August 2003, the Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, announced that Inner West Girls College had won the National Literacy Award for Excellence as part of Literacy and Numeracy Week. The award is recognition of the College's endeavour, (and achievement) to improve student outcomes in literacy in Years 7–9 (middle Years).

The documentation submitted by the College outlined a range of strategies and initiatives used to address many literacy issues within the middle years of schooling. These strategies included:

- Middle years restructure as outlined previously;

- Holistic approaches to literacy across the KLAs developed as part of the Deakin University Literacy Research Project;

- Extensive professional development of staff;

- Literature Circles – an innovative method to studying class texts;

- Lexile Levelled Reading Framework – a reading measure that matches students to texts at appropriate levels

- RESTART – a DE&T initiative to improve the literacy levels of Year 7 students most at risk of not achieving satisfactory reading levels;

- Homework Club – volunteer tutors providing assistance for newly arrived African students, but now extended to students with literacy difficulties and open to all; and

- Literacy Extension which includes inter-school debating, Australian Writing Competition and a wide range of public speaking endeavours.

In 2001, a cohort of 25 students were randomly chosen from the three classes of the same Year level. The group began in Year 7 in 2001 and is currently in Year 9 in 2003. Each year the group is tested. The College has established a relationship between DART (Development Assessment Resources for Teachers) Reading Test, CSF levels and TORCH (Tests of Reading Comprehension) stanine levels, which has enabled a comparison of each student's progress over several years. In Year 7, 76% of the group was contained within the very low, low, and below average range of indicators. By 2003 (Year 9), this same cohort has reversed the trend, with only 28% in the same low categories; 72% are now performing at average, above average and superior levels.

Social Outcomes

School based student surveys highlighted the students' enjoyment of the happier and more positive environment where closer relationships are possible. High approval ratings were received regarding clarity of rules, the friendliness of students and teachers, personal safety and security, and the availability and willingness of teachers to listen and offer support.

Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

Attendance in the Middle Years
In 1999 and 2000, student absences were generally higher than the state average. There was some improvement in 2001; but in 2002, student absences were lower at each Year level and significantly lower in Years 8, 9 and 11. The turnaround in the rate of student absence is a reflection of the more engaging curriculum and the increased academic rigour and extracurricular programs that were offered. The College sees this as a legitimate justification of the middle years focus on developing close links between teacher and students. Team teachers are much better positioned to monitor attendance and carry out more individualised follow-up due to the pastoral nature of the role. Teachers can analyse reasons, seek solutions and initiate support.

Retention
For Years 7–10 apparent retention in 1997–2000 and 1998–2001, the College closely mirrored the state average. But the Year 7–10 apparent retention rate for the most recent time period, 1999–2002, results were far more superior to the state averages. Again, improvement may be attributed to increased student engagement, the greater emphasis on academic rigour, and the supportive environment.

Student Destinations
A significant number of students leave for other government schools at the end of Year 10, but mostly as a result of relocation. The departures at the end of Year 11 are usually into employment or training. The number of students commencing and actually completing Year 12 has been an area of improvement. Approximately 70% of the last Year 12 cohort entered University or TAFE.

THE LAKES GRAMMAR SCHOOL (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Location

The Lakes Grammar is located in Sale, 260 kilometres east of Melbourne. Sale regards itself as the tourist gateway to East Victoria, featuring the Gippsland Lakes, 90 mile beach, mountains and many other exciting tourist destinations. The town has a population of close to 13,000 people and supports diverse industries, including agriculture, retail and professional services, and companies including the Esso Longford Gas Plant and Oil Platforms, Nylex Plastics Factory and the East Sale RAAF base. The relocation of the Esso Head Office from Sale to Melbourne in the mid-1990s caused a significant economic downturn for the town, which is set to be balanced by the recently confirmed proposal to relocate the RAAF officer training facility to East Sale. Several major companies have been putting off decisions to relocate to Sale awaiting confirmation of the RAAF base expansion. Those companies are now expected to make the decision to locate in Sale with confidence. The economic benefits to Sale are expected to be significant and may inject up to $75 million into the community over the next 10 years.

About the School

Founded in 1971, The Lakes Grammar prides itself on its strong academic program. Its focus is on developing the intellectual, social, spiritual and creative talents of each student and reports an annual 100 per cent pass rate in Victoria's Senior School Certificate (VCE).

The school is located on two sites within the township. Both sites are well resourced with comprehensive education facilities, excellent sporting facilities and relaxation areas. Students are provided with an excellent opportunity to develop all facets of their personality in a safe and comfortable learning environment.

Important features of the school include its outdoor education program, music, sport and extracurricular activities, all designed to accentuate the development of the students' personal growth and confidence.

The Lakes Grammar experienced a significant downturn in enrolments as a direct result of the relocation of the Esso head office to Melbourne. Accordingly, the school has undertaken a number of strategies to address this situation, including the introduction of a specific program to address the learning needs of students in Years 8 and 9. It is these programs that form the basis of this case-study.

Students/Staff/Community

The school draws its total P–12 student population of 830 from within Sale and surrounding districts, including the Latrobe Valley via bus travel, and from broader Gippsland as boarders. Many of the students attend the Junior School for their primary years, although there is a steady Year 7 entry from government and non-government schools. The staff is relatively stable and presents a good mix in terms of experience, qualifications and gender.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Philosophy

The goals of the school are to:

- Nurture and develop the intellectual, social, spiritual and cultural talents of each of its students within a secure Christian environment;

- Provide a solid foundation for further studies and vocational training, and responsible and rewarding participation in the future; and

- Enable students to achieve high standards of learning, and to develop self-confidence, high self-esteem, respect of others, and achievement of personal excellence.

In pursuit of these goals, the school indicates that it will:

- Provide a broadly-based general education, which involves studies in the traditional academic subjects;

- Have all students participate in a wide range of co-curricular activities to enhance all aspects of their personal development;

- Teach in a way that is relevant and meaningful to the current society, using up-to-date materials and equipment, building upon the students' experiences and interests, and linking educational theory to practice in everyday life;

- Emphasise the skills of communication, problem solving, cooperative learning, reasoning and research;

- Encourage adaptability, flexibility, and the transfer of knowledge and skills to a wide variety of contexts;

- Implement the school programmes in such a way that respects the rights and responsibilities of the students, teachers, and Parent/Guardian, and encourages them to place a high value on good relationships;

- Encourage students to be actively involved in their learning by making decisions, taking responsibility, evaluating, analysing and taking action;

- Give students regular feedback about their learning performance in order to improve their learning;

- Select teaching and learning approaches which offer all students opportunities for success, and motivate them to continue learning;

- Encourage students to explore ideas critically, and to learn from their errors;

- Encourage the professional development of staff by providing an environment which regards innovation, evaluation and the dissemination of knowledge and skills; and

- Provide leadership in the development of education practice.

This statement of philosophy and purposes is used as a guide to planning and implementing all aspects of the teaching and learning program.

School Structure

In addition to being located on two sites, there are several distinct learning divisions that make up the school structure. The Early Learning Centre and Junior School are situated in picturesque surroundings across town from the Senior Campus. Special curriculum, staffing and facilities arrangements are in place for Years 7 and 8, Year 9, and Years 10–12. The school commences at 8.55 am and concludes at 3.25 pm. The secondary level works on six periods per day on a 10-day cycle. Staff members generally work within one of these sections.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

Through a broad curriculum, The Lakes Grammar provides a range of offerings to produce adolescents prepared and confident to take their place in society and equipped to meet the challenges and demands of a rapidly changing world. There is an overt acknowledgement that each child has a preferred learning style and that the college makes every effort to accommodate all learning modes and requirements. Significant emphasis is placed on the skills of multiple literacies, communication, cooperative learning, reasoning, problem solving and research. The school encourages adaptability, flexibility and effective application of knowledge and skills to a given situation. Students are required to be involved actively in their learning by making decisions, assuming responsibility, evaluating, analysing and taking action. Learning is enhanced by the regular provision of feedback. There is a belief that there is no learning without emotion and challenge. Teachers are encouraged to embrace new ideas and innovative practices.

Middle Years Curriculum

Years 5 – 6
Students in Years 5 and 6 (Junior Campus) follow the curriculum set down by the Victorian Government, the Curriculum and Standards Framework 11 (CSF 11), with some modification to suit the local environment, expectations and resources. Literacy and Numeracy programs are structured to ensure that all children are exposed to a comprehensive and sequential program. Skill and concept developments are considered important aspects of the Study of Society and the Environment (SOSE), Science, Technology, Physical Education, the Arts and foreign language (Japanese). A computer laboratory is linked to the school network. Children requiring special assistance or extension with learning are catered for both within the classroom and in withdrawal groups. Classes are kept as small as possible to ensure close working relationships between students and teachers. There is a strong pastoral care program, which performs many roles including the smooth transition to Senior School.

Years 7 – 8
The Year 7 and 8 is made up of core subjects, which all students undertake. These include English, Mathematics, Science, History/Geography, Art, LOTE (French and

Japanese), Music, Physical Education, Health, ICT, Religious and Values Education (RAVE), Pastoral Care and Sport. There are six homerooms at each level, which break into five groups for English and Maths and then four academic groups for all other subjects, except Art which is in home groups. In addition, one all-boys class has been established at Year 8 level. This is done in order to focus more specifically on the learning needs of certain boys, based on research which shows that learning can be optimised in English and Maths in a single sex classroom. Course content is designed to meet individual needs. There are several remedial and enrichment programs for special needs in literacy and numeracy. Students with exceptional academic ability are extended in programs which focus on developing the higher order thinking skills and providing opportunities for exceptionally able students to explore challenging concepts.

THE YEAR 9 PROGRAM

Background

The program's origins are derived from an understanding that school curriculum needs to acknowledge that Year 9 is a Year in which students often experience a lack of engagement with traditional classroom programs. The school believes that alienation often stems from both issues associated with adolescence (with its rapid physical, emotional and social growth) and the difficulty students have in seeing the relevance of many routine school activities.

Rationale and Beliefs

Based on the above background understanding, the school has established the following as the rationale for its Year 9 program:

> " … Year 9 must provide an appropriate curriculum which recognises, celebrates and values the experiences of students as they establish individual identities within their families, peer group, school environment and community."

The fundamental beliefs guiding and determining the approach to teaching at this level are that:

- All students are able to learn;
- All students learn differently;
- All students learn best when they are self-confident;
- All students can enjoy learning; and
- All students have the capacity to change their world positively.

This program challenges students to:

- Strive for and value personal excellence and achievement;
- Enhance self-reliance and confidence;
- Work effectively with others; and
- Appreciate and respect a variety of environments.

Key features

Stand-out features of the program include its physical location and the its structure, including the use of experiential activities external to the school.

Year 9 classes are located in a separate facility removed from the remainder of the school. This facility includes four classrooms, a resource centre which includes a staff work-area and lounge and a highly valued student common room. Since its inception, students have progressively contributed to the physical beautification of the facilities, particularly through the development of its garden area.

The program is structured around core subject areas taught by four teachers that have sole responsibility for teaching Year 9. This structure is critical to the program for two reasons. First, it provides independence from the school's timetable. When coupled with the dedicated classrooms, it provides the teaching staff with the flexibility to establish 'block' lesson periods and specialisation in specific discipline areas. Second, through this structure, teachers and students share the view that the Year 9 teachers share deep understanding of students and their learning. This understanding is highly valued by teachers and students as it leads to positive working relationships and a more individualised and personalised approach to engaging students in learning.

> *"This is important in enabling us to carefully monitor students during a critical time in their education and the regularity with which these teachers see students, more easily enables recognition of and attention to the individual needs of students.[sic]"*

The Year 9 Curriculum is made up of six core subjects: English, Mathematics, Civics, Environmental Studies, Physical Education and Science. All students participate in these subjects and are able to choose two elective subjects to study each semester. The elective subjects are drawn from Art, Drama, Catering, French, Horticulture, Japanese, Magazine Publication, Media Studies, Music, Robotics, Solar Technology, Wood Technology, Writer's Workshop and Visual Communication and Design.

Study skills seminars are provided for students as they enter the program at the beginning of Year 9. Students and teachers alike highlight that these seminars are most beneficial in skilling students in undertaking research tasks, managing work requirements and organising homework.

Where possible, an integrated approach is adopted for the organisation and delivery of the Year 9 program. For example:

- The Civics topic, which covers Australia's involvement in World War I, is complemented by the study of the film *Gallipoli* in English;

- The students study the John Marsden book, *Tomorrow When the War Began*, over the period when the students in Year 9 undertake a bushwalking trip to Lake Tarli Karng, as the journey described in the book *Tailor's Stitch* via *Satan's Steps* is based around the same location; and

- Environmental Studies lessons draw on the snow camp experience to study the characteristics, use, and management of alpine environments.

The Year 9 program also places a strong emphasis on experiences outside the classroom. The wide ranging experiences offered during this program have direct curriculum links, as well as providing opportunities to enhance self reliance and

confidence, work effectively with others, and appreciate and respect a variety of environments. These experiences include:

- A bushwalking trip to Lake Tarli Karng;

- A two week Melbourne experience;

- A snow camp (under canvas); and

- Elective camps, which involve students in planning and negotiating camp venues and activities.

The Melbourne Experience is highly valued by students and staff. It involves students in a range of urban activities over a two week period. These activities include:

- Visits to Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre;

- A research activity which requires the use of primary information sources without the use of books or the internet; and

- Observations, surveys and guest speakers focusing on current issues facing the City of Melbourne.

Where possible, students participating in the Melbourne Experience organise their own accommodation and travel into the city each day. Normal timetabling of classes gives way to a more flexible approach to organising the curriculum. This includes a daily timetabling of set tasks, as well as the provision for students to negotiate work requirements and assume the responsibility of organising their own learning program, which includes extensive use of the city as an extension of the classroom.

Co-curricular programs incorporate activities across six streams. Examples of the co-curricular activities offered to Year 9 students include:

- Academic - public speaking, debating and Tournament of the Minds;

- Drama – school production, house plays and performing arts;

- Music – choir, concert band and private music tuition;

- Sport – house sports and inter-school sports;

- Mini course - computing (laptops), first aid, resume preparation and communication skills; and

- Other – community service and Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, which all students are strongly encouraged to take up.

Assessment and Reporting

The Lakes Grammar believes that the manner in which teachers assess and report on student progress has a profound influence on student learning. Teachers are expected to use a variety of techniques to assess student progress. These include:

- Formal grading A+ - E, using established criteria, of tasks such as long- and short-term project work, homework tasks, oral and creative presentations, report and essay writing, written exercises and tests. Informal assessment, such as quizzes, panels and discussions, are regularly used.

- Regular discussion regarding progress and areas for improvement. This is most important in monitoring and nurturing individual strengths and weaknesses and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Self-evaluations are used regularly as a key means of assessment. Students are encouraged to assess their own and their peers' work.
- Students are encouraged to negotiate the establishment of criteria for assessment.

A written report is completed each semester. This gives students and parents an indication of levels of achievement, academic skills and social skills. Grading of assessment tasks in all subjects is incorporated in these reports. At the end of Terms One and Three, an interim report is completed which provides feedback on key aspects of student progress, but does not include assessment grades. Parent Teacher Interviews are held in Terms Two and Three. Students include a written reflection on their year in their end-of-year reports. A self-assessment of development of skills in the use of Information and Communication technologies will be included in the end-of-year report.

Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The school day is organised around six 50-minute periods on a 10-day cycle. In the Year 9 area, there are four class groups of 22 students. Four teachers, one of whom is the Year leader, are allocated to the area. Each teacher has a home group. Each of the teachers is responsible for one subject across all four classes. The subjects covered in this arrangement are English, Mathematics, SOSE and Science. Group planning is a key component of this arrangement, and the learning in each area of study is closely aligned to the other three. The foreign languages and the performing and visual Arts are taken by specialist teachers. The four classes are mixed gender and ability groups. Wherever possible, attempts are made to place each student with several of their friends.

Professional Development

The Lakes Grammar recognises that, for staff to develop and deliver best practice, a forward-thinking program of professional learning is essential. To this end, the school management actively seeks to create an environment that rewards innovation, evaluation and the ability to share knowledge and skills.

Issues surrounding transition (Junior–Senior School, Year 9–10) have been addressed by staff in recent times.

Likewise, the areas of resilience and bullying have been the subject of staff research, policy development and program implementation. The Thinking Curriculum and Student-Centred Approaches are the major foci in recent professional development.

Participation in the *Lifelong Learning in the Middle Years of Schooling Project* has stimulated further professional interest and learning around pedagogy.

Special Programs

GEARUP – Year 8

In recent years, The Lakes Grammar School has enrolled larger numbers of students who experience ongoing literacy and numeracy difficulties. An emerging trend or concern, especially amongst Year 8 boys, is their disconnectedness from the academic curriculum, as demonstrated through their disinterest in school and inability to cope with the academic workload. This situation has a tendency to bring about low self esteem and increase the risk of leaving school early.

The school determined that students in this group were frustrated with the school curriculum in that it lacked 'hands-on' activity and had little relevance to their interests and hobbies, which usually involved small machinery such as motorbikes.

In 2003, the school obtained financial support for a pilot project called GEAR UP, so named because it has a connection with vehicles and also is an acronym for:

G – Guys and girls in Year 8
E – Expertise and enthusiasm that the students bring to the project
A – Academic focus (literacy/numeracy and credits towards possible Vocational Education and Training or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning qualifications)

R – Resilience and responsibility to commit to the project
U – Understanding each other – utilising skills
P – Pro active and positive participation

To be eligible for the project, students need to be operating at least two years below their peers in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, numeracy and, in some cases, general reasoning. Some are attracting Commonwealth funding through diagnosed learning disorders. All are at risk of leaving school early, have low self esteem, are disconnected from most interest groups but have a real interest and aptitude for automotive and mechanical pursuits.

In the project, the students attend TAFE one day per week for 20 weeks, which equates to 100 hours of course delivery. Two groups of six students (each with a TAFE teacher to facilitate the engineering process) assemble a recumbent vehicle (tricycle) from design plans to completion. They complete TAFE modules and gain competencies in machining, welding, design and drafting, and occupational health and safety.

At the completion of the project, the students receive a statement of results that will provide a direct credit towards a relevant VET course or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, should they continue on this pathway in the future. Students will also derive benefit from team building, communication, planning and organising, time management, literacy and numeracy. The project creates a new focus for the Language Recovery class that the students attend. It is evident that these students are more able to read texts related to their course and use sophisticated course-specific vocabulary when talking about this area of interest.

The school will monitor student progress through the GEARUP program through pre and post testing using several instruments, including an Academic Competence Evaluation Scale (ACES) which measures literacy and numeracy proficiency as well as motivation, study skills, engagement and interpersonal skills.

Although the project is in its infancy, the school believes it has the capacity to continue such a program if it lives up to its expectations of enhancing literacy and numeracy skills of students, as well as catering specifically for students who are experiencing significant difficulty in accessing mainstream curriculum.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

Productive Pedagogies

Opinions regarding productive pedagogies were sought from the School Principal, the Director of Curriculum, the Year 9 Middle Years Leader and classroom teachers.

Recognition of Difference

The school values each student as a unique individual and acknowledges this stance by selecting teaching and learning approaches which offer students opportunities for success, continued learning, and the establishment of an identity and a place in life. Active citizenship and a commitment to sustained Christian principles and practice are seen as essential learnings.

Connectedness

The unrelenting emphasis on connecting the curriculum with the experiences undertaken by the Year 9 students has led to high levels of engagement with the program by the students. Many examples exist which incorporate a more active learning approach with increased involvement in community, environmental and 'out of classroom' activities. This is particularly the case with the Melbourne experience, where students find that they are challenged by the unconventional nature of the program but, at the same time, are very appreciative of the flexibility and loosened boundaries of the timetable. Teachers indicate there is an opportunity, in fact a need, to develop further links between Outdoor Education and the remainder of the curriculum and to seize the opportunity to add value to the school experience.

A similar approach has been used in meeting the needs of students experiencing difficulties in literacy and numeracy in Year 8. This has been equally successful in engaging an otherwise disconnected group of students.

Intellectual Quality

The Lakes Grammar has a strong academic tradition which it maintains with rigour. Planning of assignment and assessment requirements is based on Bloom's Taxonomy and Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences. Depth of learning and a degree of negotiated choice of content and learning experiences are evident in all planned units. The school is addressing the need for increased depth of thinking, as part of its professional learning strategy.

Supportive Environment

The Year 9 program exists within a most supportive environment. Positive teacher–student and student–student relationships allow deliberation, negotiation and engagement to flourish. The resolution of conflict and dealing with problems become a

person to person responsibility. Class lessons incur only minimal disruption, as high expectations of performance and behaviour are the norm.

Lifelong Learning

The school believes its Year 9 Program makes a positive contribution to the development of lifelong learners. It is a program of relevance and challenge, and an opportunity to exercise leadership and responsibility. Its goal is to provide sound preparation for the senior Years and beyond where autonomy and self-motivated learning are essential features. It is seen as a program which will bring meaning and purpose to students' young lives, and set them on a path to maturity. Teachers see themselves playing an influential role in the way they go about their daily practice modelling their willingness to continue to learn, to work cooperatively, to adapt to changing circumstances, to take risks and value every student.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Middle Years Reforms

Students participating in focus group interviews were overwhelmingly positive in their views regarding the Year 9 program. Students highlighted the following as key features of the program:

- Location – classroom settings located away form the main area of the school;

- Small class sizes and teachers designated to the program - enabling greater understanding of each student's strengths and learning styles; and

- Home rooms and Year 9 Common Room – which provide a sense of belonging and trust.

Students are positively inclined towards future learning because the program fosters:

- Time management – a skill that is regarded by students to be essential for completing senior secondary education; and

- Opportunities to explore interests – through the provision of electives and co-curricular activities, students apply to 'taste' different subjects and activities and experience different ways of learning.

The students were most appreciative of the Year 9 'hands-on' experiential nature of the Year 9 program. They reported less evidence of 'traditional' transcription of notes from the board or lectures from teachers, in favour of a preferred approach to teaching and learning which centres on group work, class discussions to explore ideas, and extended conversations with teachers on a one to one basis, or in small groups, which encouraged thinking and evaluative skills.

> *"People are more confident – everyone knows each other so you have the confidence to speak up as well as listening to what others have to say."*

Students also appreciate the opportunities for making choices in their learning programs, either through the elective program or within individual subjects. For example, students highlighted the choices available in the Civics program based on a matrix of activity which developed according to Blooms Taxonomy of Cognition and Gardiner's styles of learning.

Lifelong Learning

The students were aware that learning did not stop at the end of secondary school or university. Many come from families where the updating of knowledge is part of everyday life, e.g. professional and agricultural careers. Their participation in out-of-school groups (environmental, sporting and artistic) heightens their awareness that learning takes place in all settings and situations. Students saw relevance in what they were studying and the connections to their experiences.

OUTCOMES

It is not difficult to identify the benefits of physical separation and disconnection from the main timetable. Physical separation provides Year 9 with a strong sense of identity. The identity is further reinforced through activities which differentiate the Year 9 learning environment, such as the landscaping of the central garden area, the Year 9 common room and the use of displays and personalisation of the Year 9 classrooms. Similarly, separation from the main timetable affords the program a high level of flexibility, which enables block programming of activities. This in turn enables teachers and students to engage in extended learning exchanges, which are deeper than those which would normally be expected through standard timetabling arrangements.

Academic Outcomes

Although the Year 9 program is regarded as being overwhelmingly successful, teachers also note that some students, particularly those with learning difficulties, struggle with the lack of structure within the program. It is equally notable that a small number of highly able girls are not sufficiently challenged by the program, despite its 'open-endedness'. Teachers involved in the Year 9 program are aware of these issues and are actively investigating strategies to overcome them.

Social Outcomes

The impact of the Year 9 program is evidenced through a number of indicators. Primarily, as suggested in the recording of student focus groups' responses, the program is held in high regard by students.

> *"On leaving school, many students cite the Year 9 program as their best year at school."*

Parents too are largely supportive of the program – though, in its initial development and, to a lesser extent in its current form, some parents have expressed concern about a perceived decline in academic rigour in comparison to the reminder of the school; a view that remains with a small minority of teachers.

Though most students readily progress to the next stage of schooling and return to more traditional approaches to teaching and learning, the school is highly conscious of a widespread 'grieving' which occurs amongst the Year 10 cohort at the beginning of the school year. While most students quickly move on from this, some students experience a deep sense of loss and a corresponding 'slump', which may last up to a term or longer as a result of the transition to the senior school.

A key strategy which the school has implemented to overcome this transition phase centres on the introduction of a peer support program. Through this program, Year 10

students are given significant responsibility for supporting the transition of Year 7 students into the school. Training in peer support is incorporated into the Year 9 program, with full implementation occurring in Year 10. This additional responsibility is perceived to be a key element in enabling students to 'move on' and adapt to new circumstances within the senior section of the school.

While the Year 9 program has clearly addressed The Lakes Grammar School's concerns regarding the relevance and levels of engagement of students in Year 9 with the school's academic program, this high level of engagement creates its own problems when students are required to return to traditional approaches to teaching and learning.

While this is not necessarily an issue for all students, it does point to the possible need for an alternative pathway which progresses beyond Year 9. Indeed, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), brought into consideration as a result of the success of the GEARUP program, may well provide an alternative for the school to meet the needs of such students.

Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

Student attendance rates are very high and absences are genuine. Processes are in place to identify and deal with any issues, either through the home group or through the pastoral care program. Staff report steady improvement in student behaviour. The number of detentions has decreased, and boys seem to be becoming more articulate in their communication. Students are taught and encouraged to resolve issues among themselves, rather than complain to their peers or staff.

INNER CITY PRIMARY SCHOOL (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Inner City Primary School was established in inner suburban Melbourne in 1881, and has a current enrolment of approximately 320 students. The immediate physical environment of the school is indicative of the diversity of the surrounding neighbourhood. It includes:

Low income housing abutting the school and parkland;

Medium to high density housing that has undergone significant redevelopment/upgrading in recent years – the suburb has the highest levels of population density of any Victorian municipality;

Extensive parkland with highly developed sporting facilities and active sports clubs;

A busy commercial/retail/entertainment precinct;

Tourist destinations and associated backpacker and hotel style accommodation; and

A number of welfare agencies catering for homeless people.

These elements influence the composition and character of the school community, as well as the nature of a number of special programs and activities offered by the school. The school's students come from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and the school prides itself on acknowledging and celebrating its diverse community.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Philosophy

Inner City Primary School has an established ethos, which encourages individualism and development of community relationships that are not based on artificial hierarchical structures. For example, teachers are addressed by first names; there are no school captains or house systems and no school uniform. This is accompanied by an emphasis on participation, and the principles of equal opportunity are paramount within the school at both student and staff levels.

For the duration of its current School Charter (2003-2005), this school has established *Engaging to Learn* as a priority area for improvement. Essentially, this priority will focus the school on developing and implementing an inquiry-based approach to curriculum delivery using a *Thinking Classroom* model for organising the teaching and learning program.

The school believes that, in a Thinking Classroom, teachers create a safe environment for thinking, where thinking is a valued activity. In such classrooms, there is explicit instruction in thinking skills, and classroom activities are structured to promote thinking – not artificially, but through the promotion of meta-cognition across all areas of the curriculum.

Within this priority area, there is a particular emphasis on engaging students in the middle years of schooling, as there is a firm belief that such engagement lays the foundation for learning throughout life.

The work of Costa (1989) is used by the school to substantiate this position.

> *"It is not possible to predict exactly the knowledge base required for productive citizens in the global/service/information age. It is also not possible to cover all of the information in a human's lifetime. We can be sure, however, that all citizens will need to solve problems, to think creatively and to continue to learn."*

As part of its monitoring process, the school became increasingly conscious that successive cohorts of students were not succeeding, despite intensive support including continuing contact as a result of participation in the Reading Recovery program. It was the school's belief that groups of students, particularly a significant number of boys, should have been achieving at higher levels. Dissatisfied with this situation, the school has initiated a number of strategies that will better meet the needs of students in the senior area of the school.

Through action research related to the early years of schooling, the school has introduced an intensive neurological/physical activity for boys, which involves them in a ballet program. This is used in addition to the standard intervention strategies which target literacy improvement, such as Reading Recovery.

For older students, the school has adopted a supportive model in which students are made to feel good about themselves and their learning as a precursor to improving learning outcomes. It is the school's view that academic improvement does not occur in isolation from students' well being - the child's sense of self, and the valuing of the child as an individual by all their teachers, are critical ingredients in the recipe for improving student learning outcomes.

This approach is supported by the school's involvement in the 'Reach Rookys' program, which is a derivative of the Reach Foundation program to support young people through adolescence. Specifically targeted at 10–12 year olds, the Reach Rookys program strives to counteract challenging situations which confront children in this age range by offering early intervention, thereby aiming to reduce or moderate the development of significant at risk behaviour and provide ongoing support and continuity for young people. The Rookys program also places an emphasis on the transition process between primary and secondary school and aims to equip young people with strategies to cope with change and difficult situations.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy – linking pedagogy and curriculum with lifelong learning in the middle years

Classroom dynamics were observed to centre largely on 'hands-on' experiential activities, where students have the opportunity to exercise some choice within the parameters of the overall teacher-directed activity. Depending on the activity, students are able to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. In paired and grouped

activities, there is a strong emphasis on roles and collaboration. Students receive equal encouragement to contribute their own ideas, as well as valuing and actively responding to the contributions of others.

Equally, as a strategy to reinforce learning, students regularly engage in presentations of their work. Such presentations range from contributions to plenary discussions – *"… this is what we did and what we learned"* – to formal presentations of learning based on set assignments or group activities held over a number of sessions.

Middle years curriculum

The Inner City Primary School middle years program centres on the students in Grade 5/6. Classes are organised to enable the maximisation of each teacher's area of expertise. This results in classes and teachers rotating in subject areas, such as Science, Literature and Technology. In addition to providing for specialisation, this approach also enables students to experience a mix of teachers prior to entering secondary school.

In other subject areas, class groups are mixed up into areas of interest or learning styles. For example, Mathematics classes are formed on the basis of preferred learning styles: 'kinaesthetic', 'visual' or 'logical'.

A strong culture of teamwork exists across the entire school, including the working relationship, which is evident within the middle years team. Teachers plan together and evaluate and moderate student learning outcomes as a team. Lesson rotations and team teaching of Physical Education and Sport provide a strong sense of community across the 5/6 classes. This sense of being part of a bigger group is further reinforced by consistent approaches to student discipline and general well being.

Assessment and reporting

The school has adopted a comprehensive approach to monitoring student learning. In addition to implementing government mandated assessment and reporting processes, teachers at Inner City Primary School use a range of assessment strategies to measure and monitor student learning. Within the middle years program, assessment rubrics are a key component of the approach to gather data and monitor student learning, particularly in Key Learning Areas, such as Science, Technology and Studies of Society and Environment. The assessment rubrics are complementary to planning materials, which guide student activity and subsequent learning across two domains:

- Bloom's Taxonomy – Knowledge, Comprehension, Application and Analysis; and

- Thinking styles – Word, Logic and Maths, Space and Vision and People.

Students contribute information about their own learning and that of their peers through evaluative activity, which requires individual reflection across four domains, and peer assessments of presentations across five domains, as illustrated below.

Self evaluation of learning activities	Peer assessment of learning
What I learned	Quality of information
What I did well	What he/she did well
My oral and written presentation	How she/he spoke

Self evaluation of learning activities	Peer assessment of learning
Ways I could improve	General comments
	What could be improved

While assessment is clearly an important component of the school's overall program, staff are not necessarily satisfied with the contribution it makes to planning and program development. Consequently, teachers across the 5-6 area are currently reflecting on the ways in which assessment can better inform and drive curriculum delivery in the future.

This represents a partial withdrawal from a previously intensive preoccupation with the prescriptive outcomes of Victoria's Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) driving curriculum delivery in the school. While still acknowledging the importance of monitoring and reporting outcomes in a systemic way, the school is now seeking to balance this with school based data derived from authentic assessments of student learning, combined with students' own interests, to form the basis of planning and curriculum delivery.

In addition to informing planning and teaching practice, this material also provides a useful platform for reporting student learning information to parents.

Supporting student transitions

Given the spread of post-primary destinations, the school recognises that transition for students from primary to secondary school may not be an optimum process, with students potentially disengaging in learning. This partly explains the reason for class rotations in Year 5/6 which enable students to gain experience in moving from one teacher to another. Another strategy relates to the development of student 'passports' as a bridge for both students and teachers, though these have only been developed where larger numbers of students have moved to a neighbouring secondary college.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff at the Inner City Primary School hold the view that teacher professional development is an important contributor to the development of a shared vision for learning and teaching. Such a vision provides the foundation for negotiating a set of teaching and learning principles and educational goals.

Over recent years, the school has made a significant investment in professional development related to the middle years of schooling. This professional development has included targeted, 'in house' activity, curriculum days and participation by staff in a range of external activities, including:

- Active involvement in two Middle Years Networks which are facilitated by regional middle years consultants;
- Attendance at regional and state-wide Middle Years Conferences;
- Specific training for teachers in Years 5/6, including:
  - o Early/middle years numeracy;
  - o Middle years mathematics coordination;
  - o Middle years literacy; and

- Sessional activities targeted at the middle years in areas such as working with adolescents, authentic assessment and drug education.

The school has engaged the services of a consultant from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to provide *" … advice, support and guidance and assist with endeavours for continuous improvement."* Through this arrangement, the school has an external point of reference which assists in keeping it 'on track' in regard to its articulated goals and objectives.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

Productive pedagogies

The school principal, assistant principal and coordinator of the Year 5/6 team were interviewed with respect to productive pedagogies in the curriculum.

Recognition of difference and connectedness
Given the diversity of student backgrounds at the school, teachers are always seeking opportunities to draw on the cultural knowledge of students in order to make the curriculum relevant to students, as well as to broaden understanding through insights derived from various cultural perspectives.

The school is also highly conscious of the varied approaches to learning based on gender. Through action research initiated by the school, as well as insights derived from professional development, teachers have adopted a number of key strategies to maximise engagement in learning. Included within these strategies are the differentiated approaches to mathematics teaching based on learning styles, and strong focus on 'hands-on activity' to capture and sustain the interest of boys.

Intellectual quality
Classroom observations indicate that the middle years pedagogy adopted at the school has a strong focus on promoting higher order thinking skills, deep knowledge and deep understanding. This is largely achieved through the focus on meta-cognition derived from adoption of the 'Thinking Classroom' approach to teaching and learning.

Supportive environment
Many of the school's students experience challenging circumstances in their daily lives. As a result, Inner City Primary School is highly conscious of the need for a positive and supportive social environment to be in place as a precursor to engagement in learning. Accordingly, rules and sanctions are displaced by values, choices and consequences. Teachers place a strong emphasis on establishing and maintaining a culture across the Year 5/6 cohort which fosters mutual respect and a valuing of learning. The school prides itself on the way in which teachers 'get to know the kids'. Teachers make deliberate efforts to engage students (not only those in their class but all students in general) in conversations, within classrooms and informally in the playground, to demonstrate their interest in the child and become more sensitive to their needs.

> *"This connection between teacher and child is so powerful that it can overcome traditional hurdles [to learning]."*

Assisted by the clearly evident skills and positive personalties of the respective teachers, the outcomes of this approach are evident in the positive working tone of individual classrooms.

Lifelong learning

Feedback from destination schools suggests that students from Inner City Primary School largely have a positive attitude to learning. Even when this feedback may be given negatively – *"… students from the school ask too many questions….."* – the principal and staff believe that such messages are strong indicators of active engagement in learning processes.

Data collected by the school indicate that students are attracted to a range of settings for secondary education. For example, of the 47 Year 6 students in 2002, 27 students enrolled in seven different government secondary colleges, and 20 students enrolled in five different private schools. The school is therefore highly conscious that a significant proportion of parent population deliberately 'shop around' for secondary school alternatives for their children with a view to finding the 'right school' for their child to build on the interest and approach to learning which has been inculcated at the school.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Students indicated that the size of the school contributes to its being a positive learning environment. As a complement to this, they recognise that strategies adopted by staff – such as use of first names and training students in peer mediation – also contribute to the positive social atmosphere which is evident within the school.

The students are highly appreciative of the caring approach of their teachers and the fact that there is a high level of interaction across a small number of teachers - *"It's not just a student teacher relationship – it's better than this."* For the students, this relationship is characterised by care, warmth and humour.

They recognise the various emphases which are made to assist in preparing students for secondary school. For example:

> *"Our teacher helps us to learn how to research things properly and write so we don't plagiarise."*

> *"The teachers give you information about what is happening so that you can plan your day like [in] high school."*

> *"They also give you reminders like, by now you should be up to here."*

> *"We have a homework schedule to help us plan ahead."*

Lifelong learning

Students acknowledge that the school implements a number of strategies to sustain engagement in learning. The students identified these strategies to include:

- Arrangements made by the school to cater for different learning styles in mathematics;

- Efforts to connect their learning with real life situations, such as using the stock market as a focus in mathematics and a simulated crime scene as the basis for a science lesson;

- Varied approaches to convey meaning, such as chalkboard illustrations, use of narrative, group activities which enable students to support each other in their

learning and breaking down complex concepts and ideas into component parts; and

- Class discussions and presentations which give students confidence that they are valued as individuals and their learning is important.

For the students, the emphasis the school places on presentations of learning was regarded as an initial challenge but also the source of self confidence and an affirmation of their learning – *"…teachers really listen to your opinions and ideas."* They recognise that the approach breaks down potential pressures related to 'performing' in front of their peers.

While acknowledging these strategies as making positive contributions to lifelong learning, students also recognised that some teachers may be 'over protective' of students and that students themselves needed to be 'better organised' so that they could assume responsibility for their own learning.

OUTCOMES

Academic outcomes

While the school is wary of making direct correlations between its overall approach to middle years schooling and academic performance, data collected as part of state-wide testing regimes and the school's own assessment processes suggest that the approach to teaching mathematics, with students being able to choose maths groups according to preferred learning styles, is making a positive and discernable difference in the learning outcomes for students in mathematics across Years 5 and 6.

Social outcomes

Feedback from students and teachers indicates the school is clearly achieving its objective of achieving a supportive social environment in order to engage and sustain engagement in learning. Students indicate that they feel valued as individuals and that their learning is important.

MURRAY HIGH SCHOOL (VIC)

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Location

The border cities of Albury and Wodonga straddle the Murray River, the border between New South Wales and Victoria. Strategically located on the major inland Sydney to Melbourne corridor, the Hume Highway, Albury-Wodonga offers an ideal, decentralised location for businesses seeking a development opportunity outside metropolitan areas. The population is growing at a rate of 3% per annum and is one of the largest inland population centres in Australia, with over 90,000 people living within the Albury-Wodonga statistical district. The area boasts a well-developed road, rail and air transport infrastructure, a productive and skilled workforce, excellent communications facilities and considerable land for sustained expansion. In addition to attracting a strong base of multi national companies, these conditions enable continued growth in innovative, residential developments, a thriving commercial area and an expanding industrial base. Albury-Wodonga in fact offers the benefits of city living in the heart of the country.

With an urban population of 35,000 residents, Wodonga has excellent educational facilities, ranging from childcare through to tertiary status. Primary and secondary schools are offered by both the public and private sectors. These include four State primary schools, three denominational primary schools, a special development school for the disabled, an Acrobatic Arts Community School *(Flying Fruit Fly Circus),* Continuing Education Centre, three Secondary Colleges and two denominational Colleges. The tertiary facilities, Wodonga Institute of TAFE and the Wodonga Campus of La Trobe University, offer a broad range of Degree, Diploma and Certificate courses. Other learning opportunities are available through Albury-Wodonga Business Enterprise Centre, Skills Inc. Training Enterprise and Envirocare Training Company. A similar depth and diversity of educational offerings are available in Albury. This enables students to undertake all of their studies in their local area, if they so desire. Although many students pursue employment in Melbourne, there are many opportunities in the local area.

In 1998, the City of Wodonga was proclaimed Australia's First Learning City. The City of Albury became a partner in the process, which has resulted in the development of a charter of learning and year-long operational plans. Objectives within the plan speak of the promotion of learning for community cohesion, informed citizenship and social and economic wellbeing; readily accessible learning opportunities and information to everyone; stronger partnerships between education sectors and between education and business; and encouragement to business houses and organisations to adopt principles underlying learning organisations in line with their own needs and directions. Learning information and events are promoted throughout the region. 'Learning Leaders' are acknowledged for the real difference they are making in their field of learning.

About the School

Murray High School, one of four coeducational, secondary schools in the rural city of Wodonga, was established in 1954 and moved to its current location in Woodland Street in 1962.

The school is committed to continuous improvement, high aspirations, a supportive learning environment, the quest for excellence and the achievement of maximum potential in academic, cultural, sporting and citizenship pursuits.

The school provides a comprehensive curriculum, covering all eight key learning areas. French, Japanese and Indonesian are offered within the school's foreign language program. Students in Years 9 and 10 enjoy a wide choice of electives. These electives lead to an extensive range of VCE/VET subject options. The school strongly encourages extracurricular educational experiences and the development of social skills through participation in an extensive range of intellectual, cultural and sporting endeavours. Leadership is promoted through mechanisms such as the Student Leadership Council.

The school has an excellent range of facilities, including the Library as a centre of student-centred learning, two computer centres, a highly functional multi-purpose room, and the Performing Arts Centre (PAC), which is an excellent venue for Drama and Music. The school has medium to long term plans for the development of facilities to enhance student learning opportunities further, especially in the areas of Information and Communication Technology, Science and the Arts.

The Flying Fruit Fly Circus School (FFFCS) was established in 1987 as the educational arm of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus. Its special focus is circus and related performing arts. The FFFCS has developed its own school charter but operates under the umbrella of the Murray High School Council. The FFFCS is currently investigating replacement facilities following a fire early in 2003.

Students/Staff/Community

The school has an enrolment of 847 students from Years 7 to 12 of which approximately 58% are girls. Most of the students are drawn from the primary schools in the Wodonga urban area and a significant number from the rural primary schools in the Indigo, Murray, Mitta and Kiewa Valleys. The Catholic Secondary College has an enrolment of 880, Mitchell Secondary College is larger with 977 students, while Wodonga West Secondary College is considerably smaller with just 363 students. Enrolment fluctuations are not uncommon and tend to reflect a degree of competition and volatility in the Wodonga educational marketplace.

The school's program is delivered by a committed and caring staff. The 60 teachers and an additional nine support staff provide an interesting balance of experience, qualifications and gender. A sense of 'team' is evident in planning, program delivery, evaluation, support and professional learning. Focus groups are used to encourage innovation, to investigate and develop better approaches to teaching and learning, and to ensure their integration into the school's curriculum programs. Welfare structures are based on a Junior School/Senior School framework, with student management roles carried out on a Year level basis. Welfare needs are further addressed by a Student Welfare Coordinator, school nurse and school chaplain. The school's Managed Individual Pathways program provides individual support, enabling students to identify and pursue preferred career options. Students experiencing difficulty in literacy are

assisted in a variety of class and withdrawal situations throughout the middle years. There are several leadership programs for senior students to assist and coach younger students. A work experience program, the World at Work, is a motivational program for Year 9 students.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

"High Aspirations, High Achievement – at the Forefront of Education"

Murray High School promotes high achievement and learning for life so that students achieve their potential. The acquisition of skills to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world and the development of enquiring minds and high levels of self esteem are seen as essential in becoming lifelong and independent learners.

To this end, Murray High School promotes an ethos of encouragement, support and high expectation. A rich range of artistic and cultural activities, and cutting edge learning technology, complements innovative and engaging teaching practices across a broad and challenging curriculum.

Murray High School demonstrates its commitment to working as a learning organisation by striving for continuous improvement, supporting staff with relevant professional development, working in teams towards common goals, and living the school values. It is in fact these values that underpin the middle years rationale.

Values

1. Educate the whole child – diverse talents, abilities and needs.

2. The whole school community as learners - an ethos of continual improvement – lifelong learning skills.

3. Enrichment and leadership opportunities.

4 Social, economic and environmental responsibilities.

5. Positive relationships, staff and student responsibility.

6. Embracing change and risk taking – flexibility and adaptability.

7. High standards of professionalism and achievement – trust, care and support.

8. Connecting between education and the outside world.

School Structure

Murray High School is organised into a Junior School (Years 7–9) and a Senior School (Years 10–12) on a single campus. The Junior School offers a challenging and diverse core curriculum in which students are introduced to a wide range of subjects. The school places a strong emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. The explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy is promoted in all subjects across the curriculum. Extension, enrichment and remediation activities are part of normal class programs in all subject areas. Within the common core subjects, there is considerable scope for a variety of choices and challenges. In Year 9, students choose three elective studies for three periods each per week.

In the Senior School, students no longer remain in form groups as subjects are offered in elective blocks in order to maximise access to curriculum offerings. Year 10, 11 and 12 classes are blocked together, allowing subjects to be accessed at more than one level. This allows accelerated programs to be offered. The school offers a wide range of studies at Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) level, and a range of Vocational Education and Training (VET) Courses. An individual case management 'Pathways' approach ensures that the individual needs and aspirations of students are addressed.

PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

Murray High School is participating in the Quality in Schools (QIS) initiative. The program aims to provide educators with additional strategies and methods to cope with changes to reduce stress and improve student learning. The two-year process provides an introduction to the principles and practices of continual improvement for school leaders, teachers, students, administrators, support staff, parents and other stakeholders, encouraging them to think about how they might work with others to improve life in the school community.

Broadly speaking, the program's mission is to enhance the school's capability to produce interdependent learners, whose love of learning makes them learners for life, able to sustain themselves and help others sustain continual improvement in the future. There are over 400 schools and pre-schools taking part in this initiative in Victoria and South Australia.

As part of the QIS, Murray High School has documented a set of key development strategies which include:

1. A Professional Development program that supports teachers to empower students as learners by:

    – teachers reflecting on their current pedagogy;

    – teachers investigating and implementing improved pedagogy in their classrooms;

    – embedding effective pedagogies in all course materials; and

    – collaborating with other schools in a District Cluster 'Middle Years' initiative.

2. A 'Learning Skills' program across Years 7–9 that defines effective learning skills/competencies and embeds the systemic teaching, assessment and reporting of these into the course structures across KLA's.

3. A Pathways approach that promotes personal development, active citizenship and employability throughout the school.

4. An effective student management system that promotes teacher and student responsibility.

Middle Years Curriculum

The Goals and Development Strategies outlined in the 'Quality Journey' are also the culmination of several years' involvement in middle years research. In 2000 and 2001, Murray High School led a group of primary schools in Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD)[5] project which resulted in significant research, staff professional development and the formation of staff focus groups to carry forward the implementation of enhanced teaching pedagogies consistent with the 'thinking curriculum'. This program was superseded in 2002 by the DET 'Innovations and Excellence'[6] initiative. Murray High School joined three nearby primary schools (urban and rural), and together they were successful in gaining entry to Phase 1 of the program. Known as the 'Murray Innovations and Excellence Cluster' (MIEC), the group devoted considerable supporting funds to staff professional development in 'New Basics'. This enabled the development of a new focus on the implementation of enhanced teaching pedagogies consistent with the 'New Basics and the thinking curriculum' – referred to as 'productive pedagogies'.

New Basics – Thinking Curriculum
The following table details how and where Murray High School sees improvements taking place in the implementation of New Basics – Thinking Curriculum.

Area	Improvements
Curriculum	Connectedness with the local community
	Explicit teaching of thinking skills through KLAs *
	Audits
	Work with feeder primary schools
Structure	Prioritised meeting times
	No overlap in Yr 7 and 8 teachers (2003)
	Specialist Year 7 teachers (2004)
	Team approach through Professional Learning Teams
	Work with primary staff
Teaching practice	Productive Pedagogies through KLAs

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[5] The Middle Years Research and Development project (MYRAD) was established to develop, evaluate and refine a research-driven approach to the improvement of student learning outcomes in the middle years of schooling in Victoria. The project involved 61 clusters of schools made up of 61 secondary colleges and 195 primary schools, over 36,000 students, 250 schools and 2,100 teachers. The MYRAD project was a deliberate attempt to transform the whole ecology of schooling. It recognised the value of reform actions being informed by the collection and analysis of data, and it developed a systemic approach to observing and analysing cognitive and effective dimensions of student learning.

[6] The *Schools for Innovation and Excellence* is an initiative which enables all government schools in Victoria to implement innovative and challenging programs to reform the middle years of schooling (Years 5–9). In 2002, 70 clusters were chosen to participate in the initiative from the start of 2003, and an additional 90 school clusters will be involved in Phase 2 of the initiative in 2004.

Area	Improvements
	Support in Professional Learning Teams
	Challenging existing practice
Assessment	More authentic
	Student self assessments
	Continual assessment and evaluation
	Not necessarily confined to only Rich Tasks
Students	Intrinsic motivation
	Improved learners
	Improved outcomes
	Deeper understanding

* The KLAs directly involved in this will be Maths, Science, SOSE, English and Health/PE.

Developing Ownership in Classrooms
The school encourages the use of a common process to promote learning. This seven step process allows students to be engaged, to make decisions about their learning, to track how well they are learning and working and to evaluate how well they work. It encourages students to work in teams or independently. The process has a safeguard in that staff can take greater control at any point (if necessary).

Step	Tools Used
1. Introduce topic/unit	
2. Develop purpose for learning	Purpose statement, 5 whys
3. Gauge students' prior knowledge	Pre tests and capacity matrix
4. Students make self assessments	Capacity matrix
5. Students plan their work using timelines	Flow charts and timelines
6. Students implement their plans	
7. Students evaluate the effectiveness of their plans	Post test and matrix

While staff members are expected to plan their teaching with this in mind, students are also made explicitly aware of the process as part of an emphasis on encouraging students to reflect on how they learn.

Assessment and Reporting

Students are assessed continualy during the year through a wide range of assessment practices, including assignments, research projects and presentations. There is some evidence of traditional testing, although this is predominantly for diagnostic purposes. Teachers in Years 7-10 gather data to assess student achievement in all Key Learning Areas. The Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) is completed at Year 7 level. The data from these sources allow the school to monitor its performance against state-wide benchmarks and 'like' schools.[7] It also informs staff for planning, evaluation and better targeting of individual student needs. Data are also collected through satisfaction surveys of parents, students and staff.

The Capacity Matrix is a major focus in Term 1 for all year 7–9 students. This self assessment tool is used by students to gauge their level of learning on particular concepts and topics. The matrix contains three main areas: Topic Breakdown, Learning Process and Evidence.

	LEARNING PROCESS					
	INFORMATION	KNOWLEDGE	KNOW-HOW		WISDOM	
TOPIC/SKILL BREAKDOWN	I've heard of this	I can do this with help	I can do this on my own	I know where this is used	I have taught this to others	I can do this using a method not set by the teacher **EVIDENCE**

The Topic Breakdown column contains the topics within a unit of work that students are expected to learn and for which they can eventually demonstrate a level of understanding. The topics are either directly from the CSF as outcomes or are higher order key questions. This column gives students direction in what they need to learn for that particular topic or unit.

The Learning Process column is made up of four columns representing the four levels of learning: Information, Knowledge, Know-How and Wisdom. As students complete the work tasks, they continually assess their own level of understanding using the matrix.

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[7] In Victoria, all government schools receive benchmarking data sourced from anonymous 'like' schools. A like school will be a similar size and similar student characteristics

As they develop deeper understanding of the work, they begin to fill the columns under wisdom, but they must demonstrate a high level of understanding to the teacher.

The Evidence is completed either by having student write the type of task they have completed to demonstrate their understanding of a particular topic, or by having the teacher sign off that the student has demonstrated to them their level of understanding.

A variety of different formats based on the same fundamental design have been used successfully. These are adapted to suit different topic needs. While the initial capacity matrices tended to be based predominantly on topic breakdowns, it has been found to be much more beneficial to base them on the skills to be developed by the student. By promoting the skills to be learnt, the matrices communicate a much greater sense of purpose to students and a more meaningful basis for reflecting on their learning. Capacity matrices are now in common usage across the school.

The school has clear guidelines and timelines for reporting to parents at the end of term and end of semester. The report formats in all subjects include a course description, a statement of achievement, gradings for assessment tasks and work habits, and a written comment. Reporting to the school community takes place through the school Annual Report and the Triennial Review.

Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

Students in Years 7–9 study in six 48-minute periods per day. The curriculum structure allows the students to study together in their form groups for most of their classes, providing an element of stability and security to the early secondary years. Form groups are rearranged annually and are of mixed ability. There is no streaming of students. While there has been extensive development in the areas of teaching and learning in Years 7–9, the structure and staff/student organisation has remained relatively unchanged. But Murray High School has proposed a revised Year 7 structure for 2004. The school believes significant change in middle years pedagogy is enhanced by:

- The use of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs);
- Support of these teams by provision of adequate blocks of time where they can plan and work together;
- Staff who are dedicated to change in the middle years and are not distracted by demands at other levels; and
- A timetable structure that is largely freed from the constraints imposed by staff involvement in other levels.

Under the proposal, Year 7 will operate in two groupings of either three or four classes (depending on enrolments). The classes will be staffed as a block by teachers who will usually only teach within one grouping. Each specialist Year 7 teacher will teach just 2-3 classes each for 2-3 subjects and generally not teach outside the Year Level. Organisational issues do not allow LOTE and Arts/Technology to do likewise, but the inclusion of these subjects enables the creation of blocks whereby all Year 7 teachers or members of each team can be released simultaneously. This provides opportunities for joint planning, preparation and discussion of pastoral issues. There would also be possibilities for curriculum/pedagogy development and team teaching. While KLA identities and time allocations will be maintained, the structure enables the flexibility to work in various structures, to vary the time spent on each area and the way it is

organised, to use trans-disciplinary structures, or switch to structures according to changing needs throughout the year. Similarly, variation to session lengths (single, double, triple) will be possible, and groups will be rearranged to complete particular tasks. The number of teachers within each group is planned to be reduced. Student progress will be reported in terms of traditional subject structures, integrated subjects, rich tasks or projects. This approach is seen as a specific middle years initiative to address identified needs at this level.

Professional Development

In the latter half of 2002, Murray High School launched itself into a comprehensive course of professional development around 'New Basics'. Ezette Grauf[8] presented five sessions of New Basics training to curriculum leaders. An introduction to New Basics and the specific components were presented to the whole staff during several sessions in 2002/2003. The combined Wodonga Schools' PD Day and 'Beyond the Basics' Conference (Education Queensland) were other major events.

For 2003, Murray High School's 'New Basics/Middle Years PD' centres largely on the development and implementation of Units, with a focus on the use of a wide range of pedagogies and rich assessment practices (Terms 2 and 3 respectively) and rich tasks (Terms 3 and 4).

Each of the professional learning teams (PLTs) developed a unit of work for their key learning area (KLA) adhering to a set format. The Unit Planner consisted of:

Outcomes	What is the purpose of the unit/topic?
Authentic Assessment Tasks	Are the assessment tasks based on the outcomes and do they show evidence of the Productive Pedagogies? (checklist)
Learning Tasks	Are tasks being scaffolded to build student understanding? How will these learning experiences create opportunities for transformative understanding? Are the 20 Productive Pedagogies evident in the learning tasks? (checklist)
Resources	List

The units were implemented in Term 3, culminating in a sharing/celebrating activity late in the term. Staff response to the unit planning process was positive, and the school now has the intention to extend the use of this format across all unit planning in the middle years. There is general acknowledgement of the need to focus on pedagogy in course planning and to use assessment practices that recognise and reinforce these pedagogies. It is anticipated that the documentation of pedagogies used will make pedagogical changes more sustainable and accessible to refinement in the future.

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[8]Ezette Grauf has had a long association within the New Basics Branch (Education Queensland) as a member of the School Implementation Unit and later as New Basics Advocate. During 2002, Ezette worked for the Victorian Schools Innovation Commission.

The development of rich tasks included two professional development activities to introduce the concept, followed by a period of planning (Term 3) and implementation (Term 4). Rich tasks were developed in the key learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science, Health/Physical Education, and Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE), with the other areas contributing skills used in them. Based on the Queensland Rich Tasks, the tasks were prepared with the involvement of all staff, working in their professional learning teams, and then trialled in at least two classes in each subject area at both Years 7 and 8 levels. In trialling the rich tasks in Term 4, it was recognised there were significant limitations in that 2003 courses had not been set up to lead toward the rich tasks, with students not always being provided with opportunities for prior usage, or development, of skills required in the tasks. Accordingly, while the rich tasks were being trialled in this limited form, preparations were being made for the planning of 2004 courses around the skills required for the rich tasks.

At classroom level, key learning areas remain the basis of organising the curriculum and staff into professional learning teams. But energy is now generated towards intellectual quality: more thinking and intellectual rigour - more depth, less breadth.

Special Programs

Special programs at Murray High School include:

- The Literacy Program, catering for students who are experiencing extreme reading, writing and comprehension difficulties, which impede their learning in class. It includes tutoring and special assistance in class.

- 'Science in Schools' (SIS) Project, which is a DET research project with a strong focus on teaching and learning, innovative assessment practices, and an approach to school change.

- The Year 8 Boys' Program, aimed at the improvement of self-esteem, provision of positive, regular contact with male role models, the development of basic, positive social skills, and the encouragement of a more positive attitude towards school.

- The Year 8 Girls' Program, aimed at the improvement of self-esteem and self-image of the Year 8 participants. The students discuss issues that relate to adolescence, challenge preconceived ideas, and support the notion of wellbeing.

- The Peer Support Program, operating in Term 1 each year to help smooth the transition from primary to secondary school. Students in Year 10 undergo a leadership-training program at the end of Year 9 and then at the beginning of the next year. They then work in groups of two or three and lead small groups of Year 7 students through activities that focus on topics such as friendships, self esteem, peer group pressure, identifying and labelling bullying behaviour.

- The Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP9), aimed at Year 9 students and delivered via the Health Program, with the focus being personal wellbeing and resilience.

- Indigenous students in Years 7-12 participate in the Koori Links Program and the Koori Cultural Program. These provide ongoing access and experience for Aboriginal students to indigenous cultural activities within the school program.

- Big Brother/Big Sister sees Year 12 students are matched with junior students who need a sensible, older friend who is able to act as a confidante, critical friend and mediator.

- The Gifted and Extension Program provides experiences for students who enjoy extracurricular challenges, such as involvement in 'Dreams and Schemes', 'Bright Futures', 'Master Classes' and English language competitions.

- The World of Work program is offered to Year 9 students who would benefit from an increased awareness and understanding of the skills needed for future employment. It is followed by work experience in the local community.

TEACHER INSIGHTS

Productive Pedagogies

Opinions regarding productive pedagogies were sought from the school principal, the assistant principal (Junior School coordinator), the professional development coordinator and several class teachers. While considerable progress has been made in terms of the development of professional knowledge and implementation of productive pedagogies, all agree that there is still much more to do. Teachers are becoming increasingly familiar with the definitions within the PP–Classroom Observation Coding Sheet. Professional learning teams are proving to be a worthwhile model for bringing about sustainable change. Pedagogy is now documented with content in course guidelines. The progression to rich assessment is viewed as an exciting challenge.

Recognition of Difference
Serious attempts are made to encourage active citizenship, a sense of community and identity. This is demonstrated by the development and implementation of the Class Code of Cooperation[9] and the regular reference and discussion about values, e.g. responsibility, cooperation, fair play and equal opportunity. In the rich task, the ethics of workplaces, the impact of work on the environment and others, equal opportunity, and roles and responsibilities of workplace personnel are examined. Consideration of different perspectives and how views are formed are seen as highly relevant across all units of work.

Connectedness
Links are made to real life situations and experiences, wherever possible. For example, the rich task at Year 8, *Ten Year Personal Career Development Plan*, does this in a complex way: thinking about the future, researching options (drawing upon family experiences of work), planning and evaluating these options.[10] Considerable investigation of current issues takes place from a range of perspectives to identify the implications of different positions. Recent topics have included mobile phones, aspects of popular culture and related texts, e.g. magazines and television. In addition,

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[9] The Code of Cooperation is developed to work in line with the school's Code of Conduct. It allows students to have input into the way they operate in class and provides consistency from class to class and teacher to teacher across the Year level.

[10] Other rich tasks have included: *International Trade, Built Environment* and *Designing a Structure*

numerous models of texts are utilised to support students' writing. The students' background knowledge is acknowledged as a vital stage in the seven-step Learning Process and the proposed Year 7 structure, and planning mechanisms will enable far greater links across the traditional subject boundaries.

Intellectual Quality

The incorporation of more thinking and intellectual rigour into the curriculum is a key objective of Murray High School. While the school is still running with the key learning areas, the energy is being generated towards intellectual quality. This was clearly demonstrated in the recent activity involving the development of the Unit Planners, where Intellectual Quality was clearly the most referenced Domain on the Productive Pedagogy Checklists.

Some specific examples of classroom activities promoting deep understanding and providing opportunities for substantive conversation include:

- Setting the context for learning and making connections between the different tasks and links to their experience. Asking 'why?';

- Using De Bono and Bloom's Taxonomy to highlight the kind of understanding required of different tasks and responses; and

- Creating opportunities to explore the ways in which language changes for different audiences and purposes, for example, persuasive texts, structured argument and debate.

Supportive Environment

Within the school statement of values is the mandate to encourage and enable students to accept responsibility for their own learning, which implies that the students will understand how they learn and realise the part they play in plotting their learning path. An example of how this is done is the widespread use of a capacity matrix, which serves to identify gaps in knowledge and skills in all class work. Most classes provide a wide range of activities or options from which students can choose to develop their understanding of the central issue. Group activities that give students opportunities to collaborate in the design of projects and allocation of tasks are provided regularly. By developing the criteria for assessing work with the class, the students are given the opportunity to apply these criteria to their own work. The Personal Career Development Plan rich task gives broad outlines of tasks to achieve outcomes, and a range of options for researching and presenting their findings.

Lifelong Learning

At Murray High School, all members of the school community are considered learners within a learning organisation committed to continuous improvement and lifelong learning. The establishment of professional learning teams has given teachers the opportunity to work collaboratively to investigate new models of teaching and learning. They are prepared to try new ways of doing things, to be flexible, take risks and self reflect. As learners themselves, they feel better positioned to help students understand the learning process through the use of models such as the Seven Step Learning Process. Several feel they are now better models, perhaps more a 'do as I do' and not the former 'do as I say'

approach to learning. The refinement of the Capacity Matrix to a skill based development tool indicates the value the school places on the acquisition of certain generic skills and dispositions, e.g. communication, interaction, self assessment, curiosity, to name just a few. The school values every student and has classroom practices and support mechanisms in place to cultivate positive self concepts. The school not only articulates lifelong learning in its documentation but also puts it into practice at all stages of planning, delivery and review.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

Middle Years reforms

Students participating in the focus groups were drawn from years 7, 8 and 9 and were representative of the mix within the school population. All expressed an appreciation of the supportive nature of the school and the friendship that existed within the student body.

> *"It was strange coming to High School. You go from being boss to baby. But it doesn't really matter because the kids are really friendly and everyone wants to help you"*

Students saw their teachers in a positive light and realised that their interest, care and dedication to teaching were in fact the main influence on motivation and interest in learning.

> *"If they are good, you look and take notice."*

Several felt they could make a closer connection with the younger teachers, who seemed to have a better understanding of, and a better response to, student needs (and wishes) and did things differently in class. The more experienced teachers were generally well liked;

> *" ….. but they are harder to change."*

Year 9 students spoke highly of the elective program. They saw this as a distinct signpost that they were preparing for later schooling. They appreciated the choice of subjects (variety and number). Year 7 and 8 students all indicated they, too, were looking forward to subject choice. Some were not really clear why they were doing some subjects/units of study but did indicate that some teachers explain where a particular study is leading.

The extracurricular activities were also rated highly. The opportunity to be in sporting teams and performing arts groups helped to develop team spirit. There was a general feeling of satisfaction, or pride of achieving with their peers.

Students were generally quite definite about their preferred teaching/learning styles. Although some individual variations existed, all were adamant they disliked copying from the board or working out of a book or being told step by step. They did like having a choice in the manner in which they completed tasks, having help on hand for when they needed it, and having subject matter that they liked and that was real. They liked things that were different (meaning innovative) and

the fact that they could develop a sense of responsibility by doing things their way. The Capacity Matrix was seen as a positive and worthwhile innovation.

"Doing the test at the start is good because if you know a lot of the stuff you can skip over it."

"I like the checklists because you can mark things off …… it makes you feel good even though there's lots more to do."

Lifelong Learning

Both student focus groups had a positive outlook on school, on life and on the future. They saw purpose in their schooling, although not clearly articulated but definitely implied. The way they were working, the skills they were acquiring

"…… would be helpful for VCE and maybe uni.'

The students did not have a clear understanding of the meaning of lifelong learning but they did see learning as something ongoing and occurring both in and out of the school environment. The Year 9 students realised that their choices and decisions about electives were in fact taking them somewhere in life. One student spoke of the rapidly changing world and the need for people in the workforce to keep in touch with new developments. Most students were able to identify their preferred learning styles. They appreciated the choices they have within units of study. They saw value in their schooling in terms of achievement, opportunity and preparation for the future.

OUTCOMES

Academic Outcomes

Below is a snapshot of the English and Mathematics data collected by the school in the three year period 2000-2002. The figures indicate the 'value added' over the last three years from Year 8 (2000) to Year 10 (2002) for Murray High School in comparison with the State-wide Benchmark and the Like Schools Group.

For example in Reading, the overall school mean for students at Murray High School effectively improved more than one CSF level during the period (1.08), which is significantly more than the State-wide Benchmark (0.95) and the Like School Group (0.88) for the same period.

	Murray High School	State-wide Benchmark	Like Schools Group
Reading	1.08	0.95	0.88
Writing	1.01	0.95	0.91
Speaking & Listening	0.99	0.94	0.89
Chance and Data	0.81	0.91	0.92
Algebra	0.88	0.87	0.91

It is quite noticeable that the gains made by Murray High School in the English subjects exceed that made across the Year 8 -10 student cohort in Victoria as well as students in the same Year levels in the like school.

Although Mathematics data do not illustrate the same comparative performance, the school data do demonstrate an overall improvement in the school's performance in Mathematics over the last three years.

Social Outcomes

There are no specific data to indicate any significant change in this area.

6.3   *Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes*
The school has current data which will serve as a major point of reference when assessing the impact of reformed teaching and learning practices within its new structure. These include the 'Attitudes to School Survey', which was completed for the first time in 2003.

MACROPOD AREA SCHOOL (SA)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location

Macropod is the major town on Wallaby Island, Australia's third largest island, located 120 kilometres south west of Adelaide. The town has a population of 1,450 and proudly boasts being the first settlement in South Australia.

Wallaby Island is renowned for its rugged and beautiful scenery and the beaches and fishing which it provides. The island has an abundance of wildlife, including colonies of Australian sea lions, little penguins, New Zealand fur seals and the once endangered Cape Barren goose. Vegetation types are also many and varied, with eucalyptus forests, mallee scrubland and riverine mangrove, mostly in the Flinders National Park at the western end. This combination of rugged scenery and wildlife ensures that Wallaby Island is a popular tourist destination.

As the island's main service centre, Macropod provides banking and other services to support the island's three main industries: tourism, fishing and farming.

1.2 About the school

Macropod Area School provides education from Reception to Year 12 for 500 students living in Macropod and surrounding districts. The school is one of three on the island. Of the others, one has an enrolment of 200 and the other an enrolment from Reception to Year 10 of approximately 70 students. Students from these schools who seek to remain on the island and complete Year 12, transfer to Macropod at the end of Year 10.

The school is in need of a substantial upgrade. The cramped facilities cause major timetabling difficulties and are perceived by students and staff to impact negatively on behaviour and morale.

1.3 Community

The school has experienced a sustained period of growth, which mirrors the changes in the demographics of Macropod and, more generally, of Wallaby Island. Though the idyllic nature of Wallaby Island remains, a growing trend of social dysfunction is apparent. The school has over 40 per cent of its student population attracting the School Card[11], which is an indicator of the low socio-economic status of the school community. Apart from organised sport and fishing, there are few recreational outlets for young people on Wallaby Island, which results in reportedly high levels of alcohol abuse and vandalism. Without the support structures which are apparent in major cities, the school faces a constant challenge of managing learning and behavioural difficulties, as well as community issues which impact on the school.

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[11] Additional funding which is accessible to families from low socio-economic backgrounds.

2 UNDERSTANDING THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

Macropod Area School regards its core business to be teaching and learning in a safe and supportive environment which enables students to reach their full potential. To achieve this, the school has established four priorities: celebrating success, enhancing literacy and numeracy, promoting quality teaching and learning, and enhancing assessment and reporting.

The ethos which underpins the middle years program has the following features:

- Relationships – building trust and independence, promoting self motivation and responsibility;

- Learning environment – enabling flexibility in the use of classroom space and promoting safe and harassment free classrooms; and

- Curriculum delivery – designed to suit the interests and needs of students and enthuse and motivate them to become lifelong learners. Approaches should ensure that students can access information to make informed choices.

2.2 School structure

The school is organised according to three stages of schooling: the Junior School – Reception to Year 5, Middle School – Years 6–9 and Senior School Years 10–12. Leadership structures within the school reflect its organisational structures, with staff appointed to leadership positions for each section of the school.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Background

The current Middle School arrangements originate from planning decisions made in 1999/2000 which sought to address concerns regarding the extent to which the school was meeting the learning needs of the middle years cohort of students. At this time, students in the middle years were located in separate parts of the school, and there was no coherent approach to organising the curriculum in ways which fostered high levels of connectedness for the students. As a result, changes were initiated in three areas:

1. *Location* – Students in Years 6-9 were co-located in a designated area of the school. This required the students in Year 6/7 to move from the 'tinny' demountables located on the periphery of the school to a centralised position alongside Years 8 and 9. In conjunction with the relocation of students, staff working spaces were also co-located. This facilitated high levels of interaction between the staff in areas such as planning, sharing of resources and reflecting on program outcomes.

2. *Organisation* – A reduction in the number of teachers interacting with students. For Year 6/7 students, the first half of the year centres mainly on classes with

their home group teachers. This expands slightly in the second semester with teachers swapping classes based on their interests and skills in specialised areas of the curriculum, such as Studies of society and Environment, Health and Physical Education, and Computers/Technology.

For students in Years 8/9, students undertake classes with their home group teacher for at least one other subject prior to crossing over for other subject areas. The use of 'block' timetabling for elective subjects enables substantive interactions between teachers and students.

3. *Resourcing* - As part of the formation of the middle school, the school's approach to budgeting was transformed from discrete budgets along faculty lines to consolidated budgets based on areas of the school.

These changes did not occur without controversy. 'Battles' to win the hearts and minds of staff were predicated on issues associated with space – *"… the Middle School has stolen three of our classrooms"* – and 'philosophical' concerns that the program would compromise the historically high academic standing of the school.

3.2 Pedagogy

Where relevant, planning for curriculum delivery is referenced against a matrix of Gardiner's learning styles and Bloom's Taxonomy to ensure that class programs are both engaging and challenging. The Middle School teachers also report that, through greater interaction with smaller numbers of students (achieved through home groupings and at least one other class), there is a much stronger propensity for teachers to know and understand students, both as individuals and as learners, to a level which was not normally achieved through previous approaches to teaching students in lower secondary classes.

The use of an open space between two of the Year 6/7 classes within the Middle School enables teachers to adopt cooperative learning and group work to assist with curriculum delivery.[12]

The middle school teachers view the integration of subject areas and vertical grouping as the next logical progression for enhancements to curriculum delivery within the middle school.

3.3 Middle years curriculum

As part of the formation of the middle school, staff have undertaken a mapping of the curriculum to minimise gaps and duplications and to ensure that a clear sense of progression occurs from the Junior School through to the Senior School. Further mapping of the curriculum is in progress to ensure that the school's curriculum aligns with the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Frameworks and benchmarks.

Students learn Indonesian through the Languages other than English (LOTE) KLA. Students in Year 8 are able to gain first hand, cultural understandings through the two day Indonesian Camp which involves travel to Adelaide to visit a mosque, the Adelaide zoo, botanical gardens, Flinders University (to learn about Indonesian musical instruments) and to dine in a Balinese restaurant.

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[12] The provision of this space comes at the expense of the third Year 6/7 class which, in 2003, is located within the Junior School.

Also as part of the LOTE program, the school organises an Asia Week to promote language learning and cultural understanding. During Asia Week, students participate in a range of activities which also sees parents and other members of the community visiting the school to join in activities.

3.4 Assessment and reporting

Continual assessment portfolios are currently maintained for all students in Years 6/7 at Macropod Area School, with the same process being planned for continuation into Years 8/9 in 2004. The portfolios contain certificates and evidence of student learning (based on samples of work chosen by the students) which are then used to support reporting conferences, that involve parents, teachers and students in the discussion of progress, and the planning of future learning.

Over the last three years the school has also introduced 'Mark Book' computer software as a tool to support processes for reporting to parents.

3.5 Professional development

Macropod Area School actively encourages all staff to undertake professional development, including that which is targeted at the middle years of schooling. Through funding to offset the school's isolation, the school covers travel costs to enable staff to attend professional development programs which may be offered in Adelaide.

Specific professional development related to the middle years has included staff involvement at an International Middle Years Conference held in Adelaide during 2002. Insights gained from practitioners in other States and keynote speakers have informed planning and strategy development at the school. This has included the implementation of a workshop for parents and teachers, which was conducted at the school by Professor Paul Deering who was one of the keynote presenters for the conference. The workshop, entitled "What's Driving You Crazy", enabled parents and teachers to consider the needs and nature of early adolescence and work together to foster greater compatibility between schools and students to make everyone's school experience less "crazy" and more fulfilling.

Further developments have been achieved through the auspice of funding derived from participating in the Commonwealth Quality Teacher Program (QTP). Through the application of QTP funds, the school was able to bring three other keynote speakers from the International Middle Years Conference to Wallaby Island to work with teachers to enrich after school programs, develop mentoring strategies and promote understanding of the concept of service learning.

3.6 Special programs

Curriculum delivery at the school is supported through organisation of special seminars for students, which focus on study skills or career planning and the Resourceful Adolescents Program (RAP), which endeavours to promote resourcefulness and resilience in secondary aged students. Targeted specifically at Year 9 students, the program provides a buffer for students against emotional problems, including depression through strengthened family support. In conjunction with a school based program, parents are also invited to participate in a series of seminars held over a three week period.

School assemblies are used as a strategic means to promote the positive aspects of Macropod Area School and celebrate achievements. Held on an irregular basis, the

assemblies provide the forum for students to present aspects of their learning and staff to promote and reinforce the successes which the school has achieved.

Behaviour management

In order to address issues related to student behaviour and provide a learning environment in which "teachers can teach and students can learn", the school has invested significant effort over the last two years to establish a behaviour management policy.

The school's approach to behaviour management aligns with Departmental guidelines and has been modelled on successful strategies observed in other schools. Based on the strategies promoted by Canter and Rogers,[13] the policy provides a clear set of school and classroom rules, with an associated set of consequences for transgression of these rules. A Behaviour Planning Room (BPR) is utilised for serious or consistent transgression of school and classroom rules.

Of equal importance to the behaviour management program are the efforts made by teachers to encourage and reward positive behaviour. The *Middle School Madness Days* are a key feature of this approach. Each term, a Year 9 group assumes full responsibility for planning and implementing a day full of activities for the remainder of the Middle School. This task includes:

- Documenting a proposal, for consideration by the school principal, outlining all the arrangements for the day, including costs, catering and safety considerations;
- Costing and organising catering for lunch;
- Distributing and collecting parent permission forms;
- Booking buses for activities to be held outside of schools; and
- Publishing posters promoting the day's activities.

Students hold the Middle School Madness Days in high regard and are highly conscious that poor behaviour may preclude involvement in a forthcoming day or, in the case of relevant Year 9 group, involvement in the organisation of the day.

Enterprise education

The school has an established enterprise education program. Its focus is to provide students with opportunities to gain first hand experience in an enterprising activity - from design, through production, to sales. Middle School students who experience social and/or learning difficulties with the mainstream program are given the opportunity to work at the Enterprise Shed for block sessions. During these sessions, students engage in one of the school's specific enterprise activities which may include:

- Production of cement pavers;
- Fabrication and packaging of fishing lures; or
- Making rope in a variety of lengths and diameters.

Students receive 'in kind' payment for their work in the form of canteen vouchers.

Students who present challenging behaviours in the normal classroom environment are found to be highly motivated and engaged in the enterprise program. This engagement

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[13] See for example, Canter (1997) Assertive Discipline: Positive Behaviour Management for Today's Classroom and Rogers (1989) Decisive discipline

is evidenced in the teamwork that students display, combined with a commitment to quality and a highly positive relationship with the enterprise education teacher.

Through linkages with the SOSE program, Year 8 students investigate volunteering as a component of the school's enterprise education program. With a focus on making linkages with the community, Year 8 students participate in a variety of voluntary activities, both within the school and with community agencies, such as the 'Kindy' and Child Care Centre.

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1   Productive pedagogies

The school principal and staff within the Middle School all contributed to discussions regarding productive pedagogies in the classroom. Follow-up discussion with the Middle School Coordinator focused on clarifying the school's position with regard to the productive pedagogies domains.

Recognition of difference

Although explicit reference to cultural knowledge was not observed during the case-study, teachers indicated that such strategies are utilised within the middle school program. By contrast, a notable emphasis was placed on providing learning opportunities for students who experienced difficulties within the traditional classroom environment. This emphasis was particularly apparent in the Enterprise Education program where, through 'hands-on' production activities, students also develop skills and knowledge related to mainstream subjects.[14]

Connectedness

Teachers commented on the need to make connections with the students' world but also emphasised the priority which the school placed on connecting students with the world beyond Wallaby Island. Excursions to Adelaide and use of the internet were viewed as critical components of class programs to enable students to broaden their outlook beyond the immediate environment.

Intellectual quality

The approach adopted by the middle school builds on the professional learning derived from conferences and the teachers' research into effective practice. Curriculum planning and delivery has referenced this knowledge, as well as planning tools derived from Gardiner and Bloom, to maximise student engagement in higher order thinking.

Supportive environment

Teachers highlighted the importance of establishing a group identity within the middle school as a key strategy in the development of a supportive environment. As part of this strategy, they emphasised the benefits of co-location and teamwork, and the celebration achieved through the Middle School Madness Days.

The importance placed on the development of a consistent and effective approach to discipline is also regarded by staff as a mechanism for achieving a supportive learning environment.

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[14] For example: Mathematics – Quantities and ratios in paver production and English sentence-construction and grammar, in the development of promotion and sales materials.

4.2   Lifelong learning

It is apparent that the school goes to great lengths to support students in transition to the world beyond formal schooling. Student destination data indicate that the school has a strong record in providing pathways for students into employment or further education and training.

It is the school's belief that the approach adopted by the middle school will further advance outcomes in this area through the propensity of the middle school program to foster a positive attitude to school and to learning. In particular, through experiential learning based on excursions to the mainland, the middle school program aims to provide students with insights into the full range of post school options to enable them to make informed choices about learning and life beyond school.

> *"It is really important that we give students the opportunity to get off the island and understand the world beyond Wallaby Island. If they come back afterwards that is fine because they will generally know what they want to do next."*

5   STUDENT INSIGHTS

Students have a positive regard for the school's middle school structure. They recognise that the school is making efforts to provide a meaningful transition from primary to senior secondary schooling and speak highly of the interest and care shown by their teachers.

The co-location of students across Years 6–9 was considered to be most important. There was a high level of frustration expressed on behalf of the one group of Year 6/7 students remaining within the primary area in 2003.

Opportunities to assume leadership positions in the SRC, and to take responsibility for planning through the Middle School Madness Days were also highlighted as positive aspects of the Middle School program.

Group work and lessons of a practical or experiential nature are regarded by Macropod students as being the most beneficial to learning.

> *"We think we do less work, but we actually do more – we learn much more [through group work and hands-on experiences]."*

Equally, students appreciate class discussions where teachers may raise a particular issue, and the conversation between students and teachers progresses towards a resolution of the issue without a predetermined outcome.

By contrast, students were critical of excessive use of photocopied sheets, particularly in circumstances where teachers appeared to be unorganised, giving the work to everyone regardless of interest, ability or prior knowledge of the work to be covered.

Students also expressed some frustration with the way in which group work may be compromised by disruptive students who were not interested in learning. So much so that one student indicated a preference for working alone. In this respect, students articulated some inconsistencies in the school's approach to behaviour management. For example:

> *"Some teachers give kids too many chances. They don't follow through with their warnings;"* and

"It's not fair when the whole class gets punished for what one or two kids do."

Similarly, throughout the focus groups, students were clearly frustrated with the cramped nature of school facilities and the limitation this places on learning programs and other activities.

"The school needs to be brightened up."

"We can't use the computers for SACE because little kids are in there doing 'Kidpix'. We don't have enough room for more computers."

"Only a few 'select' people are able to do Open Access [Distance Education]."

Student participants in the focus groups were also highly conscious of the way in which broad social issues that confront the Macropod community impact on the day to day operation of the school. Students also reinforced the insights contributed by staff regarding the lack of recreational and leisure activities for young people living on Wallaby Island.

Lifelong learning

Students highlighted the manner in which the middle school program 'set them up' for learning in the senior school and beyond. They were also positive in their regard for camps and excursions which took them beyond Wallaby Island. As well as contributing to immediate knowledge, such activity was seen by students as a way of broadening their understanding of learning and their knowledge of career opportunities on the mainland.

6 OUTCOMES

Because of a number of broad community/student background issues, combined with the cramped nature of facilities at Macropod Area School, the principal and staff face a significant challenge in providing for, and managing, student learning. Issues include:

- The lack of recreational opportunities for students;

- Social dysfunction within the Macropod community, including drug and alcohol abuse, excessive gambling and other anti social behaviours;

- Challenging behaviours of a number of students;

- Cramped and ageing facilities which, in addition to their direct impact, also have an indirect impact in limiting the flexibility of the school's timetable; and

- A comparatively high proportion of students with a disability.

Within this context, the middle years program is positioned as a key strategy to engage and sustain student learning. The program was introduced in 1999/2000 through a process which witnessed a number of 'battles' and 'philosophical debates' about the location, structure and approach to curriculum delivery for the middle year's program. As a result of this process, teachers in the middle years now work and plan together to deliver a program which bridges primary education and the requirements of senior secondary education in South Australia. Although feedback from Macropod Area School suggests that, at this point in time, there is no discernable evidence of change in academic or social outcome which may be attributed to the school's program of reform,

there is still a strong and discernable change in teacher attitudes, in both middle and secondary schools, in terms of support and understanding of each other's areas.

MARINE BRIDGE YEARS 6 TO 12 SCHOOL (SA)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Marine Bridge Years 6-12 School is located in the heart of the rapidly growing residential areas south of Adelaide. It is situated close to Adelaide's south coast surf beaches and the less urban region of hills and vineyards of the Southern Vales. The School has developed a number of successful partnerships in its short history. The City of Onkaparinga and the school share an extremely well-equipped library and recreation centre, used by school and community members. Marine Bridge is a member of a number of clusters and groups that have developed many successful initiatives and include: River Hub Preschools and Primary Schools; Fleurieu Middle School Leaders; Onkaparinga Secondary Cluster; Fleurieu Senior School Leaders; Southern Vocational College; Fleurieu Enterprise and Vocational Education; and the SA Middle Schooling Network Region.

1.2 About the School

Marine Bridge Years 6-12 School was purpose-built in 1996 to cater for the needs of young adolescents through integrated and negotiated middle schooling programs. A centre for severely multiply disabled students opened in 1998 and provides education and care to a range of students with significant disabilities. The senior school was formally opened in 2000 and provides senior students with pathways into further education, work and training.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

Marine Bridge was initially an area for migrants, most of whom originated from the United Kingdom. With its proximity to the coast and improved transport access to the city, this demographic has changed. New housing developments have attracted a broader spectrum of society, many of whom have sought a change in lifestyle. The community now comprises a mixture of mostly middle class residents, including professional as well as a significant number (approximately 35%) of parents who access social support, such as Health Care Cards. Many of these are single parents. The shift in demographics has also promoted more active relationships and participation between school and community.

Of the 848 whole-school population, the case-study included 424 students from Years 7 to 9, with the major focus on the 120 cohort within the school. The school caters for a generally homogeneous clientele. There are several students identified as at risk in terms of their learning. In addressing their needs, particularly in the middle years, the school has established a Teacher Mentor Program. Other at risk students are catered for through individual Negotiated Education Plans (NEP) and student support services to address their learning needs. Special needs students are catered for by both the Multiple Disabled Unit on-site and Special Education Classes. Students with disabilities access a wide range of learning experiences that enable them to develop their communication, problem solving and decision making skills; to maintain and increase their physical movement; and to enable them to access a wide range of post school options.

Site tenure for teachers in South Australian government schools is generally 10 years. Most staff have been at Marine Bridge for from 7 to 10 years. Some have only three-year tenure, depending on their appointment classifications. The average age is around 40, with a significant number of younger teachers. Males make up around half the teaching staff. A combination of primary- and secondary-trained teachers exists in the middle years sub-schools. Teachers indicate this has enhanced team teaching and integrated approaches to teaching and learning. Traditional secondary teachers have learned from the generalist pedagogical approaches of their primary colleagues, teaming together to spend more time with students and develop closer, long-term relationships. In each instance, these teachers have commented about their rejuvenation in work and collaborative relationships with peers and students.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

Marine Bridge's middle schooling environment aims to ensure each student enjoys quality relationships within their sub-school and with small numbers of adults. The students are also expected to negotiate a significant proportion of their learning and assessment tasks, learned within an integrated framework. In doing so, they are engaged in a broad and balanced curriculum through cooperation and individual learning activities that are intellectually challenging and further extend learning experiences. Students are expected to apply learning to new and meaningful contexts and employ up to date technologies to assist their learning. As a result, they are able to develop knowledge, skills and understandings to pursue their individual interests and societal rights, roles and responsibilities, as well as pathways to further education, training and employment.

The school has defined students in the middle years of school as young adolescents in the 11-15 year age range who are experiencing physical changes, developing awareness of sexuality, and undergoing fluctuating emotions and behaviour patterns. These students are developing their own identities and values influenced by the media, youth sub-cultures and their peers. They are challenging and testing boundaries as they commence to set life goals and develop increased interest in personal issues and curiosity about social, political, ethical, moral, environmental and technological issues. They are adolescents developing an increased desire to make personal decisions, pursue rights and assume more responsibility. These fundamental understandings about the middle years cohort underpin decisions that shape teaching/learning relationships and strategies in servicing student needs.

2.2 School Structure

Learning Communities
Typically, each learning community comprises some 120 students, where diversity is supported through mixed ability classes. Each community has 4-5 home groups, a Sub-school Coordinator and a collaborative team of 7-9 multi-discipline teachers. Teacher pairs also spend more time with partner home groups and follow these students through to transition into senior school, promoting long-term student/teacher/parent relationships and communications. This structure promotes pro-social behaviour, where students develop trusting relationships with each other and a smaller number of teachers. Each learning community demonstrates that every student is important as a person and as a

learner, where acknowledged learning extends beyond the classroom to include people, sites and experiences within both local and global contexts.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/ Learning in the Middle Years

The school is explicit in its planning and frameworks for teaching and learning, basing its middle schooling culture on strong teacher, student, peer, and community relationships. In doing so, each of the four sub-schools (learning communities) has adopted three core principles: Learning communities; Teaching and learning practices; and Curriculum decisions.

Teaching and learning practices acknowledge and build on the diverse, cultural, social and linguistic lives of students in recognising and supporting different learning styles and rates of learning. Teachers aim to provide challenging, relevant and enjoyable learning opportunities and experiences for all students, employing a range of individual, small group and whole class learning. There is a focus on variable groupings to maximise student learning outcomes. Teachers aim to develop appropriate risk taking, negotiation, decision making, leadership, problem solving and conflict resolution strategies through explicit teaching and practical application. Assessment is seen as a process which recognises student needs and reflects a common understanding of assessment structures and standards across the Middle School. Students are encouraged to utilise appropriate dialogue and negotiation around their learning and behaviour and to reflect critically on their outcomes. Learning is connected to the outside world and uses up-to-date technologies. Team teaching is encouraged as a collaborative strategy to make these outcomes possible.

Teachers in the middle years have all been intensively trained in both middle schooling culture and lifelong learning workshops. The 'Success for All' model (See Figure1 at the end of this case-study)encapsulates both the focus upon teacher training and the teaching/learning culture in all the sub-schools. Thinking regarding a skills-based curriculum has been influenced by the 'Success for All' workshops. The focus has moved from a single value system, that sets greater store on academic and intellectual performance over personal attributes, to the importance of other high-order skills (e.g. information handling, decision making, communicating and thinking) that also enhances self-esteem and the acceptance of lifelong values. As a result, middle school teachers are changing the learning environment to one that incorporates individual development and removes the notion of failure.

Teachers collaboratively utilise a cyclical approach to their teaching, planning and review. In working through the cycle, teachers consider what it means for each key learning area, identifying the core SACSA requirements and combining these with teacher and student negotiated learning, integrated across disciplines, within thematic frameworks.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

Adopted principles in curriculum decision making aim to provide opportunities for students to negotiate learning and assessment tasks that are relevant, challenging and

achievable. These tasks are based around integrated themes. Teachers build on what the students know, can do and understand. All decisions are related to and mapped against the SACSA framework. Curriculum is broad and balanced across all learning areas, with emphasis on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. It includes explicit student learning outcomes and assessment tasks, which clearly demonstrate student learning that is inclusive of all students. Planning and negotiation with students, parents and support agencies caters for students with specific needs. Planning also internalises transition needs and creates links between other levels of schooling.

Curriculum planning is largely based upon thinking shared by David Longford and Norman Longworth. Through learning review analysis, teachers focus upon student skills development, with a view to match needs and curriculum decisions. Staff identify the SACSA framework requirements and documented outcomes for all Year levels in key ideas and skills development, to develop curriculum documents that are grounded in the SACSA outcomes and ensure that all students have equal access to the curriculum and reflect a developmental skills continuum.

Currently, these are also being mapped in a Capacity Matrix framework for each learning area to track individual student development and for the students to track themselves.

Each middle school sub-school utilises the documented frameworks in developing thematic teaching/learning relationships that incorporate integrated approaches across a range of learning areas.

Coordinators undertake area-of-study reviews in forums of Years 7 to 12 teachers, collectively focusing upon work programs in individual specific learning areas, as a form of moderating learning outcomes and expectations. These forums aim to enhance transition from the Middle School and also address the differences in pedagogical practices and beliefs between Middle and Senior School staff. Suggestions from Years 9 and 10 staff on ideas for improvement are being taken on board, although a degree of scepticism still remains.

3.3 Assessment and Reporting

Assessment

All practices in developing assessment and reporting strategies are framed within an agreed set of principles aimed to promote improvement in student learning through a variety of assessment practices to meet diverse needs and to recognise teacher professional judgements. Assessment is viewed as a process that not only enables reporting on student learning progress and achievement across the curriculum, but also ensures that students develop skills in assessing and attesting to their own achievement.

The Assessment Matrix currently being developed will cater for both student self-assessment and teacher assessment, moderated through student/teacher conferences. It is planned this Matrix will replace current assessments in portfolios.

Reporting

Reporting to students and parents occurs on a formal and informal basis at least four times per year. Reporting is an ongoing process and involves a combination of:

Formal and informal interviews (acquaintance nights, parent/teacher/student conferences);

The provision of regular evidence of achievement through student portfolios; and

Written descriptive reporting.

Student learning records and work samples, achievement records for school leavers, progress reports, certificates and awards, video tapes and photographs, and multi-media presentations are included in reporting processes.

Students are also responsible for maintaining areas-of-study folders, which are kept in classrooms and also used for reporting purposes during parent, teacher and student conferences.

3.4   Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

Timetabling relies on the commitment of teachers, principal and leadership teams. Coordinators in each sub-school block program the entire timetable, with staff allocated to each learning community, first fitting in Specialist Program teachers' availability (3-4 per block), because they operate across the entire school, leaving the remainder for each sub-school to organise as desired. The aim is to maximise collaboration and coordination of staff and space for common teaching, planning and meeting times. The structure enables and promotes team teaching, where desired, as well as integrated studies, flexible groupings and negotiated learning.

Teachers work in teams, taking students in their learning communities from Years 7 to 9. Some teams teach in paired groupings. Teachers remain with their students for three years, as they move from Year 7 to year 9, before the transition to the Senior School in Year 10. Teachers decide with whom they will team teach. They also have choices regarding with which sub-school they would prefer to be, through negotiation with the relevant Coordinators.

Teams teach from 3 to 4 cross curriculum areas within integrated learning frameworks. Other subject specific teachers also teach within the learning groups. Currently, they mainly collaborate within their learning community. Plans are developing to extend collaboration between all sub-schools. In achieving this aim, the principal has remodelled the whole school leadership structure, incorporating two specific Middle School Managers as well as linking middle and senior school management, operations and curriculum decision making. The new structure also focuses upon: school direction; Department of Education objectives; school/community relationships; and action management of the school, expecting leaders to provide leadership across the whole school.

3.5 Professional Development

In developing a middle years learning culture, the school has underpinned its planning and implementation strategies on literature (such as 'Lifelong Learning in Action' by Norman Longworth) and focused professional development, provided by David Longford who was brought to the school from Canada for a four day training program. The program provided teachers with books and tools for middle schooling. Other workshops, such as the Pallace "Lifelong Learning Workshop," connect students and learning with the local and the global community.

Professional development of new staff is also a priority, not only in these key training modules, but also in integrated teaching strategies and additional support and professional development for cross-discipline teaching, as well as Information Technology (IT), group work strategies and other individual teacher needs. The school's commitment to middle schooling and lifelong learning is reflected in expenditure of some $30,000 for the four day David Longford workshop. Overall, the budget capacity for PD is largely determined by need and is embedded in school strategic planning.

3.6 Special Programs

Resourcing

Each sub-school (three middle schools and one senior school) receives a percentage of the overall operational budget, subject to enrolments and organisational needs. An agreed emphasis on smaller class sizes in the middle years, to promote closer teacher–student relationships and additional sub-school leadership positions within the overall school structure, releases a greater proportion of the school budget to the middle years.

Information Technology

The school is well equipped with information technology (IT) and multi-media resources. These are seen as core tools for developing lifelong learning skills, for students and staff and include:

- IT Coordinator position – provides support for integration of ICT across all KLA's as well as staff ICT skills development;

- Full use of IT suites;

- Computers in laboratories and classrooms, as well as access to laptops; and

- Multi-media resources for Media Studies.

Learning pathways, particularly thematic integrated studies, incorporate IT into daily learning, research, publication and presentation activities. In addition to promoting engagement in learning, particularly amongst boys, IT also provides opportunities for connectedness to both student interests and the world outside the classroom. Activities are commonly scaffolded to enable negotiated learning outcomes that students share with others through a variety of media and computer generated formats, as well as enterprise undertakings.

Students are able to email assignments and work to teachers through the intranet and vice versa. In addition, students make use of web pages and, in Year 10, are required to complete a Certificate 1 Course as part of the DET competency requirements. An IT Coordinator provides professional development for staff as well as training for integration of IT in learning. There is a level of accountability expected of each sub-school and their Coordinator in developing IT incorporation into thematic, integrated learning, as well as monitoring student outcomes and professional development needs for staff.

Careers Education

Career learning commences in Year 9, with a focus on awareness and understanding of opportunities.   The South Australian Department of Education is currently implementing three key "Futures Connect Strategies." These will become a focus for the school, to be fully implemented by 2005.

In Year 10, students undertake broader work experience opportunities and options. By Years 11/12, the school offers a range of VET courses and experiences, such as Technology, Home Economics and Mechanics. Marine Bridge is also part of a VET cluster model, offering its fully certificated Auto Mechanics course to other students within the local high schools cluster. Similarly, other schools within the cluster offer varied certificated programs, enabling students to access a broader range of career options.

Mentoring Program:

Several students have been identified as at risk in terms of their learning. In addressing their needs, the school has established a Teacher Mentor Program, currently involving two teachers who each mentor some 20 students.   The focus is on developing

confidence, forming positive relationships and partnering students through personal, social and academic challenges. Feedback from teachers, students and parents indicate the program is proving successful, so much so, that future plans for expansion are under way.

Enterprise:

A 'Local Philanthropist'" program has also been developed, inviting local business people to act as mentors for Year 10 students. The mentor program promotes and provides supported learning and enterprise opportunities, connecting classroom activities to practical application in the community. Examples include small business ventures, such as the 'Half Naked Chefs' catering company, the school beach-front shop, trading student wares, and other individual class ventures including screen printing.

City School [

One other noted initiative across all middle years has been the development of the City School concept, connecting learning between Marine Bridge and Adelaide. All Year 9 students, across the middle school, take part in a week's experiential learning in the city environment. Marine Bridge is some distance from Adelaide, and many students are unfamiliar with its environs and range of leisure and work experiences. City School aims to enable students to assimilate with the city and to broaden their awareness and experiential horizons about work, career pathways and life outside Seaford, as well as promote socialisation and social skills across the whole group.

City School is housed in a building within the University of Adelaide campus, as part of a partnership between school and university. While the school arranges for all necessary travel, activity, duty of care needs and student laptops, the university provides wireless networking facilities, technical expertise and involvement of its own tertiary students, particularly teacher training students, in support of programs, student research and duty of care.

Students explore and visit a range of places such as: Electronic Data Systems; the university; Adelaide environs; seminars and meetings with groups such as the police; and various career oriented sites.

The initial City School cohort was mentored by tertiary students from the USA, attending Adelaide University at the time. Marine Bridge students sat in on the First Year Architecture lecture, from which they planned to design and develop their own practical project models, with the guidance of mentors. The experience provided the opportunity to broaden awareness and understanding of links between school and academic pathways, which many students would not otherwise recognise, or to which they would not otherwise aspire. The socialisation with other tertiary students and amongst themselves motivated learning.

A major student task was the design and development of a web page about City School: its physical presence, aims, experiential focuses and group outcomes. Mentoring by tertiary students provided assistance, interweaving Marine Bridge student web site development with their own university course program. Again, the interaction between the two not only provided essential technical assistance, but also motivated learning.

The web page represented a large unit of integrated work, negotiated by students and teachers, as the core program for City School. Several strategies were negotiated by teachers and students for review and assessment process. These include: anecdotal notes; student self-assessment based upon a criteria rubric; peer assessment; and teacher conferencing to review and moderate self assessments.

City School is a unique opportunity to broaden awareness and understanding of 'work' and 'careers' in a practical sense, within the environs of Adelaide. It initiates student thinking about options they have never previously known or considered. From teachers' perspectives, the experience is an eye opener and motivation to preparing for Career Studies in Year 10. Students' experiences and thoughts are all captured within their "Transition Folio", a work folio that commences in Year 9 and continues through to Year 12.

4 TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

Middle School Sub-school Classroom Practice

The case-study focused largely on classroom practices within the learning community, where the interactions and learning environment were of greater complexity in terms of developing negotiated curriculum and lifelong learning cultures.

Two focus teachers in this learning community collaboratively share two vertical class groupings of Year 7/8/9 students in two adjoining open area classrooms. The two classes are managed as a single entity and include older and younger siblings. Interaction and integration of all Year levels occurs throughout the year.

Recognition of difference

There is a strong sense of group identity within Middle School and more so within student home groupings. There is also acknowledgement by teachers of the need to recognise individual differences, and the way in which students relate to and cope within a markedly reformed learning environment. While this domain is not as evident in classroom observations, it is a feature of discussions with teachers. Not all students are as comfortable or responsible with independent and negotiated learning responsibilities - particularly new Year 7s who generally make the transition from a more traditional class. These and other students tend to follow a recognised cycle of stages, from uncertainty, through lack of self discipline to competence. Teachers recognise these stages, facilitating and negotiating changes through conferencing and peer mentoring.

This cycle is typical of many students but, with teacher guidance and support, students develop greater personal accountability without putting their own learning at risk. Year 7s take up to three to six months to progress through the stages. Initially, teachers establish absolute deadlines, relaxing them as students exhibit more independent regulation. A few may still require further teacher regulation.

In selected core learning, in areas such as English and Maths, student groups are determined by gender. This approach is used in these areas for both isolated and integrated studies. The separation of boys and girls also removes stereotype behaviours, expectations and distractions that can occur in typically heterogenous classrooms. Teachers claim these lessons are more focused in learning expectations and student outcomes, because of the nature of the learning area and the specific skills development needs. Observations of both groups confirm students are actively engaged throughout the lesson.

Connectedness

As with other communities, teachers say this domain features in most planning and teaching/learning relationships. Integrated studies form a major part of each student's learning. Core skills and outcomes are identified by all middle years staff as non-

negotiable and applied to thematic directions determined by students and teachers for the whole year. Teachers and students negotiate further learning options, keeping track of what has been done and what needs to be achieved as the year proceeds.

Teachers maintain curriculum maps for essential learning, key competencies and skills, linked to the school strategic plan. They say the overall aim is to make each sub-school equally focused on outcomes and accountability, from where individual teachers and team pairs can introduce their own qualities, styles and preferences, as well as plan the development of negotiated learning and curriculum with students. A typical planning activity may have one to four teacher prescribed requirements with a similar number of student negotiated options.

Lessons and activities are planned collaboratively by the teaching team, consistent with Middle School term planner requirements. Learning pathways integrate disciplines, wherever possible, taking students on a journey of decision-making options and learning experiences from the classroom to the world outside. Planning and review are typically cyclical, following a common framework that has evolved through ongoing practice. Multi-media and IT are critical learning tools and are deliberately woven into both teacher and student planning.

Teachers emphasise the making of links to the community and outside world as they develop student learning pathways. In addition to parent and community help within the school, and student visits to the community, there is a focus on learning in the community where life skills are developed through practical experience, linking and translating in-school learning to out-of-school learning. Examples include work mentoring and experience in local businesses and student operated enterprises, where students provide services, or make, market and personally sell products to the local community - all of which activities are popular and successful.

Teachers also use Enterprise in other ways, with students organising school and inter-school events, undertaking the necessary planning, budgeting, communications and promotions and management skills. These vary from excursions to larger sporting competitions.

Parent learning partnerships are a similar strategy that teachers claim promote experiential and negotiated learning. Students have the opportunity to negotiate a day's visit to some out of school venue, with their parents. These visits link to thematic learning tasks in the classroom.

But teachers say not all activities have to extend to further exposure outside school, as many are planned to culminate in sharing outcomes with wider audiences, beyond student/teacher conferencing.

Teachers also talk about incorporating employability skills wherever possible. A deliberate focus on lifelong learning skills and life skills influences lesson planning, where connected practical skills application assumes an initial emphasis greater than the traditional approach to formal skills development. Thus, language activities may initially focus more on editing and writing to, or about, the world outside, than on formal grammatical lessons. These are treated at point of need. In doing this, students make early links to connected learning. Teachers comment that this approach is more engaging and promotes independent learning cultures. Students' high level of responsibility, along with ongoing teacher conferencing, enables skills development as well.

Intellectual Quality

This domain is a feature of Middle School, where teachers discuss and develop scaffolded frameworks that promote higher order thinking, knowledge and understanding. Their comments are ratified by practices in the classroom. Tingara in particular has reformed its structure, pedagogy and curriculum to enable vertical progress and the development of independent learners. Teachers say the workload has been enormous in planning and assessing for quality intellectual development to the point where students develop a sufficient depth of knowledge and skills to be independently aware of required outcomes, accountability frameworks and how to be strategic about their learning in meeting these requirements as well as their own interests. This transition is the ultimate goal in developing lifelong learners. But, teachers also recognise that not all students will be able to develop all skills, although they will develop many along a continuum of learning for life.

A small number of students, identified by the team, have developed these independent skills. These students now work as totally independent learners, within a framework of accountability requirements, responsibilities and expectations to achieve success. These students plan their term's work independently, incorporating non-negotiable curriculum requirements, then conference with the teacher team for ratification. Their programs may be quite different from the remainder of the class and, at times, may take place at home, or away from school. Decisions to enable students to operate in this manner are initiated by teachers in isolation and then in partnership with parents, who also share decisions about learning pathways and issues such as duty of care. Students may only enter the independent learners group if everyone, including the student, is in agreement.

Teachers indicate that this is possible only with constant conferencing and assessment by the students and with teacher-monitoring of progress and outcomes. The majority of students in this small group are progressing well, enjoying the freedom of independent learning. These students are already exhibiting well developed, lifelong learning skills that will enable them to be successful in future learning.

Teachers report that parent feedback was already supportive, with comments about students being more positive, both at home and school, as well as more focused about their lives and learning. School has become a central focus for them, even though they are largely independent.

But not all students who enter the program find the independence as welcoming, and they are less successful. Teachers say this may be a result of lower maturation levels, social skills, or interpersonal skills - or just a preference to be with a larger group. The constant monitoring and conferencing by teachers ensures that these students are not put at risk. Alternative options are negotiated, with greater focus on school-based classroom interaction - as part of the class, but with a broader extension program that meets both learning and personal needs.

The Tingara team envisage that the independent learners' group will expand in number during 2004. One major concern shared by teachers is how these students will make the transition to Senior School in Year 10. While they are academically well prepared and confident, it is uncertain how they will react in a more traditional and structured Senior School environment. Teachers are already conferencing students about the transition. In addition, the school is planning to expand the middle schooling culture into the senior school, where others have seen benefits, but still hold some reservations.

This process will take time in developing understanding, confidence and commitment to new pedagogies.

Supportive Environment

When beginning Year 7, students require and are given time to acclimatise to the new environment to gain self confidence. The orientation period is not long, as the vertical structure is both accepting and supportive for all students. Those who find the transition more difficult are supported throughout by teachers and peers. At the time of the case-study, in early second semester, this transition had occurred well beforehand, and all students were interacting positively, regardless of Year level.

Assessment is seen by the team as a critical aspect of developing personal responsibility for learning and it occurs in various ways:

- Individual student or group self assessment requiring justification through moderated teacher conferencing;

- Teacher based assessment;

- Peer assessment;

- External assessment;

- Formal testing (in preparation for more formal senior school cultures); and

- Skills matrix rubrics, enabling students to recognise and self regulate their own progress and development.

Assessment portfolios (with student work samples, teacher assessment, outcomes and unit completion), along with student self assessments, are shared with parents at the end of each term, followed by parent interviews. Journals typically include suggestions for further development by students, teachers and parents, culminating in round table conferencing and signing off.

Students cope well with the responsibility of their own decision making and accountability requirements. The focus on personal learning responsibilities has developed positive attitudes and engaged students more in their learning. Teachers perceive students are more confident and independent as learners and more wiling to risk take, having developed a range of preferred learning and problem solving strategies.

4.2 Lifelong Learning

Teachers refer to a shared set of Core Values, developed by the whole school community, as the driver for school operations. These are the foundation for teaching/learning relationships, school rules, expectations and culture. They are modelled by all staff and students and form the foundation for the school's focus on lifelong learning. They include: collaboration; staff leadership; teamwork; positive relationships; honesty; enterprise; optimism; respect; initiative; excellence; relevance; lifelong learning; student relationships; and creativity.

Teacher understanding of lifelong learning is grounded in professional development and school planning. Their conversations reflect practices in and beyond the classroom. This Middle School is particularly advanced in terms of negotiated learning, middle schooling culture. It has established itself as a model for others, who are still in various developmental stages. But teachers say they are committed to the philosophy and are strongly supported by their administration team who are currently planning for the next phase of development.

Reform at Marine Bridge has evolved as a continuum of middle school development and is continuing to do so. Teachers say they can now see directions and practices employed by colleagues around them and are prepared to commit to them and to the development of lifelong learning skills.

5   STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1   Middle Years Reforms

Students indicate that they are satisfied with the middle years culture, citing positives about empathy, teacher energy/enthusiasm, fairness and firmness, helpfulness and responsiveness, high expectations, quality of work and time allocation. The ability to work with and relate to teachers over a three-year time span is regarded as being positive for developing productive relationships and trust.

In response to gender separated lessons, both boys and girls indicate they were more engaged in their work, without the distractions and social behaviours normally expected in a heterogenous class. In all instances, these gender classes are engaged in their task, and students participated actively with each other and the teacher.

Students also enjoy the positive relationships they have, with each other as a Home Group for three years, and with teachers. They feel supported and valued. They also appreciate the structured opportunities to negotiate part of their learning and the integration and use of IT as part of their learning journeys.

5.2   Lifelong learning

The vertical grouping of Years 7/8/9 in the focus Middle School sub-school not only raises discussions about age differences, but also about older and younger siblings working together and, for some core learning areas, the segregation of boys and girls by the team teachers. After the initial orientation and transition period, during which teacher support is overt and directed, students comment they are accustomed to the structure and are able to progress at individual rates, either maintaining traditional progress or extending their work beyond chronological expectations because the vertical structure provides opportunity for them to do so. The few advanced learners, who work almost entirely on a negotiated curriculum, enjoy the independence and control over their learning. They feel more committed and better about their work.

Similarly, students discuss being in class with their older siblings and an initial degree of hesitation, which proved unfounded over time. Acceptance and even perceptions of having a stronger bond were shared.

Students are aware of various learning styles as part of their Middle Schooling programs, including those which work best for them. These they utilise in project work and as part of negotiated learning. Those few on independent learning programs share an enthusiasm about independence, learning and life, as well their concern about the prospects of making the transition to a more formal and traditional Senior School. But they feel confident in the skills they had developed and in themselves to cope with the change.

Students are extremely positive about City School and the opportunity to take learning into the outside world. They enjoy being able to experience a glimpse of university life, and the partnerships they develop with tertiary mentors. For many, the experience

opened their eyes about career pathways they had not considered, and several students commented on reassessing their future to accommodate a tertiary option.

6　OUTCOMES

6.1　Academic Outcomes

There are no specific academic outcomes data related to lifelong learning in the middle years. Student and program evaluations are embedded within the overall whole school planning, assessment and review cycles, policies and frameworks, across all learning areas. What teachers do claim, however, is that the students are more engaged, responsible and aware of their own learning and expectations. As they progress through their learning community, they become more aware of the connection between learning and learning for life outside the school. Students are more independent and confident about decision making and preferred learning styles. They are better skilled to achieve academic outcomes, as well as risk-taking and enterprise.

These perceptions emerge from student participation and development within the overarching ethos and aims for the middle years of schooling. Ample evidence of structures, programs and learner-centred pedagogy lends support to teachers' claims. The fact middle schooling and lifelong learning is a growing focus within the school suggests that others within the school share similar observations.

While Middle School teachers comment the learning community culture promotes the development of empowered learners, other traditional discipline focused staff, who are more content-driven in pedagogy, are not as positive and still need to be convinced. No data substantiate these perceptions, but inferences from the School Report would suggest some support for the middle schooling culture.

For example, recent Basic Skills Test data indicate the Year 7 cohort is marginally below the state average but slightly above similar schools, in comparison. The majority of students fall into the median range of each skills band but, in comparison to like schools again, they are more prevalent in the higher skills band. It is the aim of the school to move more students to the higher order levels.

Results from the Secondary Assessment Board (SACE) Stage 1 Year 6 to 12 assessments indicate above state and similar school averages in Health and Personal Development and Science.

Parent survey results approximate the state average indicating an overall satisfaction with the school's teaching, outcomes, reporting, environment and responsiveness. The general satisfaction among the school community was above average for the state.

6.2　Social Outcomes

Relationships and social skills are a focus of the middle years learning environment. Student surveys across the whole school indicate teacher/student relationships in the Middle School are more positive and better developed than in the Senior School. Students perceive Middle School teachers to be friendly and helpful.

The positive and confident approach to learning is challenged to a degree with the transition to Senior School, where individual social and friendship networks become part of a culture that is less relationships-focused and more rigid in traditional teaching/learning styles.

6.3   Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

In previous years, the school experienced constant parent complaints and grievances, often about student harassment, bullying and teachers picking on students.   The development of the Middle School sub-schools and middle years culture has turned this around significantly, with no complaints being taken at all in 2003, to date.

This is reflected in relationships and student behaviour in the focus learning community, underpinned by core values.   But it does vary between school sub-schools and Senior School, which also reflects a variation in approaches and collaborative strategies between them.   A recent staff survey confirms that areas of discipline still require development and improvement, including the Middle School environment.

Student attendance in the middle years, while slightly lower than state averages, is higher in comparison to the Senior School, which is further below state averages. Teachers comment, however, that attendances have improved in comparison to previous years. Retention figures from Years 7 to 9 are above the state average.

CONCLUSION

Lifelong learning in the middle years of schooling is a specific focus at Marine Bridge Years 6 to 12 School.   Investment has been made in teacher development, school organisation, curriculum and pedagogy enabling development of student-centred middle schooling cultures which, in turn, develop learning pathways for transition and later choices in life.   While this journey is at varying development stages across the learning communities, ample evidence from observations and interactions with staff and students suggest the investment is well founded.   Where practices are more developed, negotiated learning and responsibility for learning are also more developed. A variety of initiatives across all learning communities provides an environment where students feel comfortable and valued in their relationships, learning preferences and contributions.

Engagement in lessons and enjoyment of school are outcomes of connected, integrated learning opportunities that are both interesting and challenging, for students and teachers alike.   Development of lifelong learning skills at Marine Bridge School is a journey through pathways that establish, beyond the classroom, clear links and experiences, which students would not otherwise have.   It incorporates up to date technology and strategic partnerships that support students along the way.

While the school is still refining this journey, successful practices within the learning communities provide a model for future development for each community and the school as a whole.   The challenge for the future is to overcome cautions and wariness about perceptions within and between middle schooling and senior schooling cultures.   It is a challenge the school has accepted as a positive way forward in planning and developing lifelong learning skills for all students.

Figure 1: Middle schooling belief and practices are embodied within a framework of "Skills and Competencies for Lifelong Learning"

| Information Handling | Decision Making | Problem Solving |

BASIC

SKILLS

AND

COMPETENCIES

FOR A

LIFE

LONG

LEARNING

WORLD

| Presenting Communication Formally | | Self-Esteem Self-Management Self-Awareness |

| Discussing Communication Informally | | Empathy Tolerance for Others |

| Learning to Learn | | Creativity A Sense of Humour |

| Listening Memorising | | Mediation Skills |

| Entrepreneurial Skills | | Flexibility Adaptability Versatility |

| Making Practical Skills | Critical Judgement Reasoning | Thinking Vision Planning |

ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE MIDDLE SCHOOL (SA)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

St Joseph's College Middle School (SJCMS) is conducted by the Marist Brothers (Melbourne Province) as is St. Joseph's College Senior, where the vast majority of the boys complete their secondary schooling in a co-educational setting. The College was established in 1967 as a preparatory College .for the boys of the Parishes of St Mary's, Edwardstown, Marion, Colonel Light Gardens, Glenelg, Bright and Kurralta Park.

The school benefits from extensive parent support and involvement, mostly in co-curricular roles such as sport, drama and music. With over 80% of students involved in co-curricular programs, many outside school hours, this support is essential, as there are insufficient staff to provide the number of activities students seek. Parents also participate in fetes, the school council and other school help activities.

1.2 About the School

The school commenced in 1978 with the introduction of the three-tier system into the region (Reception to Yr5; Yr 6 to Yr9; and Yr 10 to Yr 12). SJCMS evolved as the middle school for boys in the district. Within this network, schools work collaboratively in areas such as curriculum development, moderation and leadership.

This school endeavours to be a faith community – where values and the teachings of the Catholic Church are reflected in its policies, structures, and the relationships of its members. Students are provided with a holistic education, offering a broad range of learning experiences, modules and educational facilities. All students study Science, Music, Information and Communication Technology, Visual Arts, Technology and Physical Education, with specialist teachers in well-equipped, specifically-designed areas. All staff attempt to provide teaching methodologies appropriate to the diverse nature of middle school boys.

Sport in the school is seen as part of a full and balanced education. The school participates in the Independent Schools Sports Association (ISSA), focusing upon sound educational and social practices in the many inter-school games that are played. The whole school community is invited to participate.

In addition, students have opportunities to be part of: School Bands; Inter-school Debating; Inter-school Chess; Tournament of the Minds; Pedal Prix; Solar Challenge; Enviroquest on Internet; Community Projects; Stock Market Competitions; and other activities as they arise.

The College Middle School has a well-structured, compulsory programme for developing self-reliance, survival and environmental awareness. This allows students to develop personal and life skills according to capabilities. In Term One of each year, all Year levels participate in the Camp program.

Specific professional support is available to students requiring specialised educational programs. The College also provides a key literacy and numeracy teacher to support Year 6 transition from primary school to Middle School.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The school community represents a broad demographic, including professionals as well as those on some form of social benefits. Generally, the majority of families are of middle to higher socio-economic status. Some reside in State Housing Commission homes. Of the 615 students, only 13% are on School Card support.

The school caters for 615 Years 6/7/8/9 students, ranging from 11 to 15 years of age. It provides for some 20 students who have been identified and funded for education support, through an on-site special facility. The school also caters for another 80 students who have also been identified by staff for learning difficulties support. A small number of students (2%) come with ESL backgrounds but have no additional support, other than in-class support by teachers. But over time, their development does not show a significant difference from others around them. There are only three indigenous students in the school.

The school encourages students to participate in national competitions. This is also seen as an opportunity to extend gifted and talented students through engagement in challenges such as the National Science competition.

The majority of staff at St Joseph's have been there for 10 or more years, providing a stable learning environment. The school is a desired location and is able to attract a broad range of highly skilled teachers and specialists in enabling provision of diverse education experiences.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

Student development at St Joseph's is based on values of hope, love, faith, forgiveness, justice, community, service and courage. The Student Development programme emphasises the welfare and total development of the individual, underpinned by mutual respect for all members of the school community. The realisation of this development comes about through the affirmation and achievement of all students and the development of individual responsibilities.

Like other middle schools in the South West Region, St Joseph's has established its own approach to operations and philosophy that underpins planning and the provision of learning opportunities. This approach seeks to:

- Harness the energy of early adolescents through their role as school leaders at Year 9;

- Reduce anonymity and the isolation or impersonal experiences, which students so often suffer in larger schools or Colleges;

- Provide a gradual introduction to the choice and diversity of subjects and increasing number of teachers, which sometimes cause students problems in the transition to secondary school;

- Enable students to identify with and build relationships with teachers who know them well in "Key Teacher" structures;

- Coordinate curriculum from Years 6 to 9, by specialists, yet centred on Home Groups;

- Allow for early introduction to practical subjects (woodwork, home economics, plastics, solar technology, graphic design, information technology, painting, pottery etc), which are not normally available at upper primary level and access to which may be limited in larger schools; and

- Address specific needs of young adolescents, especially in literacy and numeracy, where gender-based trends are apparent.

2.2 School Structure

The structure of the Middle School is reflected within the overall school leadership framework, where policy and educational leadership support holistic learning in the two sub-schools (Years 8/9 and 6/7). Executive, Learning Directors, and Year Level Coordinators work collaboratively in supporting a coordinated approach that provides balance between the South Australian Curriculum Standards Accountability (SACSA) framework and spiritual and local learning needs in preparing students for Senior School and later life. Within this framework, teachers work collaboratively, combining integrated and specialist approaches to teaching, module options and personal development.

Students are organised in Home Room groups, where the majority of learning through Key Teachers takes place. The structure provides an ongoing support framework amongst peers and teachers alike. The focus is upon developing open and positive relationships. School structure also includes three student councillors, as well as a Home Outreach program to offer family support in times of crisis or challenge. Along with a positive spiritual focus, the school has evolved a very personal and caring environment where all feel welcomed and appreciated in a student-centred environment conducive to learning.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

Through Quality Teaching Program (QTP) funding, the school embarked upon a whole school approach to student-centred learning, as part of an overall focus on the need for more appropriate teaching/learning relationships for boys and improving skills for lifelong learning. Linking with learning theory for adolescent boys, teachers developed a range of strategies that employed multiple intelligences, integrated IT across the curriculum, a focus upon individual learning and learning styles and more experiential learning connected to the real world.

This approach requires a change from traditional teacher-focused learning to student-centred learning, with greater integration across discipline areas. The SACSA Framework is used in developing programs to ensure that both consistency and accountability requirements are met. Teachers work collaboratively in team pairs, developing programs, sharing ideas and moderating outcomes as they work in tandem between their two classes.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

The curriculum ethos of the College is holistic, focusing on all aspects of personal development. The Curriculum strives to provide all students with an education that enables them to grow physically, socially, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Students study Religious Education with Literacy and Numeracy as key components of their education.

The focus for students in the middle years is to provide educational offerings that are relevant, dynamic, and divergent and that enable students to make some decisions about their own learning. The Module system in Years 8 and 9 allows students, with guidance, to make real choices about their learning. The College has a range of specialist educational facilities enabling student choices in modules such as Science, Music, Information and Communications Technology, Visual Arts, Technology and Physical Education. These are delivered by specialist teachers in well equipped, specifically designed areas. All students in Years 6 and 7 study a language.

The College has utilised the SACSA Framework as a catalyst to improve teaching and learning further. Staff Professional Development time has been used to develop curriculum programs. The Framework describes learning as "the process of constructing knowledge" and indicates that this is best done in a holistic way.

Students, parents and teachers are all regarded as partners in the College community.

The curriculum aims to provide all students with an education that enables them to grow as strong, happy responsible individuals. Programs have been designed to achieve best the outcomes framed by the Essential Learnings and Key Competencies. Within the SACSA Framework, five Essential Learnings have been identified. They are: Futures; Identity; Interdependence; Thinking; and Communication.

Specifically, these Essential Learnings foster the capabilities to:

- Develop the flexibility to respond to change, recognise connections with the-past and conceive solutions for preferred futures (Futures);

- Develop a positive sense of self and group, accept individual and group responsibilities and respect individual and group differences (Identity);

- Work in harmony with others and for common purposes, within and across cultures (Interdependence);

- Be independent and critical thinkers, with the ability to appraise information, make decisions, be innovative and devise creative solutions (Thinking); and

- Communicate powerfully (Communication).

At present, the College is developing a curriculum model jointly with the South Australian Department of Education Training and Employment (DETE), Catholic Education South Australia and the Independent Schools Board This will act as a catalyst to improve teaching and learning.

3.3 Assessment and Reporting

Assessment

Consistent with its focus upon student-centred learning, the school is moving away from the traditional all-testing regime to a combination of test and experiential investigations that require class based assessment. Review and assessment of ongoing projects and work entail a combination of teacher assessment, peer assessment and student

evaluations, where students propose future improvements through conferencing and reporting opportunities. Some staff also utilise student journals as part of the interview sharing.

Reporting

Formal reporting, through major and minor written reports, occurs through a mid-semester report and two semester reports. Parent/Teacher/Student interviews are held in conjunction with written reports. Frequent communications occur by telephone, via classroom and school communications (letters and newsletters), as well as through student diaries. These communications enable ongoing discussions between students, teachers and parents where student progress and responsibilities, and teacher comments, are shared for parent feedback.

The continuous and varied nature of assessment procedures gives clear indication of student achievement and provides students, teachers and parents with information which can be acted upon to enable greater learning opportunities for students.

3.4 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The College timetable consists of seven lessons per day. Lessons are allocated to each learning area in relation to the educational needs of the students in that Year level. Lessons are blocked, wherever possible, to allow for longer, increased learning opportunities.

This shift to student-centred learning has also realised a shift in timetabling patterns to cater for longer learning engagement in experiential and integrated work programs. Out of the seven daily lesson periods, two are currently double periods, with a view to extending them to three in 2004. Staff indicate that the longer blocks are not only more productive, but they also help to promote more positive teacher/student relationships and greater awareness of student needs and learning styles.

A deliberate effort has been made to establish Key Teachers as team leaders within groupings of Year levels. Year 6 and 7 students have a Key Teacher who facilitates learning in a number of Learning Areas, including: English; Mathematics; Religious Education; and Society and Environment. Year 8 and 9 students usually have two Key Teachers who, together, cover the majority of core learning areas. Over the two years, students have the opportunity to interact with these key teachers in a variety of areas of learning and hence to build genuine dynamic relationships with them. One of the Key Teachers will usually take the class for Student Development, of which "Program Achieve" is a feature. Program Achieve involves all students in two lessons per week focusing on development of well-being and pastoral care.

Teacher teams work together within each sub-school (e.g. Years 8/9), collaborating in program planning, review, assessment, moderation and student progress. Peer support programs are also utilised as additional support. Teachers also meet outside of school hours, developing their own formal processes to focus upon student needs and on improving learning programs. Collaboration mainly occurs within each sub-school. Future plans are to broaden collaboration across all sub-schools.

Focus for teachers is not about being in a middle school but, rather, about middle schooling!

3.5 Professional Development

PD is a growth area within the overall school budget. Most are individual undertakings that occur off-site, as visits to other schools, workshops or other PD offerings, particularly focusing on middle schooling and learning for life strategies. In school, PD is also generally linked to school planning priorities or whole school initiatives, such as the QTP funded student-centred learning focus. In total, about $15,000 is budgeted annually, but this varies from year to year, according to need.

More recently, professional development has revolved around developing a culture of student-centred learning and technologies, as well as keeping abreast of developments in Boys' Education, Middle-Schooling and Catholic and Marist Education. Sources for development include: Conferences – e.g. International Middle School Conference; In-School PD (e.g. Loretta Giancelli); 'Inclusive Classrooms'; SA Department of Education & Training PD; and Catholic Education Office PD.

3.6 Special Programs

Resourcing

SJCM caters for 10-15 year old students and so has had to overcome the variance between primary/secondary teacher entitlements. The only way to provide collaborative team time and common block timetabling periods is to ensure all teachers have similar entitlements, regardless of classification. Consequently, the school has provided additional resources in enabling common non-contact times and support for teachers.

Information Technology

The school is well equipped with Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Multi-media resources, which form part of the core tools for learning, and for developing lifelong learning skills. There is a coherence and cohesion of ICT planning across all learning areas within a band, and throughout the (SACSA) frameworks as a whole. Students develop knowledge, skills and understanding that are regarded as necessary components of today's learning.

The College aims to develop constructive learning skills to enable students with the ability to retrieve, evaluate and use information effectively, empowering them for lifelong learning to:

- Develop the ability to retrieve information from electronic sources;
- Use electronic sources selectively and critically;
- Develop skills in the operation of equipment;
- Use technology to enhance learning and communication;
- Interpret visual images and icons;
- Use graphics text and images to convey meaning;
- Communicate in a variety of discourse and media using digital text;
- Develop problem solving and higher order thinking skills;
- Become self directed learners; and
- Develop organisational strategies.

Students are exposed to learning through:

- Defining - determining the nature and purpose of the task;

- Locating - seeking information sources and retrieving information;

- Selecting - selectively and critically examining the information;

- Organising - recording, synthesising and reconstructing the information to suit the task;

- Presenting - creating and presenting the information; generating new perspectives and knowledge; and

- Evaluating - assessing the process and making judgements about their learning.

With regard to Essential Learnings within the SACSA Framework, ICT is imbedded within all subjects offered at the College and reflects the imperatives of learning to do, to be, to know and to live together. These are developed sequentially as students progress through the school - including specific skills development:

- Year 6 - Using this network; Typequick ; MS Word; CD's; Britannica Online; MS Excel; The internet;

- Year 7 - Typequick; The Internet and Boolean Thinking; Web Design; Scanning; Corel Draw/Image Composer; MS word; PowerPoint;

- Year 8 (Modules) - Novell; PowerPoint; Web Design; Logo; and

- Year 9 (Modules) - Web design; Animations; Logo.

Key personnel and organisational structures are provided in support of IT development, including an IT Coordinator, who provides support for integration of IT across all KLA's, as well as staff skills development. In terms of facilities and access, the College provides full use of IT suites, banks of computers in laboratories and classrooms, as well as access to laptops, and a range of multi-media resources for Media Studies.

Careers Education and Lifelong Learning:
There is only a small focus upon careers education in Year 8/9, with greater emphasis in Year 10 in the senior school. Generally, careers awareness is integrated into other areas of study. Students may be asked to contact or visit enterprises in relation to issues connecting their in-class learning to the real world, in areas such as Society and Enterprise. These are more informal and occur outside school hours.

A small School-Based Traineeship program is offered two mornings per week for students and parents who choose to be part of it. The program links school with business partnerships, such as McDonalds, providing students with experience in the life of work.

Key Competencies:
Key Competencies are developed as generic abilities that students need for effective participation in work, adult life and lifelong learning. These include: collecting, analysing and organising information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organising activities, working with others in teams; using mathematical ideas and technique; solving problems and using technology. This is a listing of the Mayer competencies – how does the school enable students to acquire these competencies?

Program Achieve:
The Program Achieve Curriculum, developed by the school, is also central to the holistic development of all students, complimenting academic and learning module programs. Examples of programs include Mind Matters, Student Leadership, Bullying & Harassment and Parent Information and Liaison.

Adaptive Education:

Adaptive Education structures provide learning support for individuals and small groups, both in and out of class, catering for individual needs and development of life skills. Additional literacy and numeracy support is available at Year 6 and 7, and support Maths and English classes run at Year 8 and 9.

Pastoral Care:

The school has a strong focus on Pastoral Care, supporting the belief that learning for life occurs best in an environment that promotes strong spiritual and moral qualities, personal development, and relationships. Support is provided through Religious Education, School Counsellors, Home Outreach Program, Home Room structures and positive relationships between teachers and students. In preparing students for life, the school develops their understanding of and appreciation for support structures, and capabilities that include collaboration, acceptance of diversity, social skills and self - confidence.

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

Discussions with teachers reflect an understanding that lifelong learning results largely from professional development and the school focus on student-centred learning needs for boys' education in the modern world. These understandings have been translated into the classroom, in varying degrees. The school is in an evolutionary stage of pedagogical and curricular reform. Where the reforms are more prominent, they offer models for other teachers who see the positive changes and look to reviewing and further developing their own practices.

Recognition of Difference

This domain was less manifest in classroom observations. Teachers say other domains are more focused in their planning, given there is not as much diversity amongst students, as compared with other schools. Recognition of Difference is seen as part of the whole school philosophy and supports programs for spiritual, social and personal development, including citizenship, as part of holistic student development.

Connectedness

Thematic, integrated studies play a significant role in promoting learning styles, engagement, and contextual understanding for lifelong learning. Teachers talk about teams collaboratively planning programs where they combine their skills and teaching preferences, in a cross disciplinary approach to teaching and learning, in three to four subject areas.

Thematic planning provides connected and comprehensive learning programs that employ a range of learning styles and rich task activities that require higher order thinking and engagement over a series of lessons and activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Each series represents a learning pathway made explicit through planning frameworks, where students engage in both non-negotiable and negotiated learning outcomes, culminating in teacher and student assessment, as well as some form of wider presentations, either to peers, the class, or school audience. Interwoven in the pathways are planned opportunities and expectations to incorporate ICT as a tool for learning and sharing.

Figure 1: Lesson Series Planning Framework – In the Classroom:

One teacher example linked concepts of Economics within a similar framework of
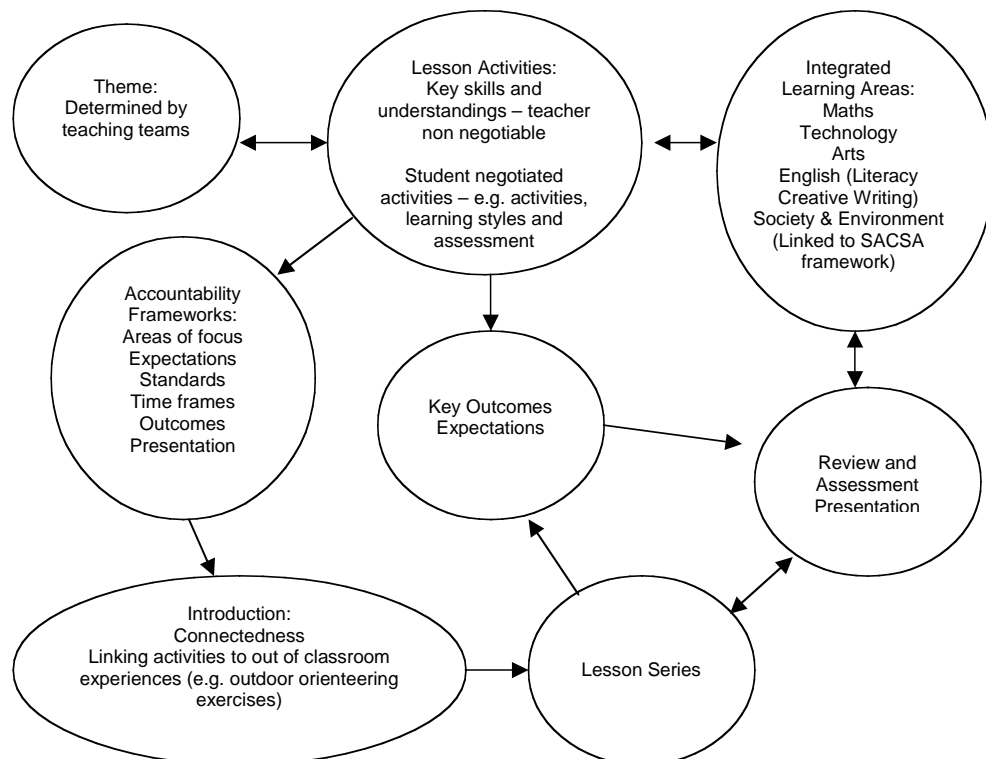
integrated SOSE studies, drawing upon student experiences of enterprises run by members of the family or friends. Real life issues about ethics, enterprise and human capital engaged student thinking and sharing, either from ideas or knowledge among themselves, or from ideas found in the media and developed by the teacher. The lesson series includes out-of-school visits to selected businesses where students are required to construct and conduct a questionnaire about the enterprise and develop a report for the class. The activity promotes the development of language and communication skills such as writing genre, telephone etiquette, structured interview and interpersonal skills, as well as planned key concepts and understandings. This particular example is also one of the targeted opportunities that promote development of career awareness.

A similar teacher example focuses upon integrated media studies in developing writing genre. Students work on topical issues from daily newspapers to share and challenge points of view, purpose, and rationale, culminating in letters to the editor. The level of engagement, thinking and debate is usually high throughout the lesson series, as

students feel comfortable and confident about putting forward their own opinions and rationale to peers and to the public.

Intellectual Quality

Teachers discussed both awareness of and need to accommodate higher order pedagogies and tasks in learning pathways. These were observed in the classroom, but are still developing across the school. Where they were further developed, pathways accommodate a hierarchical series of structured tasks culminating in rich tasks that challenged student thinking. These generally employ problem solving strategies and generate substantive conversations as students develop shared understandings and ideas. Teacher use of metalanguage is a common strategy in supporting these outcomes.

In promoting higher order skills, one teacher provided the example of linking the concept of coordinates in maths to practical orientation experiences outside the class; and thematic language studies, combining mapping and creative writing, as well as mathematical extension through the arts and technology. The combination of practical and theoretical experiences enables students to move confidently from lower order understandings and reasoning to much higher order extrapolations and discussion. Experiential learning provides the contextual need, while thematic activities provide creative interest. Technology provides the challenge of virtual manipulation, prediction and justification.

Supportive Environment

Teachers regard a supportive environment as essential to learning, both in the classroom and within a school community. This domain is a clear feature of school philosophy and operations.

Teachers also reflect on the importance of collaborative framework planning and commonly incorporated group dynamics strategies, where much of the discussion and sharing of information and ideas occurs in class discussions, group work or paired work. The positive relationships amongst students and teachers alike enable open and valued discussion in working towards achieving desired outcomes. All examples use concrete links to, and experiences within, the world outside, providing contextual meaning and learning about life.

This is further enhanced by high expectations from all teachers and students, underpinned by a strong values system that fosters spiritual and pastoral development. Students are not only prepared for lifelong learning in academic skills and student-centred interests and talents, but they also develop life skills and interpersonal relationships. The interactions between students and staff are positive, supportive and productive. This is reflected in high levels of classroom engagement, as well as in school/community relationships, that provide extensive support for the school and its philosophy.

4.2 Lifelong Learning

Teachers support the investment made by the school in reforming pedagogy and organisation towards student-centred learning and learning for life. They share a commitment to investigate and shape practices that improve teaching/learning relationships. This reform is still in its early phases with teachers at various stages along a developmental continuum. But teachers already see positive outcomes and look to furthering its development. The changes acknowledge their understanding about lifelong learning and their developing practices are evidence of a commitment to it.

In conjunction with well-established practices and organisational support strategies that promote holistic and personal development, teachers are confident that their vision can be attained.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1 Middle Years reforms

Students are positive about their learning environment, which they state makes transition from primary to middle school and from middle school to senior school a lot easier. They feel this is a better concept than traditional primary to senior high school transition, citing more meaningful student/teacher relationships. Where an individual needs to have a serious talk that may be sensitive and personal, students feel comfortable enough to share it with teachers or to take a problem to a friend.

Students find the learning environment also makes it easier for them to focus and remain on task. The stronger relationships result in less teacher nagging and less fighting and arguing amongst students. The all-boys environment enables them to accept being competitive and striving for the best, as there is no need to show off and impress. They say that this would not be the case if girls were around. "As a group of boys, one can let go and just be yourself."

5.2 Lifelong Learning

In commenting about how their environment prepares them for the future, students agree they are enabled, through skills development opportunities experienced throughout the middle years, to feel confident about their learning in Senior School, and indeed, after Year 10. They value pastoral care in helping with understanding and preparing for real life situations. While students remark about few career awareness programs, they are positive about the linkage of careers and enterprise through classroom activities. Students also claim the school provides opportunity to work out their personal skills and interests, helping them to shape what they might do in the future.

Students are positive about lessons and teaching styles, especially the broad choices of learning modules and access to good school facilities and equipment. Being able to spend more time with teacher team pairs is also a positive aspect for ongoing teacher/student relationships that enable opportunities for choice and negotiation in learning activities. Having positive relationships also enables fun and humour in lessons, as well as feeling comfortable and valued when making contributions in class. Efforts are appreciated by teachers and peers.

The majority of students perceived learning to be best where it was experiential and connected to the outside world, giving meaning to what went on in the class. In responding to how they might like to improve their learning environment, students generally supported greater experiential learning experiences and incursions to support their learning.

6   OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes

Generally student achievements are above average for the state, validating the local initiatives and philosophy which underpin the school's learning programs. Students are also regularly encouraged to participate in national competitions, with high levels of success.

6.2 Social Outcomes

The focus upon relationships has realised greater collaborative and cooperative skills amongst students and staff. In turn, this promotes social skills and enhanced, long term relationships amongst students and with teachers. The strong co-curricular program also helps to develop individual resilience and self-confidence, enabling students to pursue personal interests and strengths.

6.3 Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

The support and belief in students given by the school allow them to strive for the best. This, in turn, makes them feel more obliged to help each other. They also shared better relationships. Students also comment on the importance of Religious Education and ongoing pastoral care in helping them to be more open and confident about personal feelings and themselves. To many students, the school is like one family (where everyone connects better and is positive about everything) rather than just a group of individual teachers and students. This perception by students and staff was confirmed throughout observations and through the evidence of positive student behaviour policies and data.

Student attendance at St Joseph's is well above the state average. Ninety-nine percent of students continue to Senior College.

7   CONCLUSION

The school regards itself as a caring organisation that provides a holistic education, including a spiritual focus that collectively develops students who leave the school with understanding about support structures, positive peer/teacher relationships, greater confidence, and skill in collaborative and social interaction. The middle schooling approach at St Joseph's is more traditional in its operation and structure than some other schools investigated in this study, but its philosophy and student-centred approach has proven to be an appropriate framework and culture for well rounded personal development and development of lifelong learning skills.

Both students and teachers comment on a far smoother and more confident transition to the senior school. There are fewer students who now require additional support. Those who do are mainly students who have been identified as at risk, either educationally, socially or emotionally, and they are well catered for through individual support frameworks and the overall ethos of the school.

RIVERVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Location

Rivervale District High School is located in the Preston Valley some 35kms South West of the regional city of Bunbury and 215kms from Perth. The shire population is 4,600 2,500 of whom reside in the main town of the valley. The remainder live in nearby towns and rural parts of the shire. The area has a traditional agricultural base and is a well known fruit-growing area. The town provides a service industry and commercial base oriented to serve the agricultural sector and offer retail to residents. Most government, specialised industrial, and commercial services are accessible in Bunbury some 30 minutes away.

Several factors have promoted population growth in recent years, including numerous rural sub-divisions that are attractive to hobby lifestyles, and a growth in employment opportunities, in forest-related industries and in mining in nearby towns.

The communities which are part of the shire, are regarded as desirable abodes, for either economic or lifestyle choices. While the economic base is diversifying with growth in viticulture and tourism, a growing number of people choose to live locally but work in other parts of the region. Many of these are low-income, single-parent families who commute elsewhere for work. Over time, the burden of time and travel forces these families to return to larger centres, often to be replaced by families in similar situations, for similar reasons. This change in demographics has caused an increase in the number of families receiving some form of support (over 30% on Health Cards) and a diversity of expectations that parents have of education.

1.2. About The School

The school covers two split sites, with K-6 on one and Years 7-10 on another. The identified transition phases are: from the primary site to the middle school, which has been developed as a sub-school within the secondary site; from middle school to Year 9/10, with a focus on preparation for post-compulsory years and career awareness; and from District High School to post-compulsory education, outside the community, for Tertiary Entrance Examination courses, VET or other links with TAFE.

The school has four significant and continuing priorities each of which has targets and a set of strategies in support of the outcomes sought. These major focus areas are: Literacy and Numeracy; Learning Technologies; Curriculum Improvement ; and the Learning Environment, where there is a major focus on values (as a whole-of-school 'driver' for relationships, behaviours and policies), as well as on the ongoing development of a middle years sub-school culture that has a broader student-centred context.

1.3. Students

The school caters for some 590 students ranging from Kindergarten (4 year olds) to Year 10 (15 year olds), of which 105 students in Years 7/8 made up the case-study population. Being located in a rural setting, students are perceived to be less sophisticated and less experientially aware compared to peers in urban settings. The majority of students (70%) live on outlaying farms, travelling on buses to school. The school is therefore seen as a social focus – that perception being valued by students and fostered staff.

Most of the total population are from middle class families. Approximately a third of all students come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Some 6% are of Indigenous origin. Special needs students make up 2% of the population, including transitory students who come and go with family movements in the area.

2. ABOUT THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1. Philosophy

School operations are based on five guiding principles that have evolved from the review and consensus of the whole school community. These principles establish the philosophy that guides school planning and operations:

- The education provided to all students in the school needs to be balanced between academic learning, skilling for life's challenges and becoming lifelong learners.
- Curriculum requires structuring with a set of relevant, developmental and integrated learning experiences.
- Curriculum delivery needs to focus upon student-centred learning strategies, and to be organisationally flexible.
- Parents and the wider community need to be engaged as partners in school programs and decision making.
- Constant evaluation and review are undertaken with a view to improvement.

2.2. Cultural Vision

Rivervale's vision is the development of a whole school community that shares a "Thinking Culture" to meet diversified needs and to empower learners (staff and students) with skills that transfer across and enhance everyday life and lifelong learning. The vision was initially discussed and negotiated in 2002. Collaborative research identified an appropriate direction for the school, focusing on approaches to teaching, learning and thinking skills. This is now the Autonomous Learner Model, implemented throughout the school.

A school thinking-skills matrix has been developed and serves as a continuum that allows for ongoing development of skills complexities. Together these form the basis of a whole-school 'Thinking Culture' that is embedded in curriculum planning and supported by resources and professional development.

2.3. Principles of Learning in the Middle Years

Learning in the middle years sub-school is underpinned by the belief in the "Thinking Culture" and shared values that are interwoven through all aspects of

teaching/learning relationships. Learning is seen as being inclusive, accommodating the needs of individuals and groups of students and providing opportunities for all students to learn about issues associated with things like culture, disability, race, class and gender. Learning is flexible in that it is responsive to social and technological change and meeting student needs arising from that change process. Learning focuses upon enabling students to see the relevance of knowledge about ideas, people and things, by connecting learning to their own world and by trying to make it part of the larger whole. Learning is developmental in the sense that it acknowledges that individuals learn at different rates and in different ways, and that it actively engages students, teachers, parents, and the wider community in a collaborative approach to planning and in collective responsibility for student achievement

2.4. Structure

Rivervale's Middle School sub-school structure focuses on collaborative teams and the development of student-centred learning and relationships. The Middle School comprises four classes (two Year 7 and two Year 8) taught by a core Middle School team of four teachers. Staff plan and review collaboratively, but remain mostly with their home class, using generalist pedagogy. Integration of specialists to the middle years culture also supports the learning program, along with integration of students and activities within the sub-school.

3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1. Middle Years Pedagogy

Rivervale District High School made the decision to look more closely at their Year 8 cohort and primary/secondary transition needs. There were high incidents of friction associated with the transition, plus disengagement from learning, which for some students meant that they did not progress or learn much more. These social and educative reasons were the prime drivers to examining current practices and beliefs and the need to look for more appropriate practices.

Concurrently the school had been focusing on values as the centrepiece to building relationships, drawing from a combination of Drug Education, Behaviour Management and other programs. Rather than explore reasons for the past, teachers chose to focus on the future and on how to move all stakeholders forward. The foundations came from searching and defining a set of values for the whole school community, where everyone believed and operated in a set order of behaviour, beliefs, understandings and actions, regardless of what was occurring outside. If it wasn't valued inside, then it didn't happen. Thus the initial values frame evolved.

In searching further, the school went back to the WA Curriculum Framework Values, recognising they clearly articulated what was being sought. These became the banners or behavioural drivers for the values. They were to be modelled by all staff as a critical aspect for all students to internalise and accept. What has evolved is a common values framework that is now the ethical driver within the school, building

strong relationships that have generated a more positive and supporting school ethos and culture, all of which have influenced improved teaching/learning relationships, outcomes and the development of lifelong learners.

A change in pedagogy and relationships has promoted a strong learning community where learning and individuals are valued. This meant challenging and breaking from the traditional role of discipline-oriented organisation and delivery. Teachers decided that a cross-disciplinary teaching style was a more preferred model, better able to meet varied student needs and learning styles, as well as to broaden teacher/student contact time and relationships. Teachers opted to generalise in the social sciences, languages and science, as well their own speciality. Interchanges between teachers in maths, science and languages now occur across the Year levels where teachers share strengths. In addition, specialist support is provided from other Year 9/10 teachers in areas such as Physical Education, Technology and Arts.

Through collaborative teamwork, identified Students at Risk are also able to be grouped together and given previously unavailable ongoing focused support for individual needs.

3.2. Middle Years Curriculum

Curriculum offering is consistent with the Curriculum Framework for Western Australian Schools and covers a broad range of learning experiences for students. These include academic, practical, creative and environmental learning that are supported by appropriate teaching methods, resourcing, assessment practices, school philosophy and relationships. Planning and implementation explicitly acknowledge the core set of shared values: a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and achievement of potential; respect and concern for others and their rights; self-acceptance and respect of self; social and civic responsibility; and environmental responsibility.

Through the curriculum, schooling in the middle years offers all students the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge that will serve them for lifelong learning. The curriculum provides all students with the opportunity for success. For some students this occurs through the formal academic curriculum, for others it happens in other, non-academic areas, including sport, the arts, and career pathways; and through challenges available in the practical arts area, and in interaction with the wider community.

The school commits to ensuring that there is equity in the acknowledgments of all students, across all activities, across the curriculum and beyond, where achievements may well be recognised in regional, state or national forums. In order to support student opportunities, the core curriculum both compels participation and promotes others who wish to engage at higher levels to do so.

Academic programs are designed to deliver skills in all learning areas and are increasingly pitched to challenge individual learners in order that they can realise their full potential.

3.3. Middle Years Assessment & Reporting

Much of the work in the middle years focuses on integrated lesson series or learning pathways that incorporate a range of rich tasks and rich task assessment. These are supported by student Working Portfolios that target non-negotiable skills development, assessment tasks, realistic negotiated outcomes and organisation. Assessments by teachers, students and peers employ a range of strategies and formats including formal and informal teacher assessment, shared rubrics, matrixes, and presentations to wider audiences. Students also have the opportunity to self-evaluate and to make individual comment and recommendations about their work. These comments and recommendations are then shared and moderated through teacher and peer conferencing.

Assessment is an ongoing and integral aspect of each learning pathway. It is regularly shared between home and school, promoting parent awareness, understanding and feedback.

Formal reporting occurs at the end of each semester. This is supplemented by ongoing informal reporting through student portfolios, parent interviews, contacts and shared recommendations about student work.

The Middle School also invites parents to the school to participate in Learning Journeys where students take them on a journey through their work; what the class has been doing; and aspects of interest throughout the school. These are very successful and popular, lending much parent support for the learning program and for student self esteem. They promote three-way partnerships, where teachers, parents and students are all engaged in the learning program.

4. OTHER INITIATIVES FOR THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

4.1. Timetabling

Middle School timetabling is structured to provide common integrated teaching time and common non contact time for collaborative teacher team planning so that teachers can evaluate and reflect upon issues in developing programs, as well as moderate expectations, assessment, and outcomes in terms of student needs, school planning targets, and state Curriculum Frameworks.

The middle schooling team share collaborative planning time, identifying and developing common themes, implementation strategies, and integration strategies; sharing expertise; identifying skills and learning differences; and reviewing progress and student needs. Teacher relief is provided to access 0.5 to 1.0 planning days per week, as needed.

4.2. Staff and Student Organisation

Teachers work in collaborative teams utilising thematic approaches in integrated studies, each combining 3-4 cross-discipline areas in shared planning and delivery. In addition, teachers swap teaching time, utilising shared strengths within the teams, typically in science or maths. Teachers thereby spend more time with their core groups, which they have for the two years spent in the Middle School environment.

This enables greater student-focused teaching, with greater emphasis and time being employed to build positive relationships – between teachers and students, amongst teachers, and amongst students themselves.

Students are organised into paired teaching team class groups, one Year 7 and the other Year 8. Each group has a home teacher. The teaching pair works together in tandem, through both integrated and subject-specialist learning. Students spend the majority of their time with their home teacher. Other subject areas are addressed by specialists operating across the school.

In addition to home room classes, the school also has structured vertical Form Room groupings of around 18 students for every teacher, including students from Years 7/8/9/10, bringing the middle years together with the senior years. From these groupings, peer support programs have developed, with Year 10s, for example, supporting small groups of Year 7s. Forms meet regularly and have been purposefully structured to promote the development of positive relationships and peer support across the school. They are proving successful in breaking down traditional bullying and anti-social behaviour between older and younger students, as well as assisting learning improvement and individual confidence through peer support. The playground, once a segregated exclusion zone depending upon seniority, has transformed to a place with extensive intermingling during out of class time. Students of all ages and gender can play and socialise together.

Given that most students are rurally isolated, quality time spent socialising and playing at school is an essential ingredient to their own development and their attitude to ongoing learning. The strengthening of long-term relationships through both the middle schooling and Form Room structures has enhanced attendance, behaviour and the development of lifelong learners.

4.3. Professional Development

All staff, from K to 10 are trained in the "Autonomous Learning Model." All middle years' staff integrate learning and thinking strategies in their teaching programs. This enables students to identify their own preferred styles of learning, in order that they can gain competence for future learning. The focus is on developing a culture to assist with the transition into the Middle School sub-school; then consolidating lifelong learning skills and continuing the culture into more formal learning environments in Years 9 and 10, in preparation for post-compulsory education or work placement.

Middle School staff are also required to undertake professional development in collaborative teams strategies and approaches to integrated studies. All staff have equal access to whole-school professional development budgets. Outside school, staff access a range of programs specific to needs, as well as conferences and seminars.

The school is fortunate in having a local Curriculum Improvement Officer to coordinate and provide leadership within the middle schooling context. This Officer also provides leadership for other schools within the district. The networks developed by the teacher are shared with local staff, making links with other schools and bringing back ideas and strategies to enhance local learning cultures.

4.4. Volunteer Program

The school volunteer program operates on both school sites and involves some twenty students, offering emotional and social support. Staff identify students for the program as being at risk socially, emotionally, academically, or in other ways. The option to participate is up to students and families. In addition, the program links school, student and the home in strengthening support and understanding. This is especially so in the Middle School, where the term "building bridges to homes" is commonly used.

Volunteers come to the school to interact with students, developing positive relationships through chatting, playing games and other activities. Students appreciate having a friend to share, and to assist with school and personal problems. Each individual relationship ceases once students no longer feel the need, or their aims have been met, or the interaction is not working.

4.5. Peer Support Program

The Peer Support Program was introduced into the school over two years ago as an outcome of the school focus on building relationships, improving the learning environment, and developing a school community 'Thinking Culture'. The program aimed to:
• improve the sense of community within the school;
• promote a more caring and sharing environment;
• enhance self-awareness, self-esteem and communications skills;
• provide a comfortable situation in which to develop trust;
• encourage the sharing of ideas and feelings in a non-judgemental atmosphere;
• increase awareness of individual responsibility;
• make the transition into a new school environment more comfortable and less threatening;
• provide senior students with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in a way which benefits them and the school; and
• provide strategies whereby students are able to deal with harmful influences.

The Peer Support Program has been a success with benefits to both Year 7s and Year 10s. The Year 7 students enjoy being involved with the older students and have responded positively to their leaders. The Peer Leaders take on a significant commitment in planning and evaluation sessions, helping students with problems within their group. Leaders take the time to catch up with their students in the playground or during social activities to chat about how things are going at school and home.
In one instance a Peer Leader was able to diffuse a potentially volatile situation because of the trusted relationship and opportunity to talk openly about issues that were worrying a particular student. Not only was the crisis defused, but the Peer Leader was also boosted by the positive outcomes they were able to be achieve.

4.6. Resourcing

The Middle School accesses resources for programs, professional development and other initiatives through the overall school development plan and budget, as per other sections of the school. An additional 2.5% of the budget is specifically targeted

at middle school support and programs. The additional support also overcomes systemic human resource inequities between primary and secondary entitlements, enabling equitable entitlements that are necessary for collaborative Years 7/8 teacher teams.

4.7. Information Technology

The school is well equipped with IT resources, sharing computer laboratory costs and facilities with the community, enabling access to more IT and multi-media support than would otherwise be possible. Classrooms also have computers that are used regularly as students move through their learning pathways. IT is a school focus. The school has invested a significant part of its overall budget not only into hardware, software, networking and multi-media, but also into IT Coordinator time and expertise in developing staff skills, and support for IT implementation into classroom practice as a tool for learning. Students in the middle years are well skilled in IT research, publishing, communications and presentations. Technology is central to learning programs.

4.8. Student Career Pathways

The school employs a Structured Workplace Learning Strategy for Year 10 students in promoting work awareness and experience. Students are placed in businesses in and around the town-site for up to one semester. Ongoing commitment is required from both students and businesses, in partnership with the school. Students attend the workplace one day per week and must complete a minimum of 120 hours and demonstrate workplace competence to be successful. Student assessment is a shared process between the employer, student and school. The response from businesses has been very supportive, with over thirty employers participating in the program.

District high schools, like Rivervale, traditionally reflect a leakage of students entering Year 8 to other larger centres and larger secondary schools, both government and non-government, where parents perceive there are better and more numerous options and learning opportunities. While this is also the case for the local school, the leakage is considerably less, some 4%, as compared to others that may be as high as 50% or more. The majority of students at Rivervale make the transition from primary to middle schooling, locally. Parent support for the middle years concept has influenced their choice to continue sibling education at Rivervale.

Of the total local secondary population, the majority choose pathways linked to VET, TAFE, or employment, when leaving post-compulsory education. Around one third opt for more academic and Tertiary Entrance Examination courses. Of these, about half complete their TEE, with only a few local students going on to university. But in proportion to cohorts from other similar schools, local students perform better and are better prepared in their individual career pathway choices and for Lifelong learning.

5. CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Teachers collaborate in plan and program development, combining non-negotiable expectations with opportunities for student negotiated learning. Middle School teams map out Key Learning Area (KLA) outcomes for the year in each integrated learning area to meet KLA requirements for Years 7/8 and transition needs for Year 9/10. These are then incorporated within the overall thematic framework for integrated studies, which not only provide the foundation for integrated learning but also incorporate core values and "Thinking Culture" strategies that challenge students with rich tasks and help them 'learn to learn' as well as 'learn about,' in achieving outcomes.

Fig. 1: Collaborative Team Outcomes Planning

Collaborative teams identify outcomes desired, linked to the WA Curriculum frameworks, developing progressive programs from Year 7 to Year 8, with a view to requirements for Senior School.   Teachers identify non-negotiable items within the planning frameworks, as well as enabling student negotiated learning decisions.
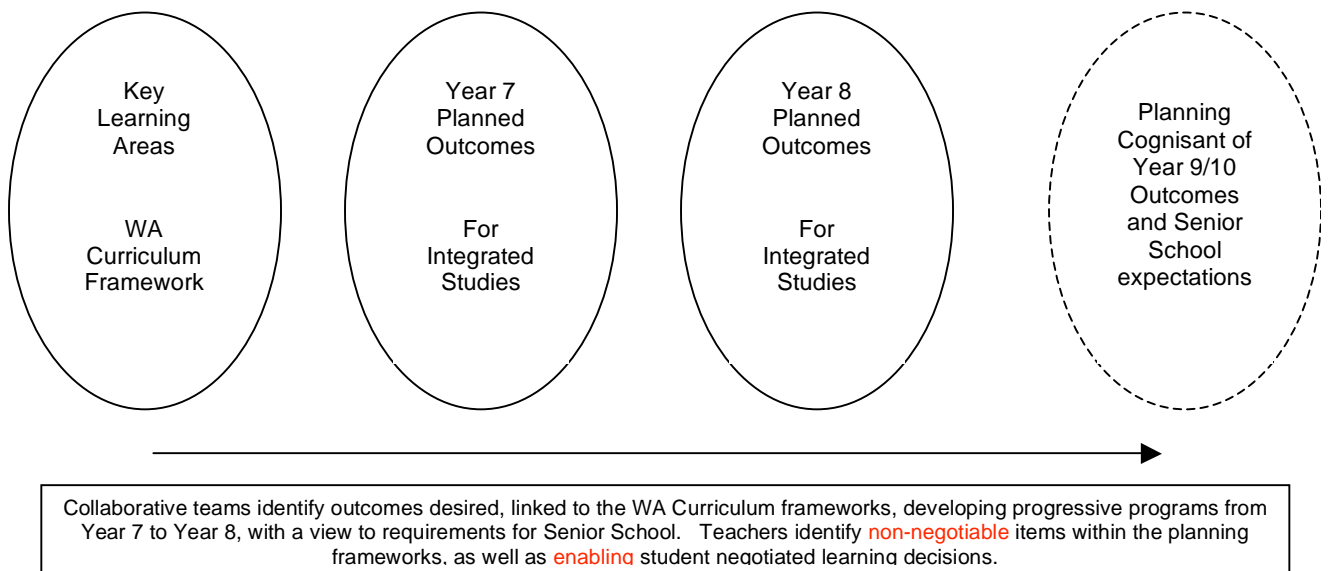
In addition, students are often also encouraged to consider and seek out-of-school support in their problem-solving and critiquing, sharing decisions about their planning and work. Students also need to consider decisions about presentation formats for various audiences, including teachers, peers, other classes and others outside the school. Woven into these decisions is an expectation and willingness for students to incorporate technology as a tool for their learning pathways, in either research, or publishing, or in presentation.

Students map individual learning pathways for the lesson series in their Working Portfolios. Teachers ensure these pathways are guided to non-negotiable outcomes and core learning skills.   Portfolios are used constantly, revisiting purpose and expectations and sharing current status of work and any issues or matters of interest that have arisen.   Teachers view them as a useful way of developing individual responsibility for learning and accountability. Portfolios also enable learning strategy frameworks reviews and discussions about what could be employed in problem-solving, research, action planning, sharing and assessment, in developing individual student pathways to learning.

Fig. 2: Integrated Studies Planning Framework

Student Portfolios:

Journal work relating to work and assessment pieces

Integrated Studies Theme:

Learning Area Options for Asia Studies Student - Negotiated

Student Learning Pathway Options

Multiple Intelligences Learning Strategies Values

Learning Area Outcomes Curriculum Framework Non -- Negotiables

Learning

Sharing

Review Assessment Presentation
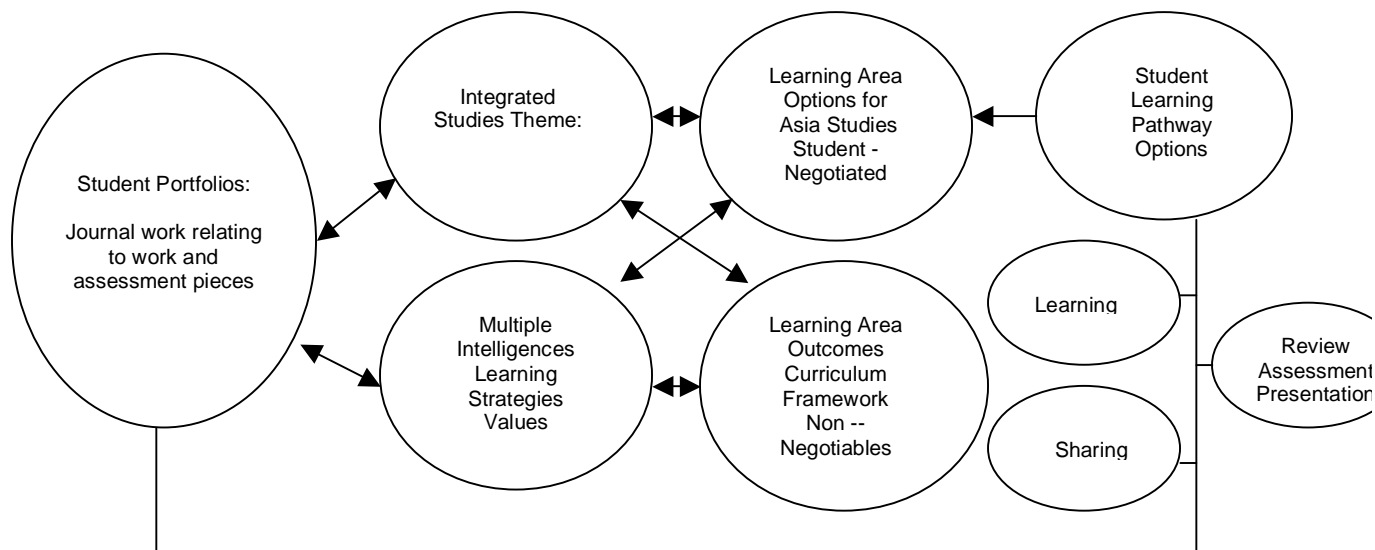
Student planning and work are commonly dealt with in group discussions in which students are instructed in the concepts of group dynamics and collaboration. Teachers conference with students either individually or in groups. They give them support, monitor and direct their progress, and lead them into higher order thinking and understandings. Students are encouraged to make connecting references to the outside world, drawing on their own personal experiences, making comparisons, and sharing their thoughts with the teacher and with their peers. This strategy is often used to engage students in non-negotiable areas of work, in which logical progression leads them to specific skills, knowledge, and understandings that require higher order thinking.

In all classroom observations students were highly engaged in their work, using collaborative strategies when sharing activities with peers and teachers. Students took pride in what they did, enjoying the teaching/learning relationships and the opportunity to have a say in their own learning and assessment. Classrooms were busy places, mixed with discussion, focused learning and time for humour and for sharing personal ideas.

Teachers remark that there is a noticeable difference between local students and those who have moved to Rivervale, without having experienced the middle years culture. Newcomers are less confident and less skilled in cooperation, independence and personal organisation. But if these students experience difficulty, there is adequate support from both teachers and peers in helping their orientation into the new culture.

6. OUTCOMES

6.1. Academic Outcomes

Though the 'Thinking Culture' at Rivervale underpins foundations for lifelong learning, there are no specific data that quantify these outcomes. But teacher observations do attest to the success of their approaches and strategies in the middle years, in terms of improved learning and preparation for life. Teachers indicate that students, in addition to helping others, are more engaged and more independent with their own learning. Year 9 and Year 10 teachers support these

claims as students make their transition to the senior years. This thread of shared relationships is quite evident within the school. Teachers comment that outcomes have improved and that their students have a much firmer foundation for lifelong learning.

What was once a section of the school with identifiable frictions is now without previous levels of tension. Transition is now a seamless process. Students are more engaged, and teachers have been 'switched on' and rejuvenated through deeper and more meaningful relationships with their students and their pedagogy, better understanding of themselves, and more satisfaction in catering for student needs and differences.

Community feedback also gives support to teacher statements, by indicating that students seem to be more at ease with themselves and with those around them. Surveyed community support for the school is above average for the state. So too are overall outcomes in learning areas.

Feedback from the main regional feeder Senior High School indicates that local students make the transition more readily and are generally more reliable, more organised and better independent learners, in comparison with other students. These local cohorts have all gone through the middle schooling culture, which is why, as teachers across the school claim, they are better prepared for lifelong learning.

6.2. Social Outcomes

The changes brought about by relationship development have influenced the whole school. Where once certain areas of the school were the domain of the senior Years students, now Year 7/8/9 and 10 students are seen playing and interacting together in the playground. Students are positive and supportive in their relationships with each other and with the school. Over 94% attend sporting carnivals, a significantly larger attendance than for similar schools.

6.3. Behavioural Outcomes

There is ample evidence in student data collection and teacher perceptions that past anti-social behaviours have largely been overcome. Teachers comment about more positive relationships, especially in the middle years, where collaboration and cooperation have become part of the Middle School culture. Consequently students are more engaged, and where once some would 'opt out', ongoing student learning is now a more likely outcome than before.

A significant number of Jehovah's Witness families live within the community and contribute positively, within the parameters of their religious beliefs. In other school settings these parameters can sometimes influence student relationships and their learning environment. Religious beliefs can impact negatively upon participation in a range of activities and types of lessons, resulting in social isolation. This potential problem is tempered considerably within the middle years environment, which focuses strongly on relationships and on developing individual learning frameworks for all students. Students have been helped by closer relationships with their peers and with a smaller number of teachers.

6.4. Student Perceptions

Students comment positively about their middle years learning environment. They enjoy the relationships they share with each other and their teachers. They feel comfortable about themselves and their learning, in an environment which is strongly supportive in its values and orientation towards independent learning. Students enjoy negotiating learning pathways and having a say about their outcomes. They feel trusted and confident because they are able to shape their learning and because they know that their efforts and contributions are valued.

Students enjoy the fun and humour they can share in class because of their improved interpersonal relationships. They also feel comfortable about being able to share concerns and problems, which otherwise they might not do, whether it be with friends, with peers, or with teachers. They see their environment as being friendly and fair.

Students enjoy employing IT as part of their learning. They appreciate the opportunity and the school resources which enable this.

They also feel that the learning and the teaching styles they experience are preparing them adequately for the Senior School and for later learning. They are aware of different learning strategies and use them confidently both in terms of personal preference and in terms of the nature of the task at hand. They comment about interesting challenges and enjoyable classrooms.

Students are positive about the Peer Support program, saying it has helped develop a sense of community and that it has become part of the school culture through which older students gain leadership experience that will benefit them throughout life. Comments from Year 7 students support the success and continuation of the program. These include:

"…the pluses of Peer Support are the interesting activities that we have to do."
"…I think it would be a good idea to make the Peer Support sessions a bit longer and twice a week instead of once".

Year 10 students have found the experience to be challenging as well as rewarding. One student who had continually struggled with academic learning exhibited outstanding qualities as a Peer Support Leader, which in turn developed his self-esteem, his attitude and his engagement in learning.

For the students in the middle years of schooling at Rivervale, school is a positive environment, which they like, and in which they choose to be. To them life at school is like a family, where people care about each other and are able to strive for the best.

7. CONCLUSION

Rivervale District High School has gone through a significant cultural transition in its middle years of schooling. The values, relationships and pedagogical approaches

exhibited in these Years have influenced the remainder of the school. Middle School teachers, who all say they work harder with their new pedagogical approaches, quickly emphasise that the outcomes and personal rewards are significantly more important. This is reflected in their collaborative professionalism in working with each other and in teacher/student relationships within the classroom. Students are more engaged, independent and better prepared for lifelong learning. For these teachers, the middle years of schooling environment is where they now wish to remain.

There is a growing challenge now for the Senior School in the realisation that good middle years practices are bringing success and that they have changed things for the better. They must consider reviewing their own practices to a whole-school change of values and relationships. Thus the journey continues for Rivervale.

SOUTH WEST SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (WA)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

South West Senior High School is situated in a metropolitan suburb 18 kilometres from the centre of Perth, Western Australia, just inland from the port of Fremantle. The campus accommodates academic buildings, art, music centre, five computer labs, swimming pool, gymnasium and theatre, as well as a new working café and renovated Home Economics and Design and Technology rooms.

1.2 About the School

South West Senior High was founded in 1963 and has a tradition that is reflected in a wide and progressive curriculum. The academic, sporting, cultural and extracurricular programmes address the individual and changing needs of students from Years 8 through 12.

The school has a well developed Pastoral Care System based upon a sub-school system, which incorporates three middle school sub-schools, a Year 10 sub-school and a Years 11/12 sub-school

The school has a strong vocational program, focusing on learning pathways to career and life choices. South West won the WA VET Award in 2002 and was finalist for the Award in 2003. It was also a joint national winner of the Careers Education Association Award for Excellence and the inaugural ACS National Innovation in School Careers Programs, where the award was presented at the Australian Association of Careers Counsellors (AACC) conference in Hobart.

South West has traditionally not been a high academic school, leading to a focus on developing students for life, both academically and non-academically. The priority is:

- Promoting the opportunities of the more academically focused students;

- Promoting learning opportunities and confidence, to increase student numbers in academic pathways and development; and

- Promoting learning for non-academic students, with opportunities for vocational options, experiences and pathways.

The school's involvement with Kwinana Industry Council in the Excellence in Education Compact has provided strong community and industry links with increased vocational opportunities for students. Upper school retention rates are now over 80% and increasing faster than the Australian average.

The Compact has provided opportunities for students through commerce and engineering seminars at Murdoch University's Rockingham Campus, careers expos, a career caravan, art awards, scholarships for girls in industry, as well as numerous vocational programs and traineeships. Its best-practice status has led to state and national awards and, just recently, a World Global Best Award. As a result SWSHS has been internationally recognised and recently participated in an international seminar in Scotland.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The school caters for 850 Years 8–12 students, of which approximately 360 Years 8/9 students made up the case-study population. The majority of students come from low SES family backgrounds featuring relatively high unemployment. Some 40% of parents access the School Book support system and Health Care Cards. The school caters for a high number of indigenous families and single parent families. The school is classified with a low "H Index" rating, giving it a classification as being disadvantaged. Currently, this index is being redefined and expected to be even lower.

Recent intakes have increased the number of Education Support needs students, who are also given access to the Middle Schooling culture and pedagogies. Further increases will necessitate a Special Education Support Centre.

There is much support for the school and its contributions towards the future of the children. While participation in formally organised operations and organisational groups, such as Parent and Citizens Association and School Council, is generally low, participation in informal student-focused activities is markedly high. These activities include Vocation Activities, Student Report Reviews, Student Expos and general displays and exhibitions. Over 75% of parents have attended these. Consequently, the school has combined formal bodies into one, with parent representation for both parent association and school council functions. Given that parents are more interested in sharing learning and activities more relevant to the students, the school has increased its PR with parents and the local community through a broad range of these informal activities.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

Middle schooling at South West focuses upon the special needs of young adolescents. Teachers examine and alter teaching practices to better address these needs. In doing so, they provide strategies that enable students to be responsible for their own learning and that help to create students who are motivated, enthusiastic and switched on learners, for life.

The sub-school system also enables groupings of collaborative teacher teams within each of the three middle schooling Year 8/9 subsets. Fewer teachers in each team spend more time with their students, over a two-year period, utilising integrated curriculum strategies, along with other Learning Area teachers. This has led to the evolution of closer relationships and closer understanding of student needs that better address teaching/learning needs. In addition, collaborative teams work together in developing shared strategies and programs and in providing additional teacher and student support.

2.2 School Structure

Given the local student profile, middle schooling has evolved as a direct approach for addressing the needs of so many students at risk in their middle years of schooling. Initially a small trial program, with only a sample Year 8 sub-school set, it has now evolved into a whole school focus for all 13 to 14 year olds, enabling overlapping learning journeys, which the school has identified as connecting three transition phases:

- Primary to Secondary – Years 8/9 Middle Schooling, focusing on "Learning to Learn" through integrated studies and core learning areas, preparing the foundation for future lifelong learning.

- Middle Schooling Year 10, overlapping and focusing more on core learning areas and foundations for options in Years 11/12.

- Senior Schooling to Post Secondary – Years 11/12, building onto these foundations; focusing upon academic and vocational options and pathways beyond secondary school.

The sub-school system at South West is renowned as a system that allows teachers to provide individual care and support for students. It enables lower school students to belong to 'little' schools, where they can be given help, become known and know others, and where their teachers and sub-school head can get to know them and their parents. This encourages students to develop to their potential both socially and academically. Each sub-school has its own rooms and teachers so that students have a 'home base' and easily make the transition from primary to secondary school.

Each of the three middle school sub-schools – Delta, Leda and Omega - is oriented to provide a vehicle for the implementation of curriculum frameworks. This allows a full integration of both the academic and pastoral care structures within the school.

3   PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/ Learning in the Middle Years

Middle schooling focuses extensively on developing individual learning styles through collaborative "Learning to Learn" and curriculum strategies in "Integrated Studies" that promote individual responsibility for learning.

Learning to Learn: (Yr 8: 6 periods per week)
Learning to Learn is a course of study which incorporates a variety of 'brain compatible' strategies to enhance the learning potential of all students. Its aim is to teach students a variety of thinking skills and tools that they can then use to solve problems, create ideas and generate active participation in their world and the world around them. The aim is to prepare students to be independent, lifelong learners, ready to adapt their skills as the need arises. The school believes students need to know how to think, how to plan, how to organise, how to evaluate and how to create, so they can show initiative, move with the times and develop ideas to solve problems or create more efficient ways to do things. Learning to Learn aims to equip students with these skills – skills they can use in a variety of circumstances.

Teachers are the students' guides. They facilitate their learning, encouraging them to explore and to find out. They give them strategies to process this learning in order to make a difference. Each teacher involved in the Learning to Learn classes has undergone extensive training which is an ongoing process – as the world of students' changes, so too does the teachers' world. New innovations and ways of assisting students are constantly being explored and developed. Teachers involved in teaching Learning to Learn also take students for selected cross-discipline studies, as well as for their specific learning area. This they do in collaborative teaching teams, sharing groups

within each of the three middle schooling sub-schools. As a result, students spend more time with fewer teachers, promoting relationships, confidence and openness between students and teachers. Observations indicate that students are more at ease in their classes and more prepared to work collaboratively with each other.

Learning to Learn is the key, the foundation upon which all other studies are built. This foundation is made up of thinking skills, research tools, recording strategies, analysis and evaluation and the concept of synthesis – doing something with learning – making a difference. All of these are used across the curriculum as a framework for instructional strategies.

Instructional Strategies Framework:
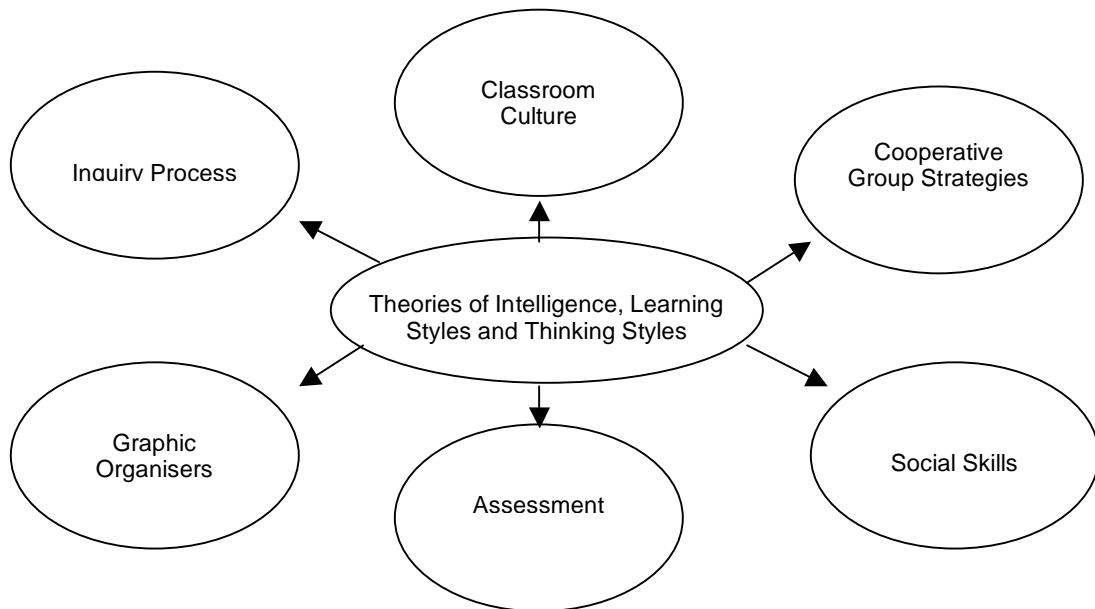
Integrated Studies: (Yr 9:   4 periods per week)
The Middle School cites research that indicates that much of what is known about how the brain learns has been discovered in the last 25 years. Teachers believe this research challenges many previous assumptions about education and they have begun to apply this knowledge in the classroom. Through their own learning, teachers now know that the limbic system regulates emotions and influences how the brain classifies and selects information to be stored in the long-term memory. Therefore, the greater the emotional impact or connection, the greater the chance the information will be recalled. This research is then applied to the classroom and validates instructional strategies that provide an emotional context for learning.

Cognitive research was not the only element to challenge teachers to look beyond traditional pedagogy. The expectations and requirements of the new world of work are not well served by traditional classrooms. Teachers agree that students of the new millennium need to problem-solve, think independently, show initiative, understand and use technology, work collaboratively and be lifelong learners. Teachers cite, *"If students are to think, they must first be taught the skills of thinking and then placed in situations that cause them to apply their skills. If students are expected to work collaboratively, they need to be taught the skills of collaboration and then*

be provided opportunities to practise these skills by working on meaningful tasks in cooperative groups."

Teachers aim to develop 'brain compatible' classrooms, in which they can set the climate for thinking, teach the skills of thinking, structure the interaction with thinking, and encourage thinking about thinking. The middle school sets the climate by aiming to develop a classroom culture that involves and inspires students to want to learn. Skills are taught through the use of organisers, evaluative tools, cooperative group strategies and social skills. Teachers and students interact with thinking through the development of rich performance tasks. The rich tasks present real problems to solve and engage learners in social actions that have real value in the world. The problems involve identification, analysis and resolution, and require students to analyse, theorise, and engage intellectually with the world.

Extension Plus

The Extension Plus program at South West aims to challenge and extend the more able students in Years 8, 9 and 10 through a series of workshops, special options and excursions. The Extension Plus students are drawn from each Year group at irregular times, and it is believed that the provision of additional opportunities and experiences for them as an academic group will enhance their belief in their own worth and capabilities. Each cohort has a different focus, but all activities are aimed at enriching and/or extending more able students.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

Learning pathways follow the WA Curriculum Framework, utilising the 13 Overarching Statements as guides, underpinned by the 17 Principles for Teaching, Learning and Assessment. In conjunction with these, extensive focus is given to the 14 Enterprise Education Characteristics in assisting with the development and promotion of Learning to Learn strategies and Integrated Studies programs.

Much of the planning focuses upon the need to recognise students' preferred styles of learning and to be aware that high order thinking promotes high order understanding, which subsequently requires high order assessment.

Teachers incorporate significant time for learning strategies within the overall curriculum structure for middle schooling. In addition to two periods of English, Science and Maths, and two to four periods of Arts, Physical Education and Technology and Enterprise, students in Years 8 access six periods of Learning to Learn per week. In Year 9, Learning to Learn gives way to six periods of Integrated Studies.

3.3 Assessment & Reporting

Assessment [

Student portfolios are employed in most Learning Areas for assessing students, utilising criterion rubrics based upon a range of learning strategies and outcomes determined in programs developed by the collaborative teams. Work units are structured to employ a range of low to high order learning strategies and assessment tasks, with increased Rich Task assessment in Year 9. As individual needs vary, so too do individual expectations and assessments, as students journey along learning pathways at varied rates, towards similar outcomes.

Reporting

Student-Focused Reporting is the key strategy in middle schooling. It is also outcomes-focused, based upon both learning frameworks developed by teacher teams and teacher

portfolio assessments throughout each semester. In undertaking responsibility for their own learning, students self-appraise each semester's work, reporting on how they met individual expectations and considerations for the future. Student/teacher conferences aim to moderate and validate students' appraisal of their progress prior to reporting reviews conducted with parents.

The school is also open on a number of mornings so that parents can view the normal educational program in action. At the report afternoon at the beginning of Semester 2, all teachers are available to issue reports and discuss them with parents. This is an essential part of parental communication, and more than 80% of parents take this opportunity to communicate with staff.

3.4 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The Middle School incorporates timetabling of three collaborative teaching teams within each of the three Middle School sub-schools, aiming to:

- Enable all teachers to teach the same learning areas simultaneously in each sub-school;
- Organise at least one common, non-contact time for planning, review and moderation;
- Organise double teaching periods for Learning to Learn sessions;
- Provide the same classroom for students, for the majority of learning; and
- Include six "Learning to Learn" periods per week.

3.5 Professional Development

Professional development plays a significant role in the success of the middle years learning program. Given the quite different culture and pedagogy in these years, all teachers are expected to undertake specific PD and support opportunities in developing skills and understandings. Priorities for all staff include training and development in Learning to Learn strategies, Integrated Studies, Cooperative Groups Strategies, Performance Tasks, Assessment and Working in Teams.

The majority of PD is provided by the Middle School Coordinator, who was previously trained, outside the school, to implement the initial middle schooling trials. The Coordinator is currently, perhaps the most experienced and practically skilled middle schooling professional within the local education system. This means costs for PD are low and, in essence, other teachers and schools access local expertise at South West to support their own program development and implementation.

Other sources of training have included seminars/programs by Barry Bennett and a range of supporting literature resources, focusing on areas such as brain compatibility strategies.

While the school does network with others, the general direction of networks is from other schools seeking direction, ideas and support from South West. Consequently, South West runs annual Middle Schooling Conferences and Expos, sharing its outcomes with and inviting other teachers and schools to share ideas, expertise and concerns. This is a fund-raiser for the school, adding to available resources. It also reinforces the success South West is having in developing learning and learners in the middle years of schooling.

3.6 Special Programs

Staff and Student Organisation

While each middle schooling team operates separately in each sub-school, they operate within the overall culture, parameters and program strategies developed collaboratively by all teams, and they are accountable to the Middle Schooling Coordinator. Ongoing collaboration and reviews refine teaching/learning relationships and outcomes, as well as assessment, reporting and program development.

Within each sub-school, teachers work together closely, focusing upon their Middle School populations, and working with each individual over a two year period. Integrated studies are developed collaboratively, adopting a more generalist pedagogical approach among members of teaching teams. In addition, teachers within each team provide other specialist learning area teaching, such as Maths and Science, maximising the time they spend with students. Moderation, planning, review and continued development are ongoing collaborative initiatives.

Separate heterogenous groupings of Year 8 and Year 9 students make up each of the three Middle School sub-schools. Each teacher is responsible for three classes of 20 students in each of these sub-school Year levels. Typically, there are some 120 students in each Year 8/9 sub-school, along with six middle schooling teachers. Collectively, the three sub-schools are made up of approximately 360 students (180 Year 8 and 180 Year 9) and 18 middle schooling teachers.

Information Technology

The school's information technology system is built on two computer platforms, with IBM computers providing the main teaching and administrative facility. South West Senior High School has a fully networked computer system, with extensive software packages and internet access for students and staff. The optic fibre backbone across the school allows for a sequential connection of computers within individual classrooms.

Vocational Education

In preparing students for future vocations and lifelong learning, South West has developed a very successful careers pathway program, focusing upon coordinated transition needs.

Middle School Year 9 students commence a Career Inquiry program, linking students to outside work. The aim of the program is to promote awareness of, and exposure to, opportunities and experiences that are available. The program includes Work Experience options.

Post Middle School Year 10 students undertake one-hour weekly periods of compulsory vocation education, as well as a week's work experience. The program aims to assist with vocation choices and the development of individual student portfolios, incorporating ongoing acknowledgements of vocation achievements and experiences, as well as frameworks for applications and interviews. The portfolios have become the focal point for student job search. Overall, the program is entirely focused on attaining "real work."

The Kwinana Industry Council in the Excellence in Education Compact

The Kwinana Industry Council in the Excellence in Education Compact program also provides a Transition Guide for students exiting school prior to the end of Year 12. Other supporting programs include:

- The Careers Expo at Rockingham, which assists with transition to tertiary education for TEE students and to TAFE for WAT students;

- Employers – school partnership, where employers contact the school regarding placement opportunities; and

- School Careers Education Service – assisting in a range of employment support, including awareness and applications.

Aboriginal Education Program

The school has developed an Indigenous Education support team that can follow up on student absences, needs and concerns. A special program takes learning out of the school environment into the community. Students respond positively and need to complete practical courses and certificates that require up to 40 hours of programs in the community. These vary from learning and work experience to part time work placement. One example took students to Kalbarri to undertake safety and health programs. All programs have been assisted greatly by Commonwealth funding. Initiatives now see student involvement in traineeships in Year 10, involving learning at TAFE and one day work placements.

The outcome has been a significant improvement in attendance and retention rates.

4 TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

Teachers follow similar lesson frameworks and strategies that are collaboratively developed in the Middle School by all teams. These are highly focused on the Middle School's approach to Learning to Learn and Integrated Studies, leading learning along structured pathways that incorporate ability levels, learning styles, the use of technology, responsibility, research, rich tasks, presentation and varied assessment strategies. Teachers and the principal regularly talk of lifelong learning, which is embedded in the school ethos and practices.

Lessons have clear transition phases that regularly assess and reiterate expectations, learning and objectives. From observation, they typically employ four structured phases:

- Relationships and responsibilities;

- Review and goal setting;

- Activity and engagement; and

- Review and reaffirmation.

The strength of the Middle School is enhanced by its consistency in planning, development, implementation and evaluation. In addition, a belief in what they are doing develops independent learners who are better prepared for future transitions and learning for life.

Recognition of difference

While observations varied between classes, there is evidence of strategies employed in the classroom as isolated situations required. Greater evidence is found in Middle School and whole-school programs that address issues such as Aboriginality, low socio-economic backgrounds, citizenship, leadership and differences between boys and girls. Discussions with both teachers and students emphasised inclusivity and learning to accept differences as strengths of their learning environment. They have developed a

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clear and positive group identity within the Middle School as teaching teams, as form groups, as Year groups and as a collective of Year 8/9 students.

Narrative strategies are commonly employed as part of the activity and engagement lesson phases. In conversation, teachers emphasise the importance of drawing upon personal experiences in promoting understanding, especially in a school with such diverse student backgrounds.

Connectedness
Teachers and students alike recognise the significance of linking learning to the outside world. Students in particular find this domain helps with their understanding and engagement.

Lesson activities are collaboratively developed within a planning framework by teacher teams, particularly in cross-discipline Integrated Studies and Learning to Learn strategies. Learning pathways ensure that students know what is expected, and how they might make their journey; and there is an expectation that they will make a presentation to a wider audience. They include interactions with, and considerations about, the wider world. Information technology is interwoven as a vehicle for learning, wherever possible and appropriate.

Teachers draw students to previous learning, reaffirming and revising depth of understandings and expectations. It is common practice for discussion to involve both teacher and peers assisting others who in turn engage positively with peers who are helping them.

In one example, a teacher reviewed prior knowledge and understandings, utilising practical examples, to reaffirm objectives, expectations and purpose. One student, new to the school and to middle school strategies, was assisted by both the teacher and students. In the course of this exercise other students also indicated varied degrees of uncertainty. This resulted in a review of the strategy, linking it again to activity goals, thereby clarifying understandings. Students also contributed to clarifications and added further ideas.

The inquiry process and graphic organisers are also scaffolded into learning pathways that employ problem-solving through rich tasks, developing individual skills and the capacity to evaluate the quality and relevance of information. The varied activities and organisers enable engagement of student interests and are structured so that all students can achieve success.

Intellectual Quality
Lessons are sequentially structured along learning pathways, with incremental high order thinking, understanding and rich task activities that cater for a variety of needs and abilities. Linking these pathways are student Work Logs and Journals, whereby students map their progress, assessment and personal improvement proposals. These are shared in partnership between students, teachers and parents. Each pathway utilises various assessment and learning strategies that are connected to the outside world. Teachers purposefully incorporate these to develop higher order thinking, understanding and assessment.

Observations also reveal the constant use of metalanguage, explaining and clarifying understanding. Both teachers and peers assist students.

Lessons are typified by opportunities for substantive conversation, between teacher and students and among students, either as a whole class or in group situations. The levels

of engagement reflect sound understanding and knowledge, with students critiquing each other as well as their learning pathway frameworks.

Supportive Environment

In review and goal setting, teachers link past discussions to the task at hand and to future lessons. Objectives are clearly outlined as non-negotiable and negotiable, with opportunity for students to negotiate individual interests or how results might be achieved or presented.

Typically, teachers allow flexible student seating arrangements and time to wind down and socialise in the first lesson phase. This time is used to develop relationships and to enable teachers to address any individual concerns, as well as to share some social time with students. It is also a time where individual responsibilities are reiterated in terms of independent learning skills, as individuals and as a group. The strategic use of the collective group and their relationships is an important factor in motivating student responsibilities so that they feel part of a team and know they will not be able to continue with the team unless and until they have delivered what is expected of them. In this way, the vast majority of students are able to move forward, while a small minority catch up in isolation.

Teachers carefully employ strategies in group dynamics to engage students and maintain their focus throughout the lesson. According to one teacher, group strategies and planned movement are essential for many students, who come from listless home backgrounds and who require some physical release by action during a lesson. The rotation of group members is a very useful strategy, and students are well drilled and versed in the relatively complex rotations, seemingly enjoying them.

Throughout lessons, teachers continually move between groups and review understandings and progress, collectively and individually.

Lessons round off with collective affirmation of progress and understandings, during which peers share findings, outcomes, or opinions, and teachers link these to future lessons and expectations. These sessions might direct students to undertake further research or additional work prior to the next lesson, but teachers are always specific in assisting students develop independence and organisational skills. Outcomes are entered in personal Work Logs and Journals as follow up prerequisites before being able to continue the lesson to its next sequence.

4.2 Lifelong Learning

The explicit and detailed management of lesson frameworks reflects a collaborative commitment to developing lifelong learning skills within the Middle School in order that Year 8 and Year 9 students make a successful transition into Year 10 and post-compulsory education as confident and competent, independent learners. The middle years of school are regarded as critical if students are to maximise future opportunities for learning and life choices. That is why the Middle School sub-schools at South West have taken up the challenge and restructured organisation, pedagogy and curriculum. Observations of classroom culture and outcomes suggest that the school is functioning so successfully.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1 Middle Years reforms

Students are very positive about their middle schooling experiences. They prefer the sub-school structure that offers a smaller and more intimate environment, enabling them to feel part of a team. This is strengthened by Form Rooms that remain constant throughout middle schooling and may even extend beyond into later years. Students comment about being part of a family, where relationships, friendships and trust are high. These smaller, ongoing structures also strengthen family/school relationships, in which both students and parents develop positive relationships with teachers.

Students also comment positively about working in groups, where the climate is open 'busy work' that allows discussion, saying they can also learn from peers as they share ideas and work. This environment, they say, is more conducive to learning than one which is more traditional, and text based. Activity based group work is more varied and can better cater for their interests and abilities. Students say the sub-school structure helps to make them feel more relaxed so that they fit into the school and can enjoy their learning.

Students comment they feel valued and they are confident about contributing to class and group work. They are not afraid to express their views and opinions. Similarly, they feel comfortable about sharing problems, whether personal or about others, with teachers, peers and the School Chaplain because of the level of trust and the bond they have with each other.

5.2 Lifelong Learning

There is general consensus that middle schooling strategies do prepare them for learning and later life. Students feel they have become more aware of the need to be more independent and more responsible for their learning; they are more aware of managing workloads and are better at organising time, information and work practices.

Group strategies incorporated in the middle years programs also promote collaboration and cooperation amongst students. They share information and each other's point of view and believe that this is important because difference and diversity are characteristics of the student body as a result of the variety of cultural backgrounds. They say that they appreciate these differences and that they enjoy learning from their peers. Regardless of abilities, everyone accepts all views, opinions and contributions as part of the learning process.

Lifelong learning strategies employed in middle schooling are recognised by students as preparations for future learning. Programs in Learning to Learn, Integrated Studies, and Extension Plus have helped them to identify their own learning styles and strengths. They have also increased their understanding of which learning strategies suit different tasks. Some students commented that they had helped older brothers or sisters in selecting strategies for their work in senior school and university.

Students say these strategies, combined with learning frameworks and pathways, help them to identify the task at hand, to be aware of expectations and to plan their work in manageable stages that often lead to a rich task, which they enjoy. They also enjoy the balance between non-negotiable expectations and the option to negotiate other aspects of their own learning. In addition, they negotiate aspects of their environment, changing the aesthetics and ambience to make their learning more enjoyable. This promotes their sense of independence about learning. Being able to self-evaluate contributes to their

development into independent learners. The learning skills acquired help select appropriate strategies for tasks, as well as strategies for assessment and for examining their own lives.

Students are aware that learning pathways interlink with the outside world, and make learning more practical because it is based on their own experiences. Many of their rich tasks address issues beyond the school and may include such topics as politics, the workplace, the environment, drugs, and various real life problems. They favour the enquiry approach to learning, which they say develops skills they can see they will use in senior schooling, university, TAFE and the workplace. While Careers is more focused in Year 10, these students are already aware of decisions they will need to make regarding choices about academic and non-academic pathways. Some say they have already identified their career goals and the necessary stages towards achieving these. Others say they are better placed to do so.

Students also favour the increasing options provided in middle schooling because these options allow then to pursue their own interests. Being aware of personal learning preferences and strengths, they have also been able to make sound choices about options such as music and photography, basing their selection on their identified areas of intelligence.

In general, students are extremely positive about their school, their learning environment and themselves.

6   OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes

A consistent message from teachers highlights two key general positives from the middle schooling approach to learning for life at South West Senior High School. With regard to students, the change in pedagogy, organisation and structure for learning is more relevant to their needs. They develop greater confidence and are more engaged in their own learning. Skills for independent learning and lifelong learning are well founded, making the transition to Senior School smoother, and better preparing students for more formal learning in Year 10. They also assist in the choice of academic and vocation options in Years 11/12 and contribute to the process of post-secondary transition.

For teachers, the change to a more generalist, integrated approach to teaching/learning relationships has also been rewarding. The development of new skills, broader understanding in addressing needs, and closer relationships with students have enhanced both teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers comment of rejuvenation in their work and more meaningful approaches and teaching programs. While their workload as members of collaborative teams can be greater at times, the rewards are reportedly well worth the effort.

Currently, specific data are being compiled to compare students from the initial middle schooling project trials with others who are now in Year 12. Information is also being gathered on a range of other academic, social and learning pathway outcomes for these trialled students. They currently make up the largest single cohort in Year 12 and it is noted that they are very prominent in the school's academic and vocational achievements, as well as in aspects of leadership and citizenship, both within and outside the school. Teacher perceptions suggest that these students experience greater success than their peers. They are more confident to 'have a go' and to take risks, and

they look more favourably upon academic success. In addition, teachers claim that these students are more confident and better prepared in terms of independent learning and choices for later life.

A recent School Destinations Survey sought student feedback on the level of support and development that Year 10s currently receive in terms of career preparation. The data strongly support the school and current strategies for promoting life opportunities and student retention. Of the 166 respondents:

- 89% indicated that they would be returning to school for Years 11/12. This represented a significant growth from previous history;
- 9% said that they would seek further training elsewhere; and
- 2% would be seeking work.

With regard to satisfaction with the quality of teaching, students also responded positively, indicating the benefits of the Middle Schooling culture:

- 86% indicated various degrees of satisfaction; and
- 14% indicated various degrees of dissatisfaction.

Students were also positive about the way school has prepared them to meet career goals:

- 93% of students indicated they were satisfied; and
- 7% indicated they were dissatisfied.

Overall, the survey provided support and confirmation about school programs and structures in developing learning pathways for the future.

6.2 Social Outcomes

While there are no current empirical data pertaining to social outcomes, teachers indicate that the middle schooling experience realises significant improvements with student skills and confidence in communication, collaboration and cooperation in a range of settings. Mutual respect, support and acceptance of differences have also markedly improved. Capacity and confidence to contribute as individuals and as groups are indicators of sound citizenship development.

6.3 Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

Teachers collectively indicate that students are more on task and more engaged in their learning as a direct outcome of the lifelong learning strategies employed in middle schooling. The opportunity to spend more time with students enhances relationships and behavioural outcomes, both inside and outside the classroom. More time is spent focusing on individual needs in a preventative framework, than in crisis management. Suspension rates in 2003 are significantly lower than in previous years. This has been attributed to both middle schooling, in terms of its collaborative and cooperative culture, and changes in the approach to student management, which focuses more on counselling and conferencing styles that are embedded in the smaller sub-school structures, making the process more personal and manageable. Similarly, attendance rates have shown improvement. Comparatively, the school's attendance and retention rates are higher than those for high schools. Attendance has also increased significantly among Indigenous students, for whom special programs and teams support different learning needs.

7 CONCLUSION

South West Senior High School has a tradition of innovation and creativity, as evidenced by its many local, national and international awards. Its program for the middle years of schooling is of a similar standard. It is a leader and beacon in this area in Western Australian Government Schooling. This success in middle schooling is widely known, and many teachers from other schools seek support and inspiration from the South West model. Over recent years, a transformation has occurred, particularly in the post-compulsory years, where retention rates have increased significantly, as have numbers of students undertaking academic options. The success in the middle years is translating itself into later schooling and beyond. The school now runs professional development programs and conferences for others. Teachers remain committed to the middle schooling program and jointly continue to seek improvement. While once the middle years environment was not such a desirable area for teaching, it is now a part of the school that teachers do not wish to leave. This in itself is testimony to the efforts and commitment by the school and staff to develop successful lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling.

NORTH COAST CLUSTER LEARNING PROJECT (WA)
Learning and Teaching in Years 6-9

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location
The North Coast cluster is situated along a coastal corridor from Perth, Western Australia, extending from Scarborough to Butler and it includes six schools of which the case-study focused upon three: Irene McCormack Catholic Education College – Butler; St Simon Peter – Ocean Reef; and St Johns Scarborough.

Catholic Education Office (CEO) Western Australia sought to explore ways in which this shift in culture and pedagogy could best be adapted to teaching/learning strategies in the middle years of schooling better to meet the needs of young adolescents in preparing them as lifelong learners. Schools in the North Coast cluster were invited by CEO to be part of a Quality Teaching Program (QTP) initiative to undertake collaborative action research and implement findings suited to each school's needs.

The project aimed to:

- Identify the professional development needs for middle years teachers;

- Enable teachers to enhance skills and competencies by networking with peers involved in other middle years schooling models;

- Enable teachers to develop materials and skills that would inform and assist other models in the middle years; and

- Understand more fully, the special needs of students in this particular phase of development, for promoting learning skills for life.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy
Irene McCormack Catholic College
Schooling for the middle years at the College is regarded as being about pedagogy, not structure. The school aims to take each student, upon entry, and best determine how to accommodate the student's personal, social and learning needs. Supporting this aim is a sustainable student behaviour system featuring the belief that the dignity of each individual is central to preparation for life and learning for life.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School
Policies and practices at St Simon Peter School are based on a view of schooling that sees parents and staff working together to ensure that each child grows spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically.

The school community aims to provide challenges for the growth of the whole person, within a framework of Catholic values, in which everyone strives to live in harmony with

each other and the environment through the school motto "Love One Another" and through explicit school goals.

Saint John's School Scarborough

The school is an educating community that involves students, staff and parents in a welcoming and nurturing atmosphere that is helping students to make sense of their faith in their daily lives and culture. This emanates from an organised, open and disciplined environment that enables children to grow towards their true potential, developing the responsibilities and respect this brings to themselves and others. With this, the school generates hope and seeks the truth in all its endeavours as it strives for excellence.

2.2 School Structure

Irene McCormack Catholic College

Being a new College, the middle years form the initial student population. The school has moved away from a typical faculty heads and coordinator structure. All teachers are required to undertake curriculum development and programming, taking charge of one of the learning areas in ensuring accountability for outcomes within the state Curriculum Frameworks. In support, the school provides additional teacher release time and smaller classes. The middle school environment is promoted and supported by the principal, staff and school community.

Saint Simon Peter

As part of the QTP project, participating Years 6/7 classes were grouped with teacher teams that collaboratively explored organisational and pedagogical reform in developing a middle schooling culture. These have been supported by the principal with resources and collaborative non-contact time.

Saint John's School Scarborough

Saint John's School is a traditionally structured primary school. With support of the principal and enthusiasm of the Year 7 teacher, the Year 7 class was chosen to be part of the QTP project, gaining additional resources and support in developing a focus on negotiated learning.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning in the Middle Years

Irene McCormack Catholic College

Issue for Investigation

The issue for investigation into teaching/learning relationships at Irene McCormack College was an awareness that some students demonstrated behaviours that indicated that school was a waste of time for them. Staff wanted to engage these students and develop a more meaningful curriculum.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Issue for Investigation

Much of the reason for participation in the North Coast Project was the need to address an ongoing lack of focus on learning by male students and others with auditory processing difficulties. In previous years, programs took the form of a learning contract. Students were given a contract each week where they were asked to complete a set number of tasks from a selection of activities. But it was of concern to staff that, while these tasks were connected by a common theme, they did not allow for the different ways in which students learn. As part of the project, teachers explored multiple intelligences theory and accessed in-service courses related to engaging learners and learning.

Saint John's Primary School

Issue for Investigation

The prime issue was to develop negotiated learning through a unit of work that did not repeat ideas and concepts taught in other years, and that the children could own, causing them to become enthusiastic about learning.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

Irene McCormack Catholic College

The College has evolved a concise framework as its established curriculum, linking core beliefs to every other aspect of the framework and the core learning areas. The framework includes:

- Core Beliefs. These form the very centre of the framework and are seen as the foundation of learning for life;

- Spiritual Formation and Personal Care. These develop a single sense of place and purpose;

- A Learning culture that is student-centred and focused upon development of lifelong learning; and

- Interaction in the Curriculum.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

From their research, professional development and classroom observations, staff shared perceptions that students want to have more input into their learning, that they work better in small groups, prefer hands-on activities, and need interaction with teacher teams. This led to further exploration of how the learning program might be structured in order to address these needs.

St John's School Scarborough

Curriculum development is based on the WA Curriculum framework and has evolved a Concept Progress and Planning Map for the whole school. The middle years teacher works within this framework with six other teachers in ensuring required learning outcomes are achieved, as well as incorporating structures for negotiated learning for Year 7 students.

3.3 Assessment & Reporting

Assessment

For all three schools assessment combines a range of strategies, including:

- Ongoing classroom evaluations and shared assessment;

- Teacher tests and assessments;

- Assessment rubrics which enable teacher evaluation and student self assessment, moderated through teacher conferencing;

- Students identifying their achievements and making comments justifying their self evaluation as well as area/s for improvement through three way conferencing; and

- Progress files or journals, quizzes, video, conferencing and electronic portfolios.

Reporting

- Similarly, the schools employ all common reporting strategies, including:

- Formal written school reporting that incorporates the state Curriculum Framework outcome statements;

- Informal reporting strategies;

- Parent Interviews and parent/teacher nights;

- Portfolios and classroom learning journeys providing information and samples of student work and progress;

- Links between classroom and home; and

- Welcoming additional parent contact regarding student progress throughout the year, keeping parents well-informed and strengthening school/community partnerships.

3.4 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

Irene McCormack Catholic College

Block timetabling is a focus, providing common teacher collaborative times for planning, review and evaluation of programs and student needs. Year 8/9 students are organised into Care groups, with a teacher carer (three in Year 8 and three in Year 9) who remains with them for their duration in the middle school. Students remain in Care groups for practical lessons, with Carers teaching up to two or three disciplines. In addition, these teachers will continue with the Care Groups from Year 8 to Year 12, as the school expands.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Timetabling arrangements are more flexible, enabling teacher team collaboration in planning, assessment and moderation. Students in Year 6/7 are homogeneously grouped in multi-age class groupings, and remain in these groups with the same teacher teams for two years.

St John's School Scarborough

With only one middle years' focus class, there are few timetabling issues that impact on the program. The teacher maximises and adapts lesson times through integrated learning and varied activities as well as accommodating specialist lessons. Additional access to technology has been built into the program.

3.5 Professional Development

QTP Action Learning Project - Learning and Teaching in Years 6-9 North Coast Cluster

The 'Learning and Teaching in Years 6–9' project aimed to engage teachers in an action-learning project. The project enabled Year 6-9 teachers to reflect on their classroom practice, share ideas, undertake research and compare findings with others in the cluster. Middle schooling research indicates the need for teachers to reflect

continually on their practice if they are to be successful in meeting the needs of the students they teach.

The process used in the project included: a full day conference - 'An Introduction to middle schooling'; a full day conference - 'Evaluation & Review in the Middle Years of Schooling'; a school visit - 'Establishing the action learning focus'; and a final conference.

3.6 Special Programs

Irene McCormack Catholic College

QTP Project

The aim of the project was to explore, develop and implement a 'Code of Teaching practice' in promoting appropriate teaching/learning relationships that addressed all student needs. It challenged safe 'chalk and talk' practices, moving participating teachers towards more appropriate pedagogy that would engage student learning. These include development and delivery of programs that are more practical and experiential, student-centred and with connections to real life; and, preparation of students to take charge of their own learning, not only for school, but for life in general. Linked into the programs are strategies for learning and Multiple Intelligences, aimed at identifying personal learning styles and developing these as a foundation for lifelong learning. These commonly support integrated studies, where Core Teachers spend more time with students in their Core Group through cross-discipline teaching of up to two to three subject areas.

Community Service

In developing a sense of personal and social dignity, the school employs a policy where students undertake up to 40 hours of community work, per year. These activities include providing assistance to needy people and organisations, as well as local projects, out of school hours. Students maintain their own logs and have accepted the program positively, knowing they have contributed to others in need or to community initiatives that benefit the whole community. Examples in 2003 included work with St Vincent de Paul, wheelchair workshops, and community help, such as gardening and painting.

On-Line Maths

The school has developed an on-line mathematics program aimed at addressing varied needs and student learning rates. Students are able to roll through units of work, completing them at their own pace. The integration between maths and technology is proving popular with students.

Information Technology

Information Technology is integrated into program planning as a learning tool. IT incorporates web site development, publications, presentations and other multi-media utilities, such as digital photography and video. In English, an accelerated reading program has been developed on-line, linking the library to the classroom. Library books are coded in levels, with on-line questions developed about the books for students to follow up. The program is both popular and successful.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

On Line Modules

Programs for student on-line learning are developed through thematic studies, with varied learning styles and difficulty pathways, which students negotiate and select based upon their own preferences and abilities. They are then required to define their objectives and processes and how they would go about doing these. Students are expected to undertake at least one main activity per week.

Group Dynamics:

Group work strategies promote shared and independent learning, as well as greater collaboration and interaction between adjoining classes and teacher teams. Two adjoining classes can be taken separately by individual teachers or collectively, by either or both teachers. Students enjoy the shared class setting and working collaboratively in groups.

Focus on Boys:

A deliberate effort is being made to challenge the 'macho' stereotyping of males and subsequent anti-social and anti-academic behaviours. A key strategy is through dance. The program uses secondary students, to assist and model dancing. This has led to the development of a Boys Dance Group, which now forms part of the local North Coast Youth Touring Expo.

Gifted and Talented Program:

The school has made a major investment for those students who have excelled and require differential curriculum in meeting their needs, as well as keeping them engaged and challenged in their learning. The school offers a range of local program options to meet these needs.

Pastoral Care:

The learning environment is also enhanced through the school's Social Skills Program and Personal Development Program. These programs foster skills for life and are supported by Religious Studies. Together they focus on the individual and on the learning community, developing an environment founded upon strong values and relationships that provide the foundation for positive self esteem and lifelong learning.

Transition:

The connection between primary and secondary is developing strongly, with a focus on improving student transition. As well as meetings, part of the process includes Heads of Department on-site observations of Year 7 students and primary teaching practices.

St John's Primary School

QTP Project

Issue for Investigation

Students in Years 6 and 7 often complained about repetition of topics and some were becoming disengaged and quite disinterested in their work. The challenge was to design a curriculum so that it was less repetitive, more meaningful to students and able to produce teaching strategies and negotiated learning activities that assist students to achieve desired outcomes. Content was divided across Years 6 and 7 and a topics grid was created. The curriculum is negotiated with students being specific about non-negotiable and negotiable outcomes. Students were also surveyed about their learning preferences.

The Learning Assistance Programme (LAP)

LAP provides an opportunity for positive parental, volunteer and community participation in schools. It enables volunteers to work with students on a one-to-one basis and develops self-esteem and confidence in participants. It builds bridges between students, teachers, parents and the wider community. Parents or volunteers from the community come to the school and work with a particular student who has been identified as needing support. Students participate in a variety of experiences depending upon individual needs.

Enrichment Programme

St. John's offers an enrichment programme for gifted and talented students. This programme provides academic extension for students from Years 4-7, interacting with intellectual peers in a withdrawal programme to allow student talents to emerge, to be recognised and to be developed. These activities employ strategies and skills to develop logical thinking, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, values clarification, and ways of enhancing the self esteem of the gifted and talented student.

4 TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

All three schools are undergoing relatively early phases of reform. While understandings and discussions about Productive Pedagogies vary, planning and developments from the QTP project support teachers' views that they are moving towards greater acceptance of these concepts, making teaching/learning relationships more student-centred and adapting traditional pedagogies to more relevant learning needs.

Recognition of difference

The project objectives were quite specific for all schools, and this domain is not as prevalent in planning or classroom observation. But a sense of group-identity, and citizenship development, are implicit in discussion with teachers and in procedural operations within classrooms and within the schools. Recognition of difference and acceptance of diversity are embodied in overall school philosophies and visions.

Connectedness
Irene McCormack Catholic College

Teacher discussion emphasised that learning is planned through integrated themes that incorporate specific learning skills. These include planning for lifelong learning skills in preparing students for life choices and opportunities, such as Life Skills through the Humanities; Personal Development; Social Development; Self Esteem; and Organisational Skills. Wherever possible and appropriate, other teachers also attempt to integrate cross-discipline areas in planning.

Part of many programs is an expectation by teachers of student presentations, sharing their work and outcomes with teachers, peers or wider audiences.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Discussions with two teachers indicated how lessons are a series of integrated studies, based upon the term themes, such as Water, that integrate Society and Environment, Science, Art, English, Maths and Technology. These teachers work in collaboration sharing their expertise. They spoke enthusiastically about integrated themes developed on-line and implemented through a common bank of radio networked IT resources linked to the library.

Saint John's Primary School

Teacher discussion about negotiated learning emphasises the importance of planning and ensuring students understand the purpose, objectives and individual responsibilities in working towards outcomes. Common strategies include overviewing and reviewing project aims and expectations, as well as directing students to share issues and problems they experience in meeting their responsibilities. This practice is often used by the teacher as part of negotiated learning, where students understand and accept the balance between negotiable and non-negotiable outcomes. From student discussion and project progress the teacher is able to guide students to problem solving strategies and self -assessment.

Intellectual Quality
Irene McCormack Catholic College

Teachers discussed the importance of developing independent skills, not only for personal organisation and responsibilities, but also to develop the ability to critique their own learning outcomes and progress. Rubrics for student self-assessment identify where students are in terms of achievement and development. Students then justify their decisions on an assessment sheet and propose actions and improvements for following activities or terms. These are conferenced with the teacher for moderation and are shared with parents. Student, teacher and parents sign the sheets as overt agreement and commitment.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

The teacher teams plan lessons collaboratively, incorporating non-negotiable requirements from the Curriculum Framework and negotiated aspects of learning by the students. Teachers share common assessment tasks and strategies leading to common student input, reflection and reporting to parents. Students have the opportunity to develop independent learning preferences and personal organisation within the collaborative planning framework where expectations are explicit. Within the framework, learning draws on student knowledge and experiences, with teachers guiding students to high order processing in rich tasks and links to the outside world. Teachers and students monitor and evaluate progress through rubrics, which they are able to link to skills and learning in terms of Curriculum Framework Outcome Statements. As a consequence, teachers say students understand their state of progress and what is required of them to develop towards the next outcomes, which they can share with parents to improve their understanding.

Teacher use of metalanguage and substantive conversation are features of lessons.

Supportive Environment
Irene McCormack Catholic College

Specific understandings and outcomes are identified by teachers as core requirements to deliver accountable outcomes within the WA Curriculum Framework. But students can also determine a range of processes or pathways for learning and review. These include negotiated assessment options and choices for learning strategies and focus areas.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Teachers say they regularly employ collaborative group strategies, sharing opinions, proposals and findings, and discussing how they might undertake problem solving. These strategies promote student engagement throughout lessons and enhance broader participation.

Problem-solving, research and student opinions are constantly used in negotiating learning. All responses are treated equally by teacher and students. They are often shared with partners in their project groups and parents in follow up work. Students discuss ways of achieving group agreement and ways of overcoming interruptions. They discuss how they each prefer to work, either individually or with others. They also review their roles and responsibilities in collaborative activities in order to achieve the identified aims. They determine how these roles might be allocated. They record their responsibilities, expectations, goal setting and due dates in their Learning Journals. In this manner, students feel empowered and have a sense of ownership of their work.

4.2 Lifelong Learning

All three schools have developed collaborative planning frameworks as a direct outcome from the QTP project. These frameworks indicate that schools are identifying key skills for lifelong learning as their planning evolves. The collaborative frameworks promote a holistic approach to learning that is more engaging and that actively develops independent learners, who teachers claim are more responsible and productive than they were as a result of past practices. (See diagram 1: Synopsis of Combined Planning Framework, at the end of this case study.)

The foundations have been laid for development of lifelong learning skills. Teachers at all three schools are enthusiastic about the outcomes from their projects and plan further development in the future.

5   STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1 Middle Years Reforms

Irene McCormack Catholic College

Students generally appreciate the opportunity to commence secondary schooling in the smaller, more intimate College environment, where they do not have to consider issues with more senior students. The intimacy allows them to enjoy closer relationships with each other and with staff.

On issues related to special groupings, male students seem to enjoy gender split groupings for some learning areas, claiming they can talk about 'boys' things' as well as just being themselves.

All students feel confident and valued when making contributions in class. They put this down to the size of the school and of the classes, as well their relationships with each other. They say that teachers are open to ideas and accept contributions equally. They are comfortable about sharing problems with teachers who they say care about them and about their learning. Their only concern is whether this environment can be sustained as the school expands to Year 12.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Students state they enjoy working in groups and interacting with each other and with the teacher. Relationships amongst students and with teachers are positive.

Students enjoy their explorations in Multiple Intelligences and are aware of their strengths. They also find the on-line tasks both interesting and challenging. They particularly like the way these tasks are designed with options to use their learning

strengths and opportunities to negotiate areas of interest. They say they find this way of learning more engaging and that they are prepared to undertake more than the requirements set by teachers.

Saint John's Primary School

Students comment on the positive aspects of being able to negotiate aspects of their learning. They enjoy the responsibilities of greater personal organisation and the combination of research and practical application through integrated learning and projects.

Students also enjoy opportunities to determine with whom they work and the delegation amongst themselves of aspects of work undertaken. They feel they have greater freedom both in and out of the classroom. This gives them a sense of being trusted and valued. They also see this style of learning as more motivating and interesting.

5.2 Lifelong Learning

Irene McCormack Catholic College

Students are positive about the good school management and behaviour policy, which helps them to deliver what is required but which is also fair to all students. They see its operation as being close to realities in life which they all need to face. In essence, students feel the policy helps their own organisational skills and the addressing of deadlines. Those who wish to learn and are motivated to learn can do so because they and their learning environment are supported. Students also add the importance of their religious grounding in providing further positive support and direction for learning and life. Linked to this is the school's Community Service Program, which students see as beneficial for personal development and for appreciating differences and roles within the community.

Students also compare different teaching styles and lessons, citing preference for the less traditional pedagogy in which lessons were less teacher-centred and more practical, especially when connected to the wider world and career thinking. Classes that are more engaging are those that include group work, student discussion and having a say about learning, as in the North Coast Project classes and others where similar strategies are being adopted. They particularly enjoy integrating IT into their learning, citing examples of school web site development and producing their own Year Book, through which skills are developed in editing, communications, design, photography and other multi-media resources.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Students are positive about their awareness of Multiple Intelligences and preferred learning styles. They enjoy the more holistic and connected approach to learning and opportunities for choice. They enjoy using IT for their learning and presentations, as well as options for on-line programs where they can incorporate their interests and have a say about their progress. Students feel less pressured about their work as it is tailored to individual needs and abilities. Some students may complete one project in a week, while others may do three; yet everyone feels more engaged and focused on what they are doing and meeting expectations.

Saint John's School Scarborough

While the project is still in its early phase, students recognise the link between developing independent and collaborative learning skills with future learning. Even at this stage, students exhibit greater maturity by the manner in which they approach and

undertake their work. They enjoy opportunities to shape learning pathways and their connection to the outside world.

The success of the program to date has been acknowledged by parents who have nominated the middle years teacher for a national award of teacher excellence. Parents are delighted with the outcomes they see and comment about significant improvements among students including: being better prepared for learning at high school; becoming independent and responsible for their learning; having the capacity for greater negotiation about their learning; developing collaborative skills and respect for others; and developing a sense that they own their learning and that their contributions are valued.

6 OUTCOMES

Irene McCormack Catholic College

While the middle years focus is still only in its early days, teachers share the perception that changes being implemented in teaching/learning strategies are already having a positive impact on the learning environment. Students are more engaged, more positive and more confident about their own learning and development for life.

Teachers involved in the Project, and others who also wish to explore their own practices through observation and interactions, have seen the benefits brought about by changes in pedagogy and curriculum. What commenced as a small project now has the capacity to influence the whole school in terms of better addressing the needs of students in the middle years and preparing them for lifelong learning.

Teachers are also enjoying the change, particularly the development of a generalist approach in cross-discipline areas and Core Groups and the opportunity to spend more time and to develop deeper relationships with students. This will be further enhanced with teachers following their students as they progress through the years.

Saint Simon Peter Primary School

Teachers feel more confident and more rewarded, indicating that the new teaching/learning strategies enhance relationships and outcomes in the classroom. They feel rejuvenated in their work and are investigating the possibility of remaining with students as they progress from Year 6 to Year 7 in order to develop relationships further and to improve independent learning strategies.

In terms of student transition to high school, teachers believe these students are more mature, more self-confident and more positive about their learning. They are generally more motivated towards, and better prepared for, ongoing learning.

Saint John's School Scarborough

Students are engaged and motivated and feedback from parents indicates they are delighted with their child's progress and enthusiasm. Working this way enables the teacher to develop a better insight and understanding of student learning needs and how to address them. The topics grid allows for flexibility of concepts without repetitiveness. This approach also ensures that the curriculum outcomes are being addressed. It is planned to continue with the development of the topics grid and to focus further on skills development. This will enable the framing of a skills grid that will identify incremental skills development and a variety of associated strategies.

7 CONCLUSION

The learning undertaken by these teams has clearly impacted on future planning in schools. A common concern relates to the need to share the research findings with the whole staff since, in all cases, the research findings have impacted to varying degrees across the whole school. The action research undertaken in these schools has informed future planning in schools, particularly in terms of designing professional development, which is relevant and responsive to the needs of students, teachers and the development of lifelong learning skills. This project illustrates the power of school - based research in having the potential to change practice and reform the middle years.

Diagram 1: Synopsis of Combined Planning Framework

Student Negotiable:

Learning styles
Activity options
Sharing work
Presentation

Non Negotiable:

Curriculum Frameworks
Outcomes

Integration:

Programs where possible
From KLA's
E.g. S&E; Maths; Science;
Art; English; etc

Connectedness:
Excursions/Incursions
Social & Environmental
issues
Presentations – local and
wider audiences

Lesson Scaffolding:

Lessons with learning to
learn and intelligences
strategies; and levels of
difficulty

Thematic
Learning:

IT:

Learning tools in activities
On line programs and
activities
Library Focus

Assessment:
Self assess Rubrics
Common assessment tasks
Tests
Quizzes
Electronic portfolio
(Web cam; Text; etc)

Library:

Research skills
Referencing
Resources

Reporting:
Formal semester reports
Expanding Outcomes to
rubric with identified
indicators, able to be used
for reporting and
electronic portfolios

Rewards:

Games
Computer activities
IT activities
Negotiated Learning

FAIRSTAR STATE HIGH SCHOOL (QLD)

1. SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1. Location

Fairstar State High School is a public, secondary school in Brisbane. It was established forty years ago as a suburban high school servicing an affluent mainstream community. Demographic changes in the community have transformed the school from this original charter, and urban sprawl has pushed the city boundaries so that the suburb is now considered to be inner-city Brisbane. Fairstar State High School is serviced by extensive city train and bus services. The school is located in a multicultural hub of Brisbane, servicing parents of students of mixed socio-economic backgrounds. It is one of eight state high schools in the Coopers Plains district of Education Queensland.

1.2. About the School

Throughout 2002-03 the school underwent significant infrastructure changes that cost around $3.5 million, as part of the government commitment to revitalising aging schools. This has included a re-paint and re-fit of existing teaching and administrative spaces in the school, along with a range of new facilities -- such as new science laboratories, gymnasium, outdoor amphitheatre and sporting facilities, administrative building, refurbished language centre, upgrade of performing arts facilities; and extensive landscaping, fencing and resurfacing of roadways. The school has internal security systems, with digital cameras monitoring the grounds. A new student uniform ensures the overall feel of the school is of a renewed, revitalised and modern place of learning.

Coinciding with the renewal of the school facilities, a new school principal was appointed in 2002. This change of leadership was timely, given that it paralleled the revitalisation of the aging infrastructure. Inspired by this opportunity, a leadership and curriculum renewal program was begun, aimed at positioning the school as a quality, viable secondary schooling option in the community, able to provide students with a range of pathways to work and further study. The newly-appointed principal initiated a whole-school process of reform, based on gathering and analysing data. This process identified issues symptomatic of the need for significant change in leadership, curriculum and structures to improve student engagement in learning. Issues included low achievement and tertiary entrance scores, and high truancy rates. Student non-engagement also manifested as low participation in cross-curricular activities, with violence and vandalism indicative of deterioration in school-community relationships. Planning for a whole-school approach, including re-conceptualisation of across school leadership roles enabled implementation of a new focus in 2003.

According to the school prospectus, the school motto is "Many kinds of excellence", and this vision is supported by "valuing, modelling and focusing on: achievement,

commitment, diversity and tolerance of difference, behavioural accountability, creativity, *lifelong learning*, and respect for ourselves, our school, and our community".   This very clear reference to lifelong learning, and the ways in which this is achieved in the middle years, is of particular interest in this study.

1.3. Students/Staff/Community

The school caters for around 1200 students in Years 8-12, with a teaching staff of 96, and a total staff of almost 150.   The school is a highly multicultural, school, and includes:
- 250 ESL unit students
- A further 300 NESB students
- 55 International Student Program students
- 40 Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students
- 16 Special Education unit students.

Students come from 68 countries of the world, their parents from 89 countries. There are 70 primary feeder schools for the approximately 130 Year 8 students. The school prospectus articulates the philosophy that the school, parents and students join together in a partnership of learning, and this relationship is an ongoing part of being effective educators.

2. UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1. Philosophy

The school renewal in the major areas of leadership and curriculum reform has as its focus the middle years of schooling, in this case defined as students in Years 8, 9 and 10, linking the years between primary school and the senior high school.   There is a focus on teachers as learners, and students as lifelong learners.   Some of the strategies used to assist in the formulation of this philosophy have included:
- Renewing the school vision and motto "Many Kinds of Excellence" and establishing school values through a community conference involving staff, students, parents and community members;
- Research by staff into the best practice of other schools across Australia, with almost all teaching staff involved in visits to a range of locations including South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and throughout Queensland;
- Sharing staff discoveries and learning on specific initiatives through full staff meetings and faculty meetings in an ongoing, collegial atmosphere;
- Participating in professional development in a range of areas, including unpacking and coming to terms with the mandated eight junior curriculum Key Learning Areas (KLAs) which underpin change in the Years 1-10 curriculum across Australia;
- Accessing the input of professionals in the middle schooling arena, including leaders of the University of Queensland's School Reform Longitudinal Study of effective teaching practice in the middle years of schooling;

- Accessing an educational consultant as a critical friend on an ongoing, independent basis to assist the principal and staff through the middle years reform process;
- Initiating a mandate for change focusing on the principles of middle schooling, based on teachers working across disciplines in Years 8 and 9 in trans-disciplinary learning teams;
- Developing a focus on curriculum and teaching practice change that goes hand-in-hand with a more supportive pastoral care program across the whole school; and
- Designing a Curriculum Framework to support change through a focus on the student outcomes to be achieved, both academically and socially, supported by specific teaching strategies and underpinned by changes in Fairstar's structures, leadership format and culture.

The reforms have at their core a culture of research - that is, of educational trends and reforms - combined with the unique context of Fairstar State High students. Some of the informing evidence-based assessment of the need for a new philosophy for the middle years included:

- Education Queensland School Opinion Survey (SOS) data: Fairstar showed below average results compared to both 'like' and 'all' schools' on a range of indicators in teacher, parent and student satisfaction. This included judging if this was a 'good school', teaching practices, facilities and technology. But no visible intervention action was occurring; staff had anecdotal 'gut feelings' about performance, but no dialogue existed with staff concerning the actual data and finding whole school solutions. .

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- QSA (QBSSSS) and EQ Data warehouse data: Fairstar's comparative achievement data showed below state average Year 10 and Year 12 results, was 15% below the state average on the Queensland Core Skills Test for Year 12 students (8 students out of 230 received 'A's with over 50% receiving a 'D' or 'E'), and had a truancy rate of over 20%. Strategic planning to address these issues was not put in place; in fact, some structures were actually removed that may have supported better tracking of students. For example, the removal of roll mark classes, which effectively decreased the staff's monitoring and intervention capacity, and made them largely unaware of these ongoing issues.

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- Staff and parent interviews: The new principal gave staff and parents the chance to be interviewed to develop some 'face validity data' to drill down into the existing EQ-generated information. An interview format which covered areas of achievement and areas for change provided qualitative information to triangulate with the quantitative achievement data. This led to the establishment of school-based priorities, with a major priority area being identified as an overt need for improvement in leadership focus. Other areas included the implementation of consistent policies and procedures, stronger behaviour management processes, instilling stronger student commitment, and change in curriculum.

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- EQ expectations for Leadership and Management: As well as lack of intervention, it was discovered that a range of departmental and legal issues

showed a failure of the school leadership to implement basic requirements in day to day school operations. For example, financial systems were not in place, making it impossible for Budget Managers to monitor their cost centres and leading to practices of suspected fraud and non-compliance with legislative requirements.

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• Curriculum Change**:** While an attempt towards recognising curriculum change had begun, the lack of a cohesive approach underpinned by a considered professional development program meant that even though the system had expectations of school change in areas such as the implementation in both HPE and Science KLAs, no change had occurred.

2.2. School Structure

The following model was adopted as the new structure, around which the curriculum focus and the development of support for teachers and students is based.
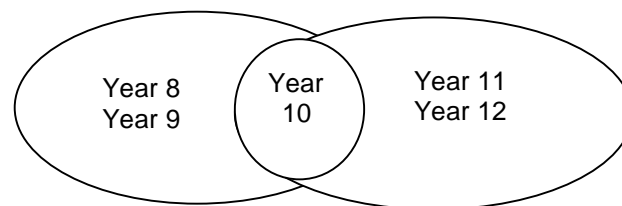
The school operates a split shift, with Years 8-10 commencing at 9.15 and completing at 3.05; while Years 11 and 12 begin their day at 8.40 and finish at 2.30. This enables better use of facilities and greater access to technology for all students, and formalises the middle years as having, in part at least, an identity separate from the senior years of schooling.

3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1. Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

Fairstar has identified what it terms 'essential learnings' that all students should possess when they finish middle schooling. The primary goal of pedagogy and the curriculum is for students to become lifelong learners; and by that, they mean that students:
   • not only possess knowledge but that they also possess a range of flexible skills;
   • are critical thinkers and can apply these abilities to their learning;
   • understand the connectedness of their learning to the world around them; and
   • can see the importance of continuing to be learners throughout their lives.

Fairstar High focuses on these areas for middle years student learning:
- KLA Core Learning outcomes;
- The Productive Pedagogies of Intellectual Quality and Connectedness through a trans-disciplinary approach; and
- Recognition of Diversity and Social Support through new school structures.

The rationale provided by the school for this approach has a foundation in the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Survey, and in the recent reforms in middle years learning in Queensland – very much a research-informed agenda. Hence, lifelong learning is an overt goal which is identified in the literature and philosophy of the school.

3.2. Middle Years Curriculum

The trans-disciplinary curriculum focus is intended to facilitate the development of a more vital curriculum program that has stronger Intellectual Quality and that supports students to understand the Connectedness of their learning. For Fairstar High, curriculum that is trans-disciplinary:
- has a student-centred focus rather than a subject/content focus;
- means a shift from the focus on teaching to focusing on learning, which is achieved by teachers talking and planning across disciplines to support learning;
- means that disciplines/subjects/KLAs remain the core of the learning curriculum and links are made through the learning experiences when appropriate;
- enables the curriculum to find the areas that are linked and ensure curriculum is not repeated; and
- provides students with the opportunity to test their understanding of learning across disciplines by completing some tasks that reach across disciplines.

This trans-disciplinary approach was specifically adopted to avoid the insecurity and resistance from teachers which often go hand-in-hand with curriculum reform that focuses on the integration of subjects/KLAs.

Embedded in the middle years Curriculum Plan is the basis of the school's Literacy Plan. This builds a focus on literacy, as well as numeracy skills, as they become the responsibility of teaching across the whole curriculum, not just in specific subject areas. This is a crucial part of students' learning to understand how to apply what they learn.

3.3. Assessment and Reporting

The school has been considering the possibilities for collecting data to determine the efficacy of their overall middle years strategy. In the first instance, the shift to KLAs that has accompanied the curriculum renewal marks the need for a major overhaul of the ways of reporting outcomes for KLAs, and to that end, trials of software are underway. The school has determined not to assess and report on all of the Core Learning Outcomes (CLOs) of the KLAs, and this is consistent with education policy

in the state.   Instead, common CLOs across disciplines that can be taught in a trans-disciplinary way are being determined.

Other areas of middle years reform the school has identified that it wishes to determine the efficacy of, include:
- The capacity for students to develop more meaningful relationships.   This has been considered in the reforms with pastoral care initiatives such as students having interactions with fewer people and more time to develop their relations, with both classroom teachers, and those supporting students, to achieve social outcomes. The House sub-school structure Fairstar has implemented enables this to occur. For instance, students see the same Manager for all support and behaviour issues, and the Managers monitor the absences of students on a weekly basis.

- A clear behaviour management approach that supports students, parents and staff to form a stronger partnership, including putting in place a Behaviour Flowchart. This is a strategy to deal with misdemeanours appropriately - as the school has a history of not attending forcefully to unacceptable behaviour, and of disrespect for senior administrators.

3.4. Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

In 2003 implementation of the mandate for change across the school commenced. The first cohort of Year 8 students began their high school year with teachers from trans-disciplinary Learning Teams. Each Year 8 class has a Learning Team of teachers of between 5 and 6 (usually only 5). Fairstar has a Workplace Reform in place that has seen management positions sacrificed for increased teacher allocations. This has meant class sizes being reduced to about 20 in the Year 8 classes (where they were typically 30). This trans-disciplinary team of teachers plan together, looking at ways to support both curriculum delivery and individual students.

The changes to leadership structures included new positions as Deans of Students and Learning Team Leaders, working together with the restructured Heads of School, and all within a House sub-school structure. This shared leadership enables shared responsibility for student support and behaviour management, and for more effective monitoring and support of students in terms of their educational engagement. This has led to a new school culture being developed, based on the concepts of collective responsibility.

The first cohort of Year 8 students was also provided with home rooms for many of their lessons in order to build up a sense of community and belonging. They have fewer subjects than in the past because now they only study the 8 KLAs, thereby enabling more time in these areas for in-depth learning experiences.

Students in Year 9 in 2004 will have the opportunity to choose from options in Technology, The Arts and LOTE (which is not compulsory after Year 8). The Learning Teams strategy will continue, especially in the areas of English, SOSE, Mathematics, Science and HPE, with teachers working across disciplines to plan and

deliver learning experiences. Year 9 students will keep the same homeroom as they had in Year 8 and as far as possible at least one of their teachers from Year 8 will follow them through to Year 9.

In 2005 Year 10 will become the next stage of the middle years curriculum change process. It is likely that the proposed program will enable students to study six disciplines (subjects) that align to the senior programs in Years 11 and 12. These programs will focus on experiential learning through in-depth projects and organised experiences, enabling students to gain real understanding of the disciplines before embarking on their senior study choices.

3.5. Professional Development

At the core of the reforms at Fairstar High is a focus on teacher professional development. A restructuring of leadership within the school, combined with the curriculum changes for the middle years, required commitment from teachers for any possibility of effectiveness. Staff were, and continue to be, engaged as active participants in the reform processes. This process has involved professional development about middle years, including interstate school visits, conference attendance, as well as staff training in leadership roles and responsibilities. Whole-of-school professional development activities were undertaken to facilitate the reforms, and the dispersed leadership model now in place provides greater opportunity for staff exercising management roles. The school was recently successful in gaining a National Award for Quality Schooling in School Leadership based on these reforms.

3.6. Special Programs

In 2003 the school commenced a Mathematics and Science Excellence Program, and it is intended to expand this in 2004. It also has a well-established Excellence in Sport program, which in Rugby League has lead to several signings of students with the Brisbane Broncos. There will also be strategies put in place in 2004 to develop stronger relationships with the feeder primary schools in the district by providing specific programs for students from them.

4. TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1. Productive Pedagogies

The school principal, the head of the middle school, and four teachers were interviewed with respect to the use of Productive Pedagogies in the curriculum. The school has specified a commitment to develop the two domains of Intellectual Quality and Connectedness in the middle years.

Recognition of Difference

This domain was generally agreed to be an area requiring attention. While the school environment provides an excellent context for developing *Cultural*

knowledges and *Inclusivity*, these pedagogies were not believed to be strong elements of practice. The use of *Narrative* as a pedagogical practice was seen as unlikely to be used by those teachers interviewed.

Connectedness

This domain was generally agreed to receive considerable attention in the school, and in classroom practice. Teachers provided examples of their efforts to make *Connections to the world* and to students' *Background knowledge*. *Problem-based curriculum* was less likely to be evident, and there was an avoidance of *Knowledge integration*. This was seen to be a clear decision to avoid turf wars at this early stage of reform.

Intellectual Quality

The interviewees generally indicated that this is a growing area of focus and intention, but to date there has been little effort to utilise pedagogies that lead to the development of robust intellectual quality. Teachers demonstrated an awareness of the serious lack of utilisation of these pedagogies, and several had completed the productive pedagogies in-service program, which highlighted their weakness in this domain. Generally speaking, *Higher order thinking, Deep knowledge and Deep understanding, Substantive conversation, Metalanguage and Knowledge as problematic*, were all not likely to be widely employed as teaching techniques, and if they were, at far from challenging levels. Teachers also indicated that the development of intellectual quality was a key part of the school reforms, and this area would receive considerable attention for professional development in 2004.

Supportive Environment

There was general agreement that this domain is strongly attended to at Fairstar High. Students have emerging opportunities to *Negotiate the curriculum*, and there are definite improvements in pedagogies where *Engagement* and *Self-regulation* by students is evident at a high level. Teachers indicated that the new leadership models provided greater opportunities for teachers to facilitate supportive learning environments for their students.

4.2. Lifelong Learning

The administrative team identify teachers as learners in the philosophy of the school, hence, there is due commitment to ongoing professional development and reform strategies. The principal in fact suggested that "teachers as learners are the most important resource for any school".

Teachers were asked to comment on the middle years reforms and achievement of their stated goal of achieving lifelong learning in their students. Generally, teachers indicated they saw themselves as learners, and that their ability to be risk takers was an underpinning concept that facilitated the modelling of lifelong learning for their students. Teachers also indicated that while lifelong learning was identified as a goal in school documents, it was not overtly integrated into day-to-day curriculum and teaching practice, and that this provided an opportunity for that to be formalised. One teacher interviewed had no understanding of lifelong learning.

5. STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1. Middle Years reforms

Eight Year 8 students participated in the student focus group. Students generally agreed that they "got to know their teachers more" because of the greater contact with a smaller number of teachers in KLAs and through the leadership model, which is part of the middle years reform approach.   This was seen as a positive aspect to their learning. Students also related well to having a home classroom where most of their classes were held, but acknowledged that other students utilised the classroom and so, although it assisted to build a sense of belonging and community, they were unable to leave posters, school work etc displayed, which was a disappointment to them.   Students articulated a high degree of relevance in many of their KLAs, and equated this with keeping them interested and "not getting bored". Students noticed a shift this year to more collaborative, team work approaches to learning, and found this to be satisfying, socially supportive, and academically appropriate.   Students recognised that their relationships with teachers had changed to allow for their growing maturity, and there was often scope for independence and a range of solutions to problems, rather than set answers, as was typical of primary school. They indicated that group work helps them "keep touch with reality" and gives an opportunity to interact with others with whom they might not typically choose to work. This was seen as a positive attribute of group work. Students liked school when it was relevant, challenging, made them think, and had hands-on elements. The students respected their teachers when they considered them to be: learned, interesting, enthusiastic, funny, technically competent, and different.

5.2. Lifelong Learning

When students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning, they were generally unable to articulate a clear idea of what lifelong learning meant for them. But with prompts, they identified teaching practices that they believe will prepare them for their lives. These included working as a team, developing technical skills, developing negotiating skills, and engaging in tasks they see as relevant to their future lives.   Students referred to the one trans-disciplinary task they have seen as particularly relevant (building a bridge from spaghetti) as an example of how different elements work together.   Students were also able to articulate how they have learned about their own learning style this year, suggesting various responses such as, students learn best: in groups, in friendship groups, by self, by memory, by being challenged, by risk taking, by considering relevant issues.

6. OUTCOMES

6.1. Academic Outcomes

■ It is too early to assess accurately the effectiveness of the middle years agenda for achieving lifelong learners in terms of student's academic achievement across the whole school. But, according to the school, indications are extremely positive. For example, the current Year 8 student cohort (which has been the focus of the

curriculum change program through smaller class sizes, a focus on productive pedagogies and changed teaching practices based on the principles of middle schooling) entered the school with the lowest testing results for literacy of any cohort yet tested. But these students, when tested at the end of Semester 1 showed remarkable improvement. Through the *Leadership 4 Learning* surveys and forums administered at the end of Term 2, students demonstrated a capacity to discuss their own learning and indicated a willingness to ask for support in improving their results. This finding is supported through anecdotal information from the Year 8 Learning Team Leaders and teachers. The productive pedagogies focus for 2003 in Year 8 has been seen to improve the connectedness of student learning and to challenge students to engage in deeper intellectual quality through their learning.

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6.2. Social Outcomes

■ Through the pastoral care House sub-school structure the ownership of the school by staff and students is demonstrated in a range of activities and actions. Feedback from students in forums and from senior leaders shows that students have embraced the changes and are more positive about school life than they were in previous data sets. The new school uniform implemented in 2003, but not essential until 2005, has exceeded purchasing expectations by approximately 400%. Participation rates in athletics carnivals have increased. Increased student access to resources has seen a change in the way staff have embraced new technologies; through staff interest the school has moved from 1 data projector in 2002 to 10 in 2003.

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■ There is a growing student pride in the school, and the school motto is used widely. There is a reduced litter problem in the school.

6.3. Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

■ Although there are no firm data to date, an early indicator is that on the school Open Day, although students were not required to attend, 98% of Year 8 students attended in order to compete in the new technology group engineering task for 'spaghetti bridge building'. These students also demonstrated very low behaviour management critical incident levels. This progress in supporting students to attain improved social outcomes can be seen noticeably across the student body: the truancy levels have seen a decline and there has been a significant change in the number of contacts with parents through the focus on teacher intervention as part of the new Behaviour Management Flowchart.

7. CONCLUSION

Fairstar High has undergone a massive transformation in terms of both infrastructure, and operational elements, including leadership, curriculum, management, and relationships with parents and the community. Underpinning these reforms is a strategy to restructure the school over time, commencing with Year 8 in the middle years.   This year has seen some positive outcomes in terms of the implementation of middle schooling practices including trans-disciplinary teams; pastoral care strategies such as

reduced contact with large numbers of teachers and smaller class sizes; and dispersed leadership. There are some data to suggest that student engagement has increased, and a formal behaviour management plan has been implemented successfully. Teachers have been central to the reform process, and professional development, including a committed approach to integrating productive pedagogies, is underway. Next year will see the professional development focus shift to strategies for improving intellectual quality of pedagogical practice. The school states clearly that it sees lifelong learning as an essential outcome for middle years students, but this remains to be developed fully beyond a conceptual commitment. With what the school has achieved in a very short time, it will be an interesting school to revisit when there has been an opportunity for the reform process to be operationalised fully over the coming years.

METRO BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (QLD)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Metro Brisbane Grammar School (MBGS) is an independent school for boys from Preparatory to Year 12. It is a GPS school - established in 1912 - with a long-standing history and traditional values. It is situated in an inner city suburb of Brisbane and is well serviced by train, ferry and school buses. Boarding is offered for students from Year 8 to Year 12. MBGS recently acquired a satellite campus at Farm, two hours south-west of Brisbane, where residential 'curriculum in context' programs are conducted. This campus was purchased expressly to facilitate programs for middle school students. Both campuses were visited during the data collection for this research project.

1.2 About the School

The Brisbane campus of MBGS combines historical buildings which are currently undergoing renewal, with state-of-the-art facilities – including a Science Centre with 12 laboratories, a lecture theatre seating more than 100, an astronomy observatory, an Advanced Technology Centre, 10 sports fields, 8 tennis courts, 25 and 50 metre swimming pools, a rowing shed and a gymnasium. It also has on-site boarding accommodation.

MBGS acquired a school in Farm in 1999 in order to provide a residential enrichment program for the boys in its Year 7–9 Middle School. At the time, MBGS was moving quickly through a planned Middle School development phase at the Brisbane Campus and felt that the opportunity that a residential experience might provide at Farm would complement and reinforce many of the teaching and learning practices that were occurring. The Farm campus had been unoccupied, having closed as a school two years previously and was in need of considerable repair and renovation. It is located on a traditionally-structured school site in the township. It includes basic teaching facilities and equipment, as well as accommodation and associated services for up to 140 students in two separate residences.

According to MBGS promotional literature, the four key values underpinning the school's programs are academic achievement, spiritual awareness, personal development and community service.   The school Strategic Plan 2003-2008 identifies the following ideals and values: learning; quality outcomes; challenge; integrity; tolerance; and community.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The school caters for around 1700 students in prep to Year 12 with a teaching staff of 120 and a total staff of almost 200.   There are approximately:
- 350 boys in Prep;
- 650 in the Middle School (Years 7-9);
- 700 in the Senior School.

Class sizes in Years 7-9 are typically around 28 students. Approximately 10 per cent of students are from South East Asia, but the School has not pursued international students particularly. It neither has a diverse multicultural student base nor offers a formal ESL program.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 **Philosophy**

Beginning in 2000, MBGS has been undergoing rolling reform in the Middle School. The initial stages coincided with the purchase of the external campus at Farm and focused on extending the existing vertical pastoral care structures of the school 'house' system by adopting a horizontal form/team pastoral system for the Middle School. A position of Head of Middle School existed but was upgraded as the school moved to create three semi-autonomous 'sub-schools'. The traditional leadership role of Director of Studies who oversaw curriculum from Year 1-12 was abolished and in 2002 a new appointment of Curriculum Coordinator Middle School signalled a commitment to changes to the curriculum approach in the middle years.   This commenced with a review of the existing beliefs, traditions and structures in the Middle School. Generally speaking, these did not reflect what is considered to be effective middle schooling practice, according to the research base informing the field.   Reforms are ongoing.

On a range of documents produced by the school, including the Middle School Curriculum Booklet, the MBGS principles of middle schooling are clearly articulated, stating that:

"The Middle School at MBGS is a student-centred learning community that promotes the social and emotional, intellectual and personal growth of boys during Years 7-9 through a partnership between teachers, parents and students. The documents emphasise:
•   That students learn by making meaning in context;
•   The importance of a process-focused curriculum featuring learning how to learn and think;
•   A collaborative teaching, planning and learning culture in which there is a shared responsibility for pastoral care.
MBGS Middle School is where boys step into possibility".

The middle school curriculum is delivered over the two campuses. The school argues that this split delivery optimises lifelong learning for boys in the middle years of schooling, as it enables practical, hands-on educational programs at a time when research indicates there is a decline in student interest in learning.   In this way, the school supports the belief that middle school students are a distinct developmental group, and actively seeks to provide educational experiences that are based on firm principles and best practices in Middle Schooling, especially in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The relationship between the two campuses is represented diagrammatically as:

Student activity and work product

Common learning experiences – including excursions

Brisbane Curriculum

Depth Studies

Farm Curriculum

Ongoing activity , assessment and presentations.
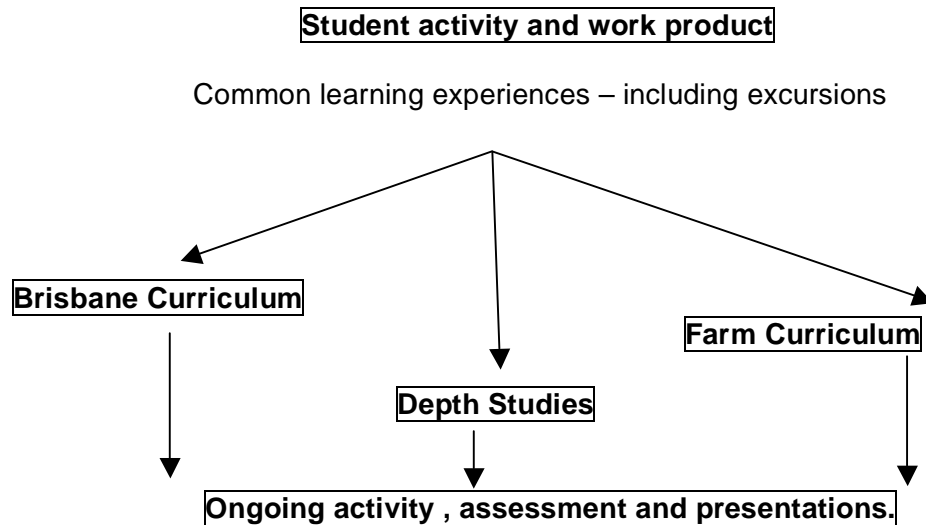
2.2 School Structure

The school has three components for its organisational structure:
- Preparatory (P-6)
- Middle School (Years 7-9)
- Senior School (Years 10-12)

Each division of the school is a semi autonomous sub-school with an identical leadership structure. Each sub-school has a Head who reports directly to the Headmaster/CEO and is responsible for all matters pertaining to that sub-school. In this he is supported by two Deputy Heads – one for Administration and one for Curriculum. They are supported by an administration division (Financial Manager, enrolments officer and so on) that works across all three schools. Sub-schools implement the policies of the school, but may vary them according to the needs of the students within that particular school. For example, the organisation of pastoral care is different in each sub-school. Within the middle school, the Head of Middle School works closely with the Head of Farm campus to ensure smooth delivery of the curriculum and consistent pastoral care for the students.

Teaching staff and facilities are shared across all three schools, particularly between the Middle and Senior Schools

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

Lifelong learning is an overt goal identified in the literature and philosophy of the school. The Middle School Curriculum Booklet explains that the Key Learning

Area (KLA) Syllabuses with their outcomes-based approach to the curriculum, guide the teaching programs in the middle school, with an emphasis on developing the attributes of the lifelong learner. Programs in the middle school recognise the lifelong learner as:

- A knowledgeable person with deep understanding;
- A complex thinker
- A responsive creator;
- An active investigator;
- An effective communicator;
- A participant in an interdependent world;
- A reflective and self-directed learner.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

In Years 7, 8 and 9, all students take a 'core' course based on the eight Key Learning Areas, in addition to Religious Education. Each KLA is delivered separately at the East Brisbane school site, complemented by the residential campus experience at Farm.

One of the key features of the delivery of the curriculum is the formation of learning teams. These teams reduce the number of teachers students are exposed to in Years 7, 8 and 9 and encourage teacher- driven and -owned integration of the curriculum. Each group of students remains intact, while there are few of changes of staff for the delivery of the entire curriculum. For instance, some students will see three teachers, others four. In addition, students are all involved in a Pastoral Care Program, which sees a commitment of twenty minutes per day to a relevant issue. The pastoral care teacher will also be one of the teaching team for that group of students.

The next phase of the renewal process for the Middle School will focus on a range of areas including:

- Enhance physical, staffing and timetable infrastructure;
- Review and refine links in learning experiences between the two campuses;
- Establish new parallel partnerships within and beyond the school (eg. Universities).

3.3 Assessment & Reporting

The Middle School uses an outcomes-based approach to assessment and reporting. At meetings attended by the researcher it became apparent that staff and administrators in the Middle School are seeking possibilities for collecting data to determine the efficacy of their overall middle years approach, by seeking to create bench marks against which student progress can be measured. In addition, they are deliberating about ways of developing 'more rigorous' outcome planning, assessment, data recording and reporting across the middle school -- particularly regarding connections between the external residential experience and the main campus experience.

The Farm campus residential activities aim to develop social and emotional outcomes that are identified by the school as desirable, fundamental outcomes for boys in the middle years. To that end, the MBGS Social and Emotional Development Outcomes Instrument has been formulated and is administered to students as part of their in-residence experience. The tool provides a

benchmarking and reporting framework that is utilised by students, staff and parents. The sequential Farm experiences lead students to explore and reflect upon their social and emotional maturity in the following areas:

- Confidence and self image
  - o Participation
  - o Attitude
- Self awareness
  - o Emotional awareness
  - o Honest self assessment
- Self management
  - o Self organisation
  - o Motivation
  - o Emotional management
  - o Independence
- Social competence
  - o Communication
  - o Conflict management
  - o Collaboration and cooperation
  - o Empathy
  - o Contribution to positive group culture
- Leadership

In addition, students in each Year level compile portfolios of their achievements during the residential program. The next phase will be to integrate this instrument into the teaching, learning and assessment practices at the east Brisbane campus.

3.4 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The Middle School staffing matrix operates on the basis of the following form class numbers: five Year 7, eight Year 8, and nine Year 9. Pastoral Care Teachers (Form teachers) for each Year level comprise teams of 3 (one team of 5 in Year 7) with a team leader for each team. In addition to exercising pastoral leadership across the team, one of the duties of the team leader is to undertake the entire residency of that team at Farm. Typically the Form class teacher teaches the class in two or three KLAs, so that students build a strong relationship with this adult, even if only because of the frequency of contact. The Form teacher has responsibility for coordinating the team of teachers who teach that class. The curriculum is mandated, with students experiencing a broad curriculum across all KLAs, in addition to Religious Education. Students are all involved in a Pastoral Care program for twenty minutes each day. Topics vary, but include a focus on such issues as bullying.

In addition, the recent creation of Assistant Heads of Faculty with specific responsibility for Middle school has allowed the formation of KLA teams which has further enhanced curriculum reform. Each Assistant Head of Faculty is developing action plans that flow from the year-long overall goals that were established with the Head of Middle School.

3.5 Professional Development

At the core of the reforms in Middle Schooling at Form level is teacher professional development. There is a strong commitment and a high expectation that teachers are involved in the reform process, and in the professional development opportunities that are identified and developed to achieve these outcomes. There are regular middle school teacher meetings, full day workshops, and a planned series of professional development activities. The school is actively seeking advice and guidance in terms of implementation and review, and is initiating in-school conferences for staff. Middle year coordinators and teachers have attended national conferences, both as presenters and as delegates. Interviews with teachers and administrators revealed that there is a need for greater focus on staff Professional Development in all areas, but particularly with respect to the development of higher-order thinking skills, to enhance the overall intellectual quality of programs delivered.

3.6 Special Programs

The Farm campus external program is the centrepiece of the Middle School reforms at Form level. It is a residential program which all Year 7 students attend for one week, Year 8 students for three weeks, and Year 9 students for five weeks. The three-year sequential program has a strong emphasis on the development of student-directed learning as an integral part of the school's overall aim to develop self-managed learners. The program claims to be student-centred to allow high levels of choice, and aims to reinforce problem solving, critical thinking and modes of learning introduced at the Brisbane campus. The students are engaged in project-based, guided group experiences called 'challenge units' and 'depth studies' requiring completion over an extended period. The theme for these units is Studies of the Murray Darling Basin. The residential programs set out to provide students with opportunities to:
•   Live and learn together;
•   Apply theory in practical situations;
•   Work in teams to achieve outcomes;
•   Test and increase individual capacities through participation in a range of challenging tasks -- including structured, sequential outdoor education experiences.

The Farm experiences aim to:
•   Facilitate and accelerate social and emotional development;
•   Promote self esteem;
•   Promote a student-directed view of learning;
•   Increase students' sense of responsibility and develop dependence;
•   Heighten acceptance of diversity among peers and foster appreciation of families;
•   Develop appreciation of the value in working closely with adults in learning and working environments;
•   Create opportunities to meet and work with people from rural communities; and
•   Foster an appreciation and understating of some of the challenges, aspirations, and lifestyles of individual people, their families and wider communities in a rural setting.

4 TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

The Middle School Curriculum Coordinator and two teachers based at the Brisbane campus, along with the Head and a middle years teacher at the external campus, were interviewed with respect to the use of productive pedagogies in the curriculum. The school has specified a commitment to the development of "social and emotional, intellectual and personal growth" as the focus for middle schooling reform. While this does not translate precisely into any of the four domains of the productive pedagogies, it could be expected that there should be clear evidence of each of the domains.

Recognition of difference

Those interviewed at the main campus recognise that the school environment, with little cultural variation, provides limited opportunity for developing *Cultural Knowledges* and *Inclusivity* of an incidental nature, and there is little active attention to this area in the curriculum and in teaching approaches. *Citizenship* was perhaps the only pedagogy that was recognised as being a particular strong point of this domain. Staff at the external campus program identified *Group Identity* as one area upon which the program was focused, but acknowledged that generally, there was only incidental attention to this domain as a collective.

Connectedness

Staff at the main campus generally indicated that it was left up to the residential experience with its focus on 'learning in context' to make *Connections*, as there was little time in an already full curriculum to develop this aspect. Students were also likely to have 'overloaded lives' beyond their school commitments and there was little time to focus on this element. In support of this view, the external residential campus based teachers argued that **Connectedness** is a key element of their teaching repertoire, with *Connectedness to the World*, *Problem-based Curriculum* and *Knowledge Integration* featuring as the basic platform for their approach to learning. But there was a belief that the main campus curriculum could more effectively establish connections and set up opportunities to emphasise this element when students are undergoing the residential component, regardless of the current imbalance.

Intellectual Quality

This domain was generally agreed to be an area requiring attention. *Higher-order thinking*, *Deep Knowledge* and *Deep Understanding*, *Knowledge as Problematic*, were all considered to be 'superficial' in terms of current school emphasis. Staff generally were not acquainted with the concepts of *Metalanguage* and *Substantive Conversation* as pedagogical practices.

Supportive Environment

Agreement about the strengths of the school in the domain of **Connectedness** differed according to the views of those located at the main campus, compared to those involved in the external residential program. Staff at the residential program highlighted the possibilities for achieving *Engagement, Self-regulation* and *Student Control* particularly, but believed that greater integration of the curriculum at the main campus with the residential experience is required to achieve and optimise these possibilities.

4.2. Lifelong Learning

Those interviewed were asked to comment on the middle years reforms and achievement of the school's stated goal of developing lifelong learning in their students. Generally, respondents saw themselves as learners, and hence role models for the students, with one or two exceptions. They were familiar with the elements of lifelong learners, as stated in their school philosophy and in relevant curriculum material. Two respondents noted that while they were committed to the goal of developing their students as lifelong learners, this was often in conflict with some parents who were more likely to be career-oriented, and hence did not appreciate the need to develop lifelong learning attributes in their sons.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1. Middle Years reforms

Eight Year 8 students participated in the student focus group. It was conducted at the external campus on the last day of the residential program. Students were asked to comment about their whole-school experience, not to separate the main and external campus experiences. But inevitably, this became the focus for most responses. Students generally agreed that they had a greater trust for their teachers because they had a smaller number of teachers with whom they frequently had classes. They also noted some teachers' attempts to integrate curriculum areas, though students experiences of curriculum integration attempts varied significantly. Students were less trusting of teachers based at the main campus than those at the external site, as relationships were seen to be significantly different. Teachers at the external campus were considered to be more trusting of students because they were willing to let them take risks, to negotiate their learning, and to facilitate the development of individual time management skills. Those same teachers (in some cases) - when back at the main campus - reverted to a much stricter, formal regime of learning which was less desirable from the student perspective. Students also identified the learning at the external campus to be of an authentic nature, relevant and of direct benefit to them and to others. This was a satisfying aspect of their learning. They also believed that the residential program helped them to mature, to be away from their parents (mum particularly), to respect their peers, to respect boarders, and to develop life skills such as washing and ironing.

5.2. Lifelong Learning

When students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning, they reverted to a phrase from the school philosophy "the making of men". The boys saw their learning as contributing in a collective way to their formation of manhood. They were familiar with the concept of lifelong learning and believed that they had experienced this through learning experiences that were competitive, that applied processes to new situations, and that provided opportunities for problem solving. They generally believed they experienced these activities during their residential program. There was group agreement that the residential program enabled them to "be responsible for our own learning, not rely on parents to force us".

6 OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes

The efficacy measures for the middle years reforms are still undergoing development. Anecdotal evidence from those interviewed suggests that the formation of learning teams, reduced numbers of teachers' students are exposed to, and some early attempts at integration of the curriculum, are achieving desirable benefits in terms of students' academic outcomes, but this remains to be quantified.

6.2 Social Outcomes

The external residential program monitors the Social and Emotional Development of participants. A self and peer reflection survey using a Likert scale seeks comments on: confidence and self image, self-awareness, self-management, social competence, leadership and influence. While data have been collected over the last two years, these are not available at this stage.

6.3 Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

There are no data available to make a comment on this aspect.

7   CONCLUSION

Metro Brisbane Grammar School (MBGS) is currently undergoing reform in the middle years. It has a strong commitment to this revitalisation process, including appointments of key staff to facilitate the process, and professional development of staff. Reforms to date have centred on re-shaping the timetable to ensure students have contact with a reduced number of teachers, and that some curriculum integration can be commenced. A renewed pastoral care system supports this restructuring. The centrepiece of the reforms is the external, residential program, which provides students with an opportunity to learn in context. Developing students who are lifelong learners is the clearly specified goal of the middle years approach to teaching and learning. At this stage efficacy measures are not available.

BRISBANE SOUTHSIDE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL (QLD)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Brisbane Southside Catholic Primary School is a co-educational school situated in a semi-rural suburb in the south of Brisbane, catering for students from Pre-school to Year 7.   The school was established in 1976 and has a stable enrolment of around 360 students, having had a peak enrolment of 630 in the 1980's.   The decline in school numbers is due to changing population distribution in the surrounding suburbs, and hence facilities are excellent for the now reduced number of students. The school is located in a middle- to upper-middle socio-economic community.

1.2 About the School

The school is administered by the Brisbane Catholic Education Commission (BCEC), promoting Christian values in the Catholic tradition. The school is well resourced with a computer laboratory, resource centre, visual arts area and well-maintained grounds.   An integrated approach to curriculum is followed in all classrooms, and the eight Key Learning Areas devised by the Queensland Studies Authority are the basis for the curriculum, along with the ninth KLA of Religious Education, which is based on the guidelines developed by the Archdiocese of Brisbane. Personal Development Education is integrated through all KLAs. The curriculum framework has been designed and implemented to support the School Vision Statement: "Brisbane Southside Catholic Primary School is a Christian community of lifelong learners empowered by the teachings of Jesus to shape and enrich the world".

The school literature has very clear references to lifelong learning, stating that the roles of lifelong learners are the "overarching significant learning outcomes" of the school curriculum.   The roles of the lifelong learner are derived from the BCEC Learning Framework - and the way in which this is achieved in the middle years is of particular interest in this study.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The school has a teaching staff of 13 full time equivalents. It has 7 ascertained students, two of whom are in the middle years, and 27 NESB students, with varying cultural groups represented. Almost half of the students commence Year 8 studies at the nearby Clairvaux MacKillop College.   The socio-economic background of parents is diverse, incorporating a mixture of professional, semi-professional and self-employed.   Parents could generally be described as middle to upper-middle class, with only a small number of families struggling financially.   There are many single parent families.

2   UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

The school has three distinct phases: Early Phase (P-3); Junior Phase (Years 4 and 5); and the Middle Phase (Years 6 and 7), known as the Year 6/7 Learning Community, which is of particular interest in this study. In 2004 there are 46 Year 6 and 24 Year 7 students.   Students engage in an outcomes based approach to education, which is planned from the roles for lifelong learners:

- Effective communicator;
- Active investigator;
- Designer and creator;
- Quality producer;
- Community contributor;
- Leader and collaborator; and
- Reflective and self-directed learner.

These are the elements which together can be taken as tools for lifelong learning. They are the roles established by the QSCC (now QSA) and adopted in the BCEC Learning Framework. Hence, lifelong learning is an overt goal that is identified in the literature and philosophy of the school.

The Year 6/7 Learning Community was established approximately four years ago as part of the then whole School Renewal Plan. This renewal process incorporated key signifying practices of middle schooling, and is linked to the roles of the lifelong learner as a focus for the curriculum reform.   Programs and learning experiences in the Year 6/7 Learning Community are described as:

- Learner-centred;
- Collaboratively-organised;
- Outcomes-based;
- Flexibly-constructed;
- Ethically-aware;
- Community-oriented;
- Adequately-resourced; and
- Strategically-linked.

2.2 School Structure

The following model is a depiction of the school structure, around which the curriculum focus and the development of support for teachers and students is based. There are currently two classes of Year 6/7 students, with 2.4 key teachers.

Early Phase				Junior Phase		Middle Phase	
Preschool	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7

The School employs a vertical pastoral care system based on a house system.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

The school has a range of publications which explicitly link middle schooling and lifelong learning. For example, in a resource used for distribution to parents it explains that "in the middle years of schooling learning community, in order for our students to succeed, we promote learning that is lifelong and life-giving". The information sheet explains the activities students will be participating in, including:

- Engage in whole class discussion, group work and individual activities;
- Use multiple intelligences in carrying our learning tasks;
- Learn within an integrated framework;
- Participate in community based learning by accessing peer tutors and adult mentors;
- Use up-to-date technologies to assist their learning;
- Participate in intellectually challenging and extension activities;
- Use appropriate time for critical reflection and the development of cooperative learning strategies; and
- Apply acquired learning strategies to new and meaningful contexts.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

Students are formed into pastoral care groups (currently two groups) with a Home Room Teacher who is responsible for students' day-to-day procedural activities, religious education classes, and life skills activities. English skills lessons and mathematics skills lessons form the basis of the morning program, with students allocated a learning situation according to their ability at a particular time. Students move between homerooms using a basket for the transportation of books etc. Six integrated modules have been developed which form the basis of the learning experiences for students over a two-year cycle. Central to each module is the development of the students as lifelong learners, that is: effective communicator; active investigator; designer and creator; quality producer; community contributor; leader and collaborator; and reflective and self-directed learner. Specialist teachers provide the students with learning experiences in the area of music, LOTE, information technology, physical activity, visual arts and information processing.

The integrated modules are more accurately described as 'connected curriculum'. The current module titles are:

- Sharing our stories;
- Choices: Responsible participation;
- Think Global, Act Local – Project Island Connection
- Images of me, God and everyone else;
- Live it Up!
- Space invaders.

For each module, the relevant roles of lifelong learners are identified explicitly in planning documents and are utilised as curriculum organisers.

To enable students to be engaged in independent learning, electives are held twice per week. These activities enable students to work in areas of interest with a culminating activity that is evaluated. Electives are chosen from four areas:

- Science – with a focus on developing the *active investigations* attributes of a lifelong learner;

- Technology – with a focus on developing the *creative person* attributes of a lifelong learner;
- The Arts - with a focus on developing the *effective communicator* attributes of a lifelong learner;
- Cultural literacy and learning - with a focus on developing the *participant in an interdependent world* attributes of a lifelong learner;

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3.2 Assessment & Reporting

The Middle School uses an outcomes-based approach to assessment and reporting. In addition to reporting on KLA outcomes, the school reports on how students are progressing in each of the roles for lifelong learners, which are part of the work in all subjects.

3.3 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

There are two year 6/7 learning groups in the learning community. The school operates extended time allocations and is not structured around periods. Teachers are allocated 2 hours non-student contact time per week for planning purposes. In addition, half a day per term is allocated to team planning for the middle years teachers.

3.4 Professional Development

At the core of the reforms at Brisbane Southside Catholic Primary School is a professional development program for the teachers, based around the School Renewal Plan, which incorporates the middle years reforms. Teaching and administrative staff are actively involved and committed to the reform processes. This has included professional development about middle years, including school visits, conference attendance, as well as staff training in student free periods. The Assistant Principal is recognised as a leader in the implementation of middle schooling reforms within this school.

3.5 Special Programs

The School has a range of special programs in place across the school in the middle years, including the "You Can Do It" program where students learn about the four foundations necessary for achievement: confidence, persistence, organisation, and getting along .

The Year 7 Leadership Program centres on two themes: "I am an individual with rights and responsibilities" and "What can I do to make my school a great school?" It consists of six elements:
- leadership training days;
- interpersonal skills activities;
- Year 7 camp;
- Care groups;
- retreat day; and
- celebrations and graduation.

The Care Groups work in particular areas of the school serving other students and

staff in the community. The Care Groups are: media; environment; sport; under eight; library; social justice; art.

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

The Assistant Principal and two teachers were interviewed and were asked to comment on evidence of the use of Productive Pedagogies in the curriculum and in classroom practices. The school has previously offered professional development sessions for staff on Productive Pedagogies.

Recognition of Difference

This domain was generally agreed to be a domain where more attention could be focused. The use of narrative as a pedagogical practice was considered to be one aspect that was effectively and frequently utilised in the connected curriculum approach. Group identity, particularly by encouraging Year 7s to take very active leadership roles, was also considered to be quite frequently focused on.

Connectedness

This is the domain which is believed to be most evident, receiving considerable attention in the school, and in classroom practice, through the 'connected curriculum' model the school has implemented. Teachers make strong connections to the world and to students' background knowledge, and seek to integrate knowledge when possible.

Intellectual Quality

This domain has been the focus of reforms this year. Teachers and administrators have identified the need for intellectual quality to be strengthened in the pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in the school. Opportunities for higher order thinking have been increased, and the development of deep knowledge is now a focus of re-thinking pedagogical practices.   Evidence of the way this has affected the curriculum is that the number of thematic units has been reduced across the two-year period, so that deeper learning can take place.

Supportive Environment

There was general agreement that this domain is strongly attended to at Brisbane Southside. Students are encouraged to negotiate the approaches they take to learning and assessment when possible. Student self-regulation and control are very high, and explicit criteria are frequent and detailed.

4.2. Lifelong Learning

Teachers were asked to comment on the middle years reforms and achievement of their stated goal of developing lifelong learning in their students. Teachers indicated that in their planning of connected curriculum modules, the roles of the lifelong

learner were absolutely embedded and determined the approaches to learning that were used. Teachers also use the roles for reporting to parents, and for awards for Year 7 students. Teachers advised, with some regret, that they had not used the terminology of lifelong learning explicitly in the classroom to date, but now planned to.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1. Middle Years reforms

Eight students participated in the student focus group, five girls were Year 7 and one boy and two girls were Year 6 students. When asked to compare their Year 6/7 Learning Community to their earlier experiences in primary school, the students indicated that this is harder, with more teachers, and there are many more subjects. They also spoke of having more fun, that classes were "better, more interesting, connected". Students enjoyed the opportunity to move around the classroom more, and to work with other students in a variety of teams. Students also identified the Year 7 Leadership Program as a valuable activity where they had a chance to be a leader, and where there is scope for free choices, which was rated highly by the respondents.

Students liked school when it was fun (a very strongly supported view), relevant, and when they had a chance to do activities. The students respected their teachers when they considered them to be 'fun and interesting', and they believe teachers who are boring make it hard to learn – "the teacher makes the difference of whether you are learning or not". Teachers were seen to help students to learn when: they understand you, they're on students wavelength, they tell jokes that kids understand, have an understanding of adolescents, are very patient, follow through on consequences.

5.2. Lifelong Learning

Students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning. They advanced the following aspects of what they are currently learning that will assist them throughout their lives:
• computer skills;
• mathematics;
• being a leader;
• having confidence;
• being a good role model for others; and
• performing well in class jobs.

Students were very explicit about the belief that their experiences in the Year 6/7 Learning Community had assisted them to "develop our sense of responsibility for our own learning".

Students also described how they have learned about their own learning style this year, suggesting various responses such as, students learn best: in groups, by self (being quiet), by having fun. Teachers were seen as excellent role models for lifelong learning.

6 OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes
■ There have been no measures put in place to assess accurately the effectiveness of the middle years initiatives for developing lifelong learners in terms of student's academic achievement across the whole school. To date, anecdotal evidence suggests that the various features of the Year 6/7 Learning Community have led to an increase in student engagement. This is evident in voluntary activities, for example. Teachers and students believe that students are well prepared in particular to deal with transition issues. There appears to be an emerging pattern that students from Brisbane Southside Catholic Primary School have a higher than percentage would dictate representation as leaders in secondary schools, suggesting they are gaining a range of benefits from the program.

6.2 Social Outcomes
The teachers indicated there are high levels of engagement with the school and extracurricular activities.

6.3 Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes
■ There are indications that there is a reduction in the severity of behaviour management incidents.

7   CONCLUSION
Brisbane Southside Catholic Primary School has enthusiastically implemented many of the signifying practices of middle schooling, along with a commitment to developing the roles of lifelong learners. The BCEC Learning Framework roles of a lifelong learner are embedded in the connected curriculum modules, and are used for reporting to parents. Selected middle schooling practices, including a decrease in the number of teachers with whom the students engage; attempts to integrate and 'connect' the curriculum; and provision of a homeroom have underpinned the reform approach, along with a sophisticated leadership program, which provides many opportunities for Year 7 students in particular to engage in leadership roles. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that student engagement has increased. The school states explicitly in many of its forms of literature that it sees lifelong learning as an essential outcome for middle years students.

TREELINE STATE SCHOOL (QLD)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Treeline State School is a primary school situated in the Logan-Beaudesert District to the south-west of Brisbane, catering for students from Pre-school to Year 7.   The school was established in 1924 with 21 students, and now has a stable enrolment of around 530 students, having recently experienced a growing enrolment over the last three years of between 20-30 students per year.   The school is located in a diverse socio-economic community, with a tendency towards low socio-economic indication. It has excellent access to a range of community facilities, including the Logan TAFE and the Logan campus of Griffith University.

1.2 About the School

The school commenced operation on its current site with 40 pupils and one school building in 1932,.   The physical construction of the school that remains today is classic modernist, typical of schools constructed in the 50's and 60's. It is in need of painting. It includes three general teaching blocks in addition to the pre-school building. Other facilities are: a well resourced and computerised library, an open under-storey building for eating and handball, a daily operated tuckshop, 2 small computer laboratories, and several play areas. It is considered that the classroom design would present certain constraints to pedagogical approaches, and this perception is reinforced by the priorities identified for the future, which include enhancement of parking and play areas, provisions of wet areas and larger classroom spaces.

The school vision is "for all students to become active and caring citizens in a learning society". It includes the following aims:
   • A curriculum that is responsive to the needs of all learners;
   • A safe, supportive and stimulating learning environment;
   • Sound partnerships with other community and educational groups; and
   • Ongoing learning/training for our school's staff and our community members.

The school literature does not make explicit references to lifelong learning as a goal of the school.   But a possible equivalent that is fundamental to the school philosophy is the *Words of Wisdom*, which comprises the elements: confidence, persistence, organisation, cooperation and resilience.   This is based on *Program Achieve*, which sets out to provide children with foundations for achievement and social-emotional-behavioural well-being.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The school caters for around 530 students from Pre-school to Year 7, with a teaching staff of 21 full time equivalents.   In addition, various advisory visiting teachers (hearing impaired, behaviour management, ESL), support teachers (learning

disability), reading recovery teachers and others frequent the school community. The school has a stable blend of experienced (5+ years, 57%) and novice (1-5 years, 43%) teachers, four of whom are male.

There are approximately 30 different cultures represented in the school, with Pacific Islander communities composing the major group other than Anglo-Australian. Temporary housing for refugee families, new arrivals and those who have need of a fresh start is located near the school, so it is used by refugee settlement groups as a first arrival centre for preschool and primary age children. There is an supposition that the school is used by these groups for support of various kinds. As stated in the *School Planning Overview 2003-06*, "the community expects the school to offer a safe, supportive and disciplined environment in which children can develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively". The school has an Indigenous population of approximately 10%. Of particular note is that approximately 30% of the student population turns over during each year. Around 30 (6%) of students are ascertained with disabilities ranging across intellectual, autistic spectrum disorder, hearing, speech and language, and multiple impairments. This compares with a state average of around 2-3%.

There are complex social problems such as single parent families and substantial unemployment, which characterise the school community. Because of the important role the school plays in the community, it has extensive links to local agencies. The school has also taken on the philosophical and policy approach of being a 'Supportive School Environment'. To that end, a set of principles are understood, accepted and practised by all members of the school community. These principles are organised according to the 4 R's: rules, rights, responsibilities and rewards. This arrangement is accompanied by a 'Responsible Thinking Classroom' approach to behaviour management.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

The school defines the Middle Years as the Middle Phase (not grades), incorporating Years 6, 7, 8 and 9, with Year 6 and 7 located within this school community. The school has a cluster arrangement with surrounding schools, to which most Year 7 students progress, with nine schools in total in the cluster. Known as the Treeline Corridor Cluster of Schools, there is a focus on transition for the middle years.

The transition focus of the middle years reforms takes on a 'passport of learning' model, which produces a transition report incorporating classroom profiles in areas of literacy, numeracy and special conditions (eg. behaviour management, special needs referrals). This tool is in its infancy and was trialled for the first time in 2003.

2.2 School Structure

The following model is a depiction of the school structure, around which the curriculum focus and the development of support for teachers and students is based. There are currently five classes of around 150 Year 6/7 students, with 5 teachers.

Early Phase				Junior Phase		Middle Phase	
Preschool	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

The focus of teaching and learning in the middle phase classes is social and emotional well-being, so that students will become independent learners ready for high school. Literacy and numeracy outcomes are seen by teachers as a bonus. There are efforts made to conduct excursions into the real world, which are seen as particularly beneficial for this student cohort. These includes visits to the art gallery, travel on trains, and other public access things and places of interest. Classroom teachers see the 5 keys of the *Words of Wisdom* (confidence, persistence, organisation, cooperation and resilience) as providing a common mind-set that is seen as somewhat similar to lifelong learning.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

The middle phase in this school features:
- A unitised approach;
- Outcomes based around the Key Learning Areas;
- Increasingly integrated curriculum;
- Focus on literacy, with a move towards numeracy.

Teachers are responsible for a separate class (25-28 class size) and they collaborate according to their desire and willingness. In some instances, some team teaching between classes takes place, particularly where teachers are trying to utilise integrated curriculum. The approach to teaching is typically whole/small/whole. Rotations and group work are commonly used, and support teachers are frequently in the classroom. The staff have worked over the past term on the integration of the KLAs Core Learning Outcomes and the assessment tasks to suit. Most areas are now integrated if appropriate, and assessment tasks are progressively covering common outcomes from "like" CLOs from the KLAs.

3.3 Assessment & Reporting
The Middle School utilises an Outcomes based approach to assessment and reporting. The transition focus of the middle years of schooling has facilitated the development of a summary of student achievements (a passport) for students to take to their secondary school. The staff at Treeline State School are all heavily involved in the development of an Assessment and Reporting Framework. The three Assessment Workshop modules presented by the Assessment and Reporting and New Basics Unit staff from Education Queensland are guiding the process.

3.4.Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

There are five Year 6/7 classes in the middle phase.   The school operates extended time allocations and is not structured around periods. Teachers are allocated 2 hours non-student contact time per week for planning purposes. They are also supported by a programmed Year level, Year 6/7 meeting time once a month for an hour, instead of a staff meeting after school.

3.5. Professional Development

Teachers and administrators in the school attend a range of professional development opportunities, a number of which have been middle years focused. Literacy in the middle years has been a particular focus to date. Teachers are familiar with and utilise the tools of Productive Pedagogies.   There is a local cluster of schools collaborating in professional development and focusing to date on middle schooling and literacy.

3.6. Special Programs

The School seeks to develop a 'Supportive School Environment'. Many of the programs in place are fundamentally contributing to this goal.

The School has a range of special programs in place for the middle years, including the "You can do it – Program Achieve" where students learn about the five foundations necessary for achievement: confidence, persistence, organisation, cooperation and resilience – known as Treeline's Words of Wisdom.

Other programs include:
  • School behaviour management plan built upon Choice Theory and Responsible Planning Process;
  • A social developmental program – FOCUS 40
  • Student leadership positions: 2 school captains, 6-8 student leaders, house captains and library monitors;
  • Adopt-a-cop program;
  • Life Education;
  • Bicycle Education Safety program;
  • Reading Recovery;
  • ESL Support program.

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

The principal and two teachers were interviewed and were asked to comment on evidence of the use of Productive Pedagogies in the curriculum and in classroom practices. The school has previously offered professional development sessions for staff on Productive Pedagogies.

Recognition of Difference

This domain was generally agreed to be extremely well conducted in the school. The school environment provides a richly diverse context for developing cultural knowledge's and inclusivity, and these pedagogies are believed to be strong elements of practice. The use of narrative as a pedagogical practice was considered to be an aspect that was effectively and frequently utilised in the connected curriculum approach. Development of a group identity, particularly through encouraging Year 7's to take very active leadership roles, was also considered to be extensively promoted.

Connectedness

This domain is also believed to be present, receiving considerable attention in the school, and in classroom practice, through the 'supportive school environment' model the school has implemented. Teachers make strong connections to the world and to students' background knowledge, and increasingly seek to integrate knowledge when possible. Nevertheless, teachers indicated a number of difficulties in making connections to students' experiences, as for many school-provided activities are their first significant experiences, so there is no prior knowledge to connect with. An approach of learning about other people's worlds is used to attend to this difficulty. This domain is acknowledged as requiring further attention.

Intellectual Quality

Teachers and administrators identified the need for intellectual quality to be strengthened in the pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in the school. Opportunities for higher order thinking have been increased, and the development of deep knowledge is now a focus when rethinking pedagogical practices. Teachers indicated difficulties in introducing high levels of intellectual quality because of the lack of a sound knowledge base for most students.

Supportive Environment

There was general agreement that this domain is strongly attended to at Treeline State School. Students are set high expectations, and the behaviour management approach based on responsible thinking provides students with opportunities for high levels of self direction.

4.2. Lifelong Learning

Teachers did not make connections lifelong learning in their pedagogy, curriculum and assessment approaches, beyond drawing some parallels with the Treeline Words of Wisdom.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1. Middle Years reforms

Nine students participated in the student focus group, seven were Year 6 and two were Year 7 students.   When asked to compare their Year 6/7 class to their earlier experiences in primary school, the students indicated that these Years are pretty much the same as Year 5, apart from having more learning groups, which they generally found to be a helpful way of learning.

Whether students liked school and learning depended upon the subject. Mathematics, technology and art (all considered to be easy) were generally liked while the remaining subjects were not liked because "you have to think hard". Students liked learning when they were actively involved, for example, using the metre wheel, cooking, and attending excursions.   Teachers were seen to help students to learn when they: follow the Responsible Thinking program properly, listen to the students, let students get actively involved.

5.2. Lifelong Learning

Students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning. They considered that getting along with others was a key feature they will need later in life, and working in groups in class facilitated this process.   The students also identified the development of communication skills as valuable.

Students also described how they have learned about their own learning style this year, suggesting various responses such as, students learn best: by doing (almost all students indicated this choice), and by reading. Teachers were seen as excellent role models for lifelong learning. The multicultural blend in the school was also highlighted by students as a perfect environment for learning how to get along with others, and students were confused by some negative stereotypes that exist about the school (they raised this issue without prompting).

6   OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes
During Semester 1, staff focused on developing an assessment framework and culture, using (student/teacher) negotiated criteria sheets, and portfolios of work. Students in these classes are working more responsibly in self-evaluating their work, playing a cooperative learning role with their teachers and selecting appropriate samples of work to highlight their progress along their learning journey. The use of criteria and portfolios of work to show case progress is to be a key element of the assessment framework this year.

- Current student performance trends can be summarised as:
  - Year 7 data indicate that over the past three years the overall literacy mean has improved, with reading and spelling showing the most improvement; and
  - Year 7 numeracy means are fluctuating but show some improvement with overall numeracy mean approaching the 'like schools' mean.

6.2 Social Outcomes

The teachers indicated there are high levels of engagement within the school and in extracurricular activities.

6.3 **Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes**

■   There are indications that there is a reduction in the severity of behaviour management incidents.   Less than 10 incidents of suspension per term have occurred over the past three years. This is attributed to the Responsible Thinking Process and support of at-risk students.

7   CONCLUSION

The school behaviour management policy summarises the school context as "characterised by a diversity of cultural groups, low socio-economic indication, high mobility of residents, and a large number of complex social issues such as single parent families and substantial unemployment".   With this context in mind the philosophy of 'Supportive School Environment' underpins school culture and practices.   According to the *School Planning Overview 2003-06*, the school is sought out particularly to support:
•   Students with disabilities;
•   Students with learning difficulties;
•   Students as new arrivals to Australia and as refugees requiring NESB support; and
•   Social skills and the HPE program.
   The Words of Wisdom philosophy can be likened to the lifelong learning attributes, with a focus on social and emotional development of the learner for a lifetime.

COOPERSPLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE (QLD)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Coopersplains Community College is a public, P-12 school in an outlying suburb of Brisbane.   The first year of operation was 2002. Demographic trends in Brisbane have led to urban sprawl, and this school is an example of the public sector establishing a school to meet the resulting growing population in the outer regions of the city. The school services predominantly middle class families.   It is unique as a public school in that as a P-12 college it has a non-traditional structure which is quite unlike the typical pre-school, primary school and secondary school separated campuses.   Furthermore, the college is a trial 'New Basics' school, which is a major initiative of Education Queensland to implement and determine the efficacy of reforms in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.   The College operates in a culture of innovation.

1.2 About the School

The college opened in 2002 with 1150 students ranging from preschool to Year 8. In 2003 the enrolment P-9 was 1569, and when it extends to P-12 by 2006 will have a predicted enrolment of 2200.

The college has excellent facilities, which is a benefit that comes from the large enrolment base. Stage 1 of development is now complete. It is designed to be a hub for the community and to promote connections with local government agencies, businesses, clubs and interest groups.   The college is currently into Stage 2 development, which focuses on the Senior facilities. The college is designed to have precincts – junior, middle and senior - so that students operate within smaller communities.

The scheduling of the school day commencement, break times and finish is different for the junior, middle and senior precincts so that there is no competition for shared facilities such as canteen and playground, and drop off and pick up zone traffic is reduced.

The college is one of approximately 60 state schools in Queensland trialling the New Basics, the curriculum identified by *QSE 2010*. The curriculum for students in the junior and middle schools has been developed around the four New Basics organisers rather than the eight Key Learning Areas. The New Basics Three Year Plan documents core learnings, pedagogy, assessment and reporting across the sub-schools to ensure a cohesive learning program for all students.

According to the *School Planning Overview 2004-06*, the school purpose is: "As a community, we build success for all learners through a future oriented curriculum". This purpose is supported by valuing "learning, teamwork, respect, and environment" and believing in "maximising everyone's potential; developing positive partnerships; creating a sense of safety and belonging; and celebrating our achievements".   The

seamless curriculum of the college from P-12 is identified as critical to the development of the lifelong learner, a goal which is clearly articulated in school publications.

The Coopersplains Community College values and beliefs are:
- Learning;
- Teamwork;
- Respect;
- Environment;
- Maximising potential;
- Developing positive partnerships;
- Creating a sense of safety and belonging; and
- Celebrating our achievements.

The college operates under a whole-school team philosophy, with a seamless curriculum from pre-school through to Year 12, "promoting the concept of lifelong learning". There is a focus on the development of the individual as a "creative problem solver and a confident lateral thinker". This focus on teams is a fundamental philosophy for the college, with teaching teams and learning teams central to the understandings of middle schooling.

The school uses a flexible teaming process that is formally known in the college as MAYOP – Move At Your Own Pace – which is utilised in all Year levels. This allows for the needs of all students to be catered for by enabling them to learn in different ways and rates through flexible pathways.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The school currently caters for around 1850 students in Years P-10, with a teaching staff of120 and a total staff of almost 200. Of the students, 73% identify as Australian (0.38% of Aboriginal or Islander descent) with the remaining 27.5% of students representing 26 different ethnic backgrounds, including:
- 3.95% New Zealand;
- 3.76% European;
- 3.12% Chinese.

The college is coded for students with disabilities in Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Impairment and Speech Language Impairment, with 58 students coded accordingly. Algester State School is the primary feeder school.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

According to the promotional material supplied by the College, middle schooling is where there is "use of a range of learning strategies and resources to promote a curriculum which engages adolescents successfully in learning that they find purposeful and challenging". Because the college is a trial school for the New Basics, a number of key

elements underpin the philosophy of middle schooling in this unique context. The college:

• Prepares students with strategies to survive in a changing world;
• Provides connectedness to the real world through an integrated format;
• Focuses on skills and processes rather than being content cluttered;
• Provides learning and assessment strategies which improve student outcomes;
• Utilises the New Basics – four futures-oriented clusters of essential practices;
• Utilises rich tasks – culminating, trans-disciplinary performance;
• Utilises repertoires of practices – skills which allow transfer of knowledge between different contexts;
• Utilises productive pedagogies – focus instruction and improve outcomes.

2.2 School Structure

The college is organised into five precincts: junior (pre-school: 100 students; Year 1-3: 480 students; Years 4-6: 490 students), middle (Years 7-9: 600 students); senior (Years 10-12: will cater for a predicted 600 students); sporting and community. There is a College and Associate Principal, and principals for the junior, middle and senior schools.

The college operates a split shift for the three precincts (enabling better use of facilities and greater access to technology for all students), and formalises the middle years as having a separate identity.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/Learning in the Middle Years

The College maps student progress from Year 1-12, using Global Learnings, a hybrid of lifelong learning and employability skills. Global Learnings for the Middle school are the same as those for the other sub-schools; that is:
• Researching and consulting;
• Analysing, synthesising, relating and selecting;
• Negotiating and personalising;
• Planning, designing and creating;
• Judging and deciding;
• Operating and making and acting;
• Evaluating and revising;
• Presenting, performing, explaining and communicating.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

The middle years curriculum incorporates a number of principles:
• Authentic learning and assessment;
• Productive pedagogies;
• Emphasis on higher order thinking;
• MAYOP (Move at your own pace);
• Rich tasks (integrated approach);

- 5 CCC knowledges (literacy, numeracy, technology, problem solving, social and personal development).

Years 7-9 are the middle years at Coopersplains Community College. Middle years students are members of 'pods'. There are five pods, each with 120 students, ranging across Years 7-9. Year 7 students are identified as Phase 1, Year 8 as Phase 2, and Year 9 as Phase 3. Each pod has a purpose-built facility with access to computers, wet and dry areas, and flexible teaching spaces. There are four teachers and a Head of Department for each pod, along with two specialist teachers known as Integrating Facilitators; and in some cases there are learning support teachers as well. Each pod operates according to the decisions made by the team of teachers.

Pod planning meetings include all staff noted above. Planning meetings occur on a weekly basis, with 1.5 to 3 hours of class time allocated. In alternate weeks, approximately an hour and a half is dedicated to pod planning at staff meetings. The planning meetings determine all levels of the implementation of the curriculum, including timetabling, arrangement of students within pods, running of sessions/classes as optional, essential, and so on. The team members in each pod develop depth studies which include deep understandings; a concept map of learning experiences and resources; models for learning groups and delivery; and the culminating activity.

Hence, students work within a small community (120 students, 7 teachers) for three years. They participate with other students in their pod in various team structures, dependent upon the activity/topic being investigated. The purpose of the pod structure is to develop relationships:
- Between teachers and students;
- Between students and students;
- Between teachers and parents; and
- Through community involvement.

The integrated, connected units of work called 'depth studies' run for approximately a term. The twelve topics over a three-year period include:
- Environmental Park
- Living in Society
- Global Communication
- Future Pathways
- Needs and Trends
- Back to the Future
- Australian Media
- Natural environments
- Entertainment
- Technology and Invention
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Changes in Society

3.3 Assessment & Reporting

Students' school-based assessment occurs in the five knowledge's and on the Global Learning's, using the standards: developing, consolidating, proficient,

exemplary. Students, parents and teachers conference progress at the end of term one and one written report is issued each semester. As Coopersplains Community College is a New Basics school, students also receive a report at the end of Years 3, 6 and 9 detailing their achievement on state moderated rich tasks.

3.4 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The pod structure outlined above is used as the basis for implementing the curriculum. A 3-year cyclic rotation of units across the five pods has been developed with each depth study lasting for approximately a term. Students remain in the same pod for three years, with students progressing through the three phases. In the last 2 phases, students culminate their depth study by completing a rich task for state-wide moderation.

The day is broken into three sessions with the pod teaching team determining the timetable to meet the needs of their students and teachers within the depth study currently being implemented.

3.5 Professional Development

The teachers are actively involved in professional development. The establishment of the three-hour team meetings each week provides an ideal opportunity for ongoing conversations. In addition, teachers and administrators in the college are frequently called upon to present the unique context of the College to others, during both onsite and offsite activities.

3.6 Special Programs

The College is designed as a hub for the community, hence special links with the community are being established. The first stage involved the establishment of a reference group, following which an advisory group has been established. Subgroups operate in the areas of: education, sporting links, childcare, business development and cultural links.

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

The college principal, the middle school principal, and three teachers were interviewed and were asked to comment on evidence of the use of Productive Pedagogies in the curriculum. The school offers ongoing professional development sessions for staff on Productive Pedagogies, and all staff planning and teaching incorporate the Productive Pedagogies.

Recognition of Difference

This domain was generally agreed to be an area which was reasonably attended to, but could receive greater attention. Teachers suggested that while their practices actively seek to include the range of pedagogies in this domain, there was some resistance by students towards elements such as inclusivity. In this way, inclusivity is valued by teachers and administrators, but not by students. Group identity and citizenship were consistently promoted by teachers.

Connectedness

This domain was considered by teachers to be achieved to a high degree. The integrated curriculum, MAYOP principles, pod structure, and the global learnings were each seen as facilitating factors in what was perceived as a highly successfully domain. Teachers believe the practices in the school "stand out' in this regard.

Intellectual Quality

The interviewees generally indicated this is a domain that requires focus and attention and one that is currently a priority in the classroom. Higher order thinking was identified as the least likely to be evidenced, while deep knowledge and deep understanding were seen as by-products of the integrated and connected curriculum approach.

Supportive Environment

There was general agreement that this domain is robust at Coopersplains Community College, though there is room for further improvement. Engagement and self-regulation by students were considered to be clearly evident, and these were linked to lifelong learning through the development of responsible students.

4.2. Lifelong Learning

Teachers were asked to comment on the middle years reforms and achievement of their stated goal of developing lifelong learning in their students. Generally, teachers agreed that they saw themselves as learners and that they modelled this to their students. Teachers did not expressly use the phrase lifelong learning with their students, but did seek to develop in their students a questioning attitude, which they believe was closely aligned with the concept of lifelong learning. Teachers spoke of inspiring students not to be content with their knowledge, but to ask 'why?' They also instil in students the belief that each of us is responsible for our own learning.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1. Middle Years reforms

Twelve students five of whom were boys participated in the student focus group. Students spoke of the differences in the College compared with their previous schools. They commented on having more responsibility and fewer reminders since moving into the middle school. They strongly endorsed the pod structure as a desirable learning context, identifying the associated practices as being empowering for them as learners, for social benefits, for improved relationships with teachers, and for developing dependable teams for learning. Students noticed the shift to more collaborative

teamwork approaches to learning, and found this to be satisfying, socially supportive, and academically appropriate. The students learned from their teachers: when they were in teams to support their learning; when teachers were interesting; when real situations that were relevant were used as a basis for learning. Students particularly elaborated on the benefit of working in teams with other students across the three Year levels, suggesting that students working together enabled them to learn from each other.

5.2. Lifelong Learning

Students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning. They referred to the College values and beliefs as fundamental to their overall learning, citing particular elements such as teamwork and respect as critical to lifelong learning. Students looked to teachers to be role models of learning, and endorsed the need for a friendly environment. They spoke of readiness for learning, noting that sometimes they were not ready to leave topics, and they had greater flexibility to explore topics more deeply than in the past. It was of note that students indicated their learning was being detrimentally affected by the high number of visitors to the classroom, because of its status as a trial College.

6 OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes
■ The College has no explicit data to link middle years reforms with academic improvements. It is a newly established facility and the area of efficacy has been identified as an area for attention in the future. Academic data in the form of literacy and numeracy benchmark tests will be utilised. The College is a trial school for the New Basics and as such is utilising a variety of measures and instruments that might possibly provide useful measures in the future.

6.2 Social Outcomes
This aspect is also difficult to ascertain, given the newness of the College. There is some evidence that the first cohort of students is atypical, with some general dissatisfaction among this group.

6.3 Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes
■ There are indications that there is a reduction in the severity of behaviour management incidents. The majority of behaviour management incidents occur in the playground during lunchtime activities, suggesting that students are engaged during their class time.

7   CONCLUSION

Coopersplains Community College is a recently established, non-traditional institution that is actively pursuing a culture of innovation. It is a trial New Basics School, and has a unique structure. It is innovative in terms of middle schooling signifying practices, utilising the most sophisticated of the organisational, pedagogical, curricular and assessment approaches to middle school reform. Lifelong learning, while not explicit in the values and beliefs of the College, is evident in Global Learnings and in intent.

MERCY COLLEGE (QLD)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Mercy College is a Catholic Secondary School in Ipswich, approximately 50 kilometres from the CBD of Brisbane, catering for girls from Grades 8-12. There is a growing enrolment of around 605 students. The school was established by the Sisters of Mercy 141 years ago in 1863 at the request of a group of Catholic citizens of Ipswich. It commenced with 113 girls. The school is located in a middle- to lower-middle socio-economic community. It has a high standing in the Ipswich community, with a strong academic and cultural history, and a strong emphasis on pastoral care.

1.2 About the School

The College grounds provide a rich heritage of Catholicism and Catholic education and incorporate National Trust listed buildings that are named after notable Sisters of Mercy. While the links with the Sisters of Mercy remain strong and the teaching and ancillary staff of the College strive to maintain the traditions they established, 1996 saw the last of the Sisters leave the Convent. The College is now administered by the Brisbane Catholic Education Commission (BCEC).

The College Mission statement is "With Jesus and Mary as models, Mercy College strives to provide quality, holistic education in a Caring Catholic Christian community", with the accompanying Vision Statement to:
  • Embrace and promote lifelong learning;
  • Encourage young women to aspire to excellence;
  • Use best teaching practice and up to date appropriate technology;
  • Develop self reliant young women of faith displaying courage, community responsibility, social skills and enjoyment of life;
  • Provide a positive learning environment for all;
  • Live and spread the gospel message;
  • Promote faith learning that is lifelong and life-giving; and
  • Provide education that supports holistic development ensuring a balance between individual and societal needs.

This very clear reference to lifelong learning – which is derived from the BCEC Learning Framework - and the ways in which this is achieved in the middle years, is of particular interest in this study.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

The College caters for around 605 students in Years 8–12, with a teaching staff of 43. The school includes around 3% of ascertained students in each Year level, with a Learning Support Teacher available for utilisation. There are 19 primary feeder schools, of which 3 or 4 are Catholic schools, for the approximately 140 Year 8 students. The school website and literature articulate the philosophy that the school, parents and students join together in a community for lifelong learning. While the College offers a Scholarship program to students, based on academic performance, it caters for the full range of academic ability, with most students considered to be of

average ability with a pattern of participation in extracurricular activities. There is a strong vocational education program in the senior years of schooling. The College is located across the road from the boy's College. This ready access to the campus facilitates some cross campus study for boys and girls in Years 11 and 12, in particular.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy

The College has a designated middle school structure which includes Year 8, 9 and half of Year 10. In 2004 there are 139 Year 8, 123 Year 9 and 140 Year 10 students. The underpinning approach to study in Year 8 is designed to facilitate a smooth transition to secondary school, and to this end many middle school signifying practices are evident. The Year 8 program is vastly different to the Year 9 and 10 programs, where students study a broad core curriculum with opportunity for electives, allowing them to keep subject options open for selection in senior years. The Middle School has a clearly articulated curriculum, with defined beliefs and values. The Year 8 initiative will be featured in this report.

2.2 School Structure

The following model is a depiction of the school structure, around which the curriculum focuses and on which the development of support for teachers and students is based. There are five classes of Year 8 students, each with between 25-30 students. There are 10 Core teachers, two of whom are allocated to each class. Students are also exposed to specialist teachers.

Middle School		Senior School		
Year 8 Key 8 Program	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12

The school has 11 Academic Coordinator (HOD) roles, and until 2004 the Year 8 coordinator (a pastoral role) assumed some responsibility for the organization of the Key 8 program. In 2004, responsibility for the Key 8 program and middle schooling initiatives is shared by the Academic Coordinators, working closely with the team of Key 8 Core teachers. House coordinators replaced Year level coordinators in 2004 to promote and develop a vertical pastoral care system which encompasses personal development education.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy - Linking Pedagogy and Curriculum with Lifelong Learning/ Learning in the Middle Years

The publication *Mercy College Curriculum for Middle School,* identifies the aims of the middle years program as being to "nurture each student to become a reflective, self directed learner who is:

- An Effective communicator;
- An Active investigator;
- A Designer and creator;
- A Quality producer;
- A Community contributor;
- A Leader and collaborator.

These are the elements which together can be taken as tools for lifelong learning, according to the BCEC Learning Framework. Hence, lifelong learning is an overt goal that is identified in the literature and philosophy of the school.

3.2 Middle Years Curriculum

The Middle School at Mercy College is currently undergoing review and reshaping, and is described by administrators as in need of further evolution. This follows a successful initiative of almost four years in the form of a major innovation in Year 8 with the development and implementation of the *Key 8 Program: Unlocking Students Potential*.   The Key 8 Program is for Year 8 students only and is designed to facilitate a smooth transition into secondary schooling, while introducing students to a variety of subjects. The approach incorporates principles of middle schooling. Features of the program include:
Each year 8 class has two Core teachers and a home room
Core 1 and Core 2 teachers meet once per week after school to plan work
Curriculum integration; linking and shared assessment; and special events, are featured in the curriculum and pedagogical approaches.

In this model, the Core 1 teacher is responsible for the delivery of the following learning areas: religious education, English and SOSE.   Where possible, 'integrated' units are developed each term through connected topics or themes; and there is an allocation of 10 fifty-minute lessons per week. The Core 2 teacher is responsible for the delivery of: mathematics, science and technology, with an allocation of 9 fifty-minute lessons per week.   Some topics and assessment items 'link' across the learning areas and to Core 1.   The connected term-long topics currently providing a basis for integration of the Core areas are:
- Local History;
- Australiana;
- It's a Small World; and
- Infinity and Beyond.

Approximately two thirds of the Year 8 time is spent with the two Core teachers with specialist teachers delivering the remaining learning areas, including: Health and Physical Education, The Arts, Technology and LOTE. According to the rationale for this innovative approach, the benefits to students include:
- Fewer teachers in Year 8;
- Closer teacher-student relationships;
- Lessons that are activity/task based;
- Less doubling up of subject matter;
- Less movement between classrooms;
- Makes learning fun and maintains students' enthusiasm and passion for learning; and

- Both student and teacher engagement in the teaching/learning process is high.

Currently in Years 9 and 10 the core curriculum is broad, with students completing study in all key learning areas, with a choice of two additional electives. There is no attempt to integrate learning areas or to extend the middle schooling principles evident in the Year 8 Key 8 program.

The *Strategic Renewal Plan 2003-2006* for the College identifies 15 intentions, including three that are particularly relevant to middle schooling and lifelong learning:
- Implement a KLA structure in the middle school;
- Develop lifelong learners through the adherence to the BCEC Learning Framework; and
- Investigate and develop further links with the Primary School to grow a Middle School.

3.3 Assessment & Reporting

The Middle School utilises an Outcomes based approach to assessment and reporting. In addition to reporting on Key Learning Area Outcomes, the school provides an indication of how students are progressing in the Roles for Lifelong Learners. These fundamental roles are part of the work in all subjects. The roles reported on are: Reflective Self Directed Learner, Community Contributor, Quality Producer, Designer and Creator, Active Investigator, Effective Communicator, Leader and Collaboration.

3.4 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

The College operates a schedule of six fifty-minute periods per day. For Year 8 students, this is not rigorously adhered to as the Core 1 and Core 2 teachers generally spend lengthy periods with the students each day, frequently extending across two or three periods in succession. But the challenges associated with timetabling have been identified as one of the problem areas for the implementation of the Key 8 Program. Issues include:
- Many of the teachers involved in Key 8 are teachers in the Senior School;
- Timetabling in Year 8 must be done class by class, lesson by lesson, to facilitate implementation;
- A desire to extend the program format to Year 9 seems improbable (though desirable) because of the difficulty in timetabling specialist teachers.

3.5 Professional Development

At the core of the reforms at Mercy College is individual teachers taking on board middle years initiatives and maintaining the strategies over a lengthy period. The restructuring of middle management within the school, in particular the restructuring of the pastoral care coordinator has impacted somewhat on the Key 8 Core teachers, who now relate directly to the Academic Coordinators for curriculum planning and design. The school has explored new models of cooperative planning, and senior management acknowledges a perceived future need for a middle schooling coordinator, particularly as the middle schooling initiatives are developed in Year 9 and Year 10. Teaching and

administrative staff were and continue to be engaged in the reform processes, as active participants.   This has involved professional development about middle years, including school visits, conference attendance, and staff training on student free days.

3.6 Special Programs

The College has a range of special programs in place, including intervention programs (indigenous focus), enrichment programs (university links), and enhancement programs (individualised programs).

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

4.1 Productive Pedagogies

The school principal, the deputy principal, and seven teachers (all Core Key 8 teachers, 5 female, 2 male) were interviewed and were asked to comment on evidence of the use of Productive Pedagogies in the curriculum. The school has previously offered professional development sessions for staff on Productive Pedagogies.

Recognition of Difference

This domain was generally agreed to be an area requiring attention.   It was acknowledged that the school environment does not provide a diverse context for developing cultural knowledges and inclusivity, and these pedagogies were not believed to be strong elements of practice.   The use of narrative as a pedagogical practice was seen as likely to be utilised by those teachers interviewed in a spontaneous manner.   Both group identity and citizenship were considered to be generally evident in pedagogical practices.

Connectedness

This domain was generally agreed to receive considerable attention in the school, and in classroom practice.   Teachers provided examples of their efforts to make connections to the world and to students' background knowledge.   Problem-based curriculum was less likely to be evident.   There were efforts made for knowledge integration, though it was clear that this varies between the Core areas and from teacher-to-teacher.

Intellectual Quality

The interviewees generally indicated that this is a domain that requires focus and intention.   There have been varying efforts to utilise pedagogies that lead to the development of robust intellectual quality.   Generally, higher order thinking, deep knowledge and understanding, substantive conversation, metalanguage and knowledge as problematic, were not likely to be widely employed as teaching techniques, and if they were, at far from challenging levels.

Supportive Environment

There was general agreement that this domain is strongly attended to at Mercy College. Students have emerging opportunities to negotiate the curriculum, and there are definite improvements in pedagogies where engagement and self-regulation by students is evident at a high level.

4.2. Lifelong Learning

Teachers were asked to comment on the middle years reforms and achievement of their stated goal of developing lifelong learning in their students. Generally, teachers indicated they saw themselves as learners, and that their ability to be risk takers was an underpinning concept which facilitated the modelling of lifelong learning for their students. Teachers also indicated that while lifelong learning was identified as a goal in school documents, it was not necessarily overtly integrated into day-to-day curriculum and teaching practice, though some teachers believed that it was extremely overt in their practices.

5 STUDENT INSIGHTS

5.1. Middle Years reforms

Nine students, two from Year 9 and seven from Year 8, participated in the student focus group. Students generally agreed that they were "nervous" and expected "a big change" when they moved into the College in Year 8 but mostly experienced less change than predicted. This was attributed to the Key 8 Program in Year 8, and in particular, having a home room; having the two Core 1 and Core 2 teachers for most subjects; and not having to move around the school at the end of each period. Students believe they have strong relationships with their two Core teachers because of the greater contact with a smaller number of teachers, which is part of the middle years reform approach. Students noticed a shift this year to more collaborative, team work approaches to learning, and found this to be satisfying, socially supportive, and academically appropriate. They also believe this transition year has enabled them to develop skills to help them "get organised for life". Students liked school when it was relevant, made them think, had hands-on elements, was fun, provided a safe place for experimenting, and included quiet time. The students respected their teachers when they considered them to be: organised, fun, and interesting. They considered home economics to be one of the most important subjects for later in life, so that "you don't have to rely on your parents".

5.2. Lifelong Learning

When students were asked to comment on how their learning this year had contributed to lifelong learning, they identified teaching practices that they believe will prepare them for their lives. These included: learning to cooperate with other students, developing technical skills (particularly computer related), developing organisational skills, and engaging in tasks they see as relevant to their future lives. Students also identified literacy and numeracy as being necessary to be employed later in life along with being able to "speak properly". Students also articulated how they have learned about their own learning style this year, suggesting various responses such as, students learn best: in groups, by self (being quiet), by not being rushed, by having fun, by having teachers

model examples and then let students practise, by being encouraged and supported. Of particular interest in the interview was that the girls noted that the absence of boys from their classrooms enabled them to perform at a higher level. They "learn better", and "don't get embarrassed". Boys "pay out when girls beat boys" so girls tend not to perform to their highest ability when boys are in the class. Boys made girls "feel restricted" but they were missed as a source of humour. As one girl put it, you "can be the best you can be, because you don't have to worry about beating the boys".

6 OUTCOMES

6.1 Academic Outcomes

■ There have been no measures put in place to assess accurately the effectiveness of the middle years initiatives for developing lifelong learners in terms of student's academic achievement across the whole school. As a future direction the school is moving towards a form of reporting that uses lifelong learning attributes as organisers. To date, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Key 8 program has led to increased teacher dedication and professional satisfaction, and to increased student engagement. Concerns were raised about the lack of intellectual rigour and the need to focus on this aspect. Administrators indicated a desire to increase tangible outcomes.

6.2 Social Outcomes

The teachers indicated that the long term social benefits to students involved in the Key 8 Program are now becoming evident. The first cohort of students through the program are now in Year 11, and this group is considered to be "more enthusiastic" than previous cohorts. The students also recall the Year 8 program with enthusiasm, and have high levels of engagement with the school and extracurricular activities.

6.3 Behavioural and Attendance Outcomes

■ There are indications that there is a reduction in the severity of behaviour management incidents, though this is not a major area of activity for the College.

7 CONCLUSION

Mercy College is a long-established, community based school that has taken on some reforms in middle schooling, along with a commitment to developing the attributes of lifelong learners. Selected middle schooling practices, including a reduction in the number of teachers; attempts to integrate and 'connect' the curriculum; and provision of a homeroom, have underpinned the reform approach, which is essentially a transition strategy that does not extend beyond Year 8. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that student engagement has increased. Teacher's efforts and commitment have been central to the success of the initiative and the College leadership continues to support this commitment into the future. In stating clearly that it sees lifelong learning as an

essential outcome for middle years students, the College plans to implement the middle school philosophy and practices more extensively.

SOUTH WEST COUNTRY HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

1. SCHOOL CONTEXT:

1.1 Location
South West is a rural town of approximately 3500 people in New South Wales. It is the main service centre for local agricultural industries such as wheat, canola, sheep, wool and cattle. The town is located on key highways linking Sydney and Adelaide, and Brisbane and Melbourne, and is an important transit stop on these highways. South West was originally established as a gold mining centre. Mining may again play a key part in the town's economy with the recent development of a gold mining project. The town, like many rural towns in Australia, is currently dealing with ongoing drought and the drift of people to larger centres.

South West has one public high school and one public primary school that are the subject of this report. The schools are located next to each other.

1.2 About the schools
The two schools studied, South West Country High School and South West Country Primary, were initially responsible for the establishment of the middle school program and both have a long and stable history in the community. Many of the staff have worked in the schools for some years and some staff have worked in both schools. Both schools offer students good facilities in terms of physical environment and educational resources, including networked computer facilities. While each school has its own priorities and programs, there is a strong culture of innovation and exchange between the two schools. This reflects a concern to create a coherent and comprehensive curriculum, in particular one that caters to a broad range of student needs, interests and abilities.

The middle school is one key example of this cross-school innovation. Indeed it is important to acknowledge that the middle school is a joint initiative of both schools, not one only instigated and run by the high school. Moreover, the middle school has been in operation at South West Country for the past ten years. In this respect the middle school is now systematically embedded in the day to day practices and structures of the schools. Alongside the middle school is a range of programs that assist students to create pathways through school and into their lives after school. These include an enrichment program and a vocational education program. Each school is also participating in a number of current systemic and local initiatives which share some alignment with the principles developed for the middle school. For example, primary teachers are participating in a science education project as part of the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program.

The principals of both schools have been instrumental in developing and sustaining the middle school over the past ten years. Both principals have brought to their role a strong commitment to middle schooling, and more broadly to the development of close links and curricular exchange between the primary school and high school.

1.3 Students/staff/community

The schools serve a mixed demographic. Students at both schools come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of students (approx 60%) live in town. About 40% of students live on farms and travel to school each day. Most students are of Anglo-Celtic background.

The enrolment is approximately 215 at the primary school and 350 at the high school. While South West Country Primary School is the main feeder school for the high school, there are other small feeder primary schools that are located in communities outside the township of South West. These schools include Wyalong PS, Weethalle PS, Tallimb PS, Beckom PS and Burcher PS.

In this rural community the primary and high school play pivotal roles in terms of provision of education. Two other educational providers in the town are a Catholic school and a campus of Riverina TAFE. Both schools have strong and well-developed relationships with parent groups and others with an interest in education in the community. The vast majority of students completing Yr 6 at the primary school move to Yr 7 at the high school, with little movement of students to boarding schools in larger cities or regional towns. The middle school and the way in which it aids the transition from primary to high school, is considered one of the key reasons for the high transfer rate between the two schools.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Background and Philosophy

The middle school has been in operation at South West Country for the past ten years. Its formation began as one part of a two-fold plan: to extend the range of ways in which the primary school and high school could work together (resource sharing, communication, etc); and to address issues pertaining to the transition from primary school to high school that were noted in the research literature and that resonated with the experiences of those working in the schools. Thus the original model of the middle school was based on home classes for Year 7 students (first year of high school), and transition classes for Yr 5 and 6, as a way of attending to the social and academic needs of students during this particular phase of their schooling, and of building coherence between the curriculum across the primary and high school sectors. The development of the middle school came at a time when both schools were looking to make changes: the high school was reforming its timetable; there was strong support from the senior administration; teaching staff took key roles in conceptualizing practices; and there was a climate of open discussion across both campuses. Each of these factors was critical to implementing the middle school.

Over the last ten years the middle school and the philosophy underpinning it, have evolved and expanded. Key and related aspects of the current middle school philosophy include the following:

- *Curriculum continuity and intellectual integrity*
  A central tenet of the middle school philosophy at SWC is that the program has integrity in relation to student learning. A key aspect of this is the focus on curriculum continuity that has been developed across the school sites and reflected in jointly constructed programs for students in Stage 3 (Years 5-6) where students are prepared specifically for work in Year 7. This continuity aims to make explicit ways in

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which skills and knowledge can be built across Year levels while minimizing repetition across these levels.

- *Student pathways and needs*

In ways consistent with curriculum continuity, a key middle school philosophy at SWC is the provision of pathways for students in ways that suit diverse needs, interests and abilities. The pathways exist through the range of offerings/programs and the curricular and pedagogical structures. Moreover, underpinning the approach in the middle school are structures and practices that support students' academic and social needs (particularly home teachers in Yr 7).

- *Self directed learning*

Enhancing ways in which students can build their confidence and independence in directing their learning is a core part of the Middle School philosophy at South West Country.

- *Middle school integral to school operation.*

The Middle School is embedded within the structures and operations of both the primary and high school. A central tenet of this is that the expertise of teachers working across the sectors (primary, middle and secondary) is valued. There is also a clear understanding that the middle school program is 'more than a barbeque' put on by the high school. Underpinning this is attention to resourcing, staffing and curriculum leadership.

- *Community support*

Building community support, trust and credibility is a guiding middle school principle at South West Country. The middle school developed through a process of consultation with parents.

2.2 School structures

The primary school and high school are located on adjacent sites. The fence between the two schools has been removed to enable students in the Middle School to move freely across the two sites and facilities such as the multi-purpose unit which "belongs" to the high school are readily available to the primary school.

The Middle School encompasses Years 5-7 at South West Country. Students in Year 5 and 6 spend 4 periods each Thursday at the high school. During this time students participate in 'Rotas' (rotating subjects and lessons – 4x50 minutes each day) in the discipline areas in which the high school has specialist facilities, teachers and resources: Design and Technology, Physical Education/Health, Creative Arts.

Students locate permanently on the high school campus in Year 7. The key structures in Year 7 are home classes and Rotas. In the home classes, students are taught by one teacher for English, Maths, Science and HSIE. Students continue with Rotas during this year. In Year 8 most students move to the regular high school timetable. A small group of students who require additional academic support remain with a home teacher in Yr 8. Pathway programs are provided in Years 9 and 10. These programs are a Vocational Education Program and an Enrichment or academic extension program.
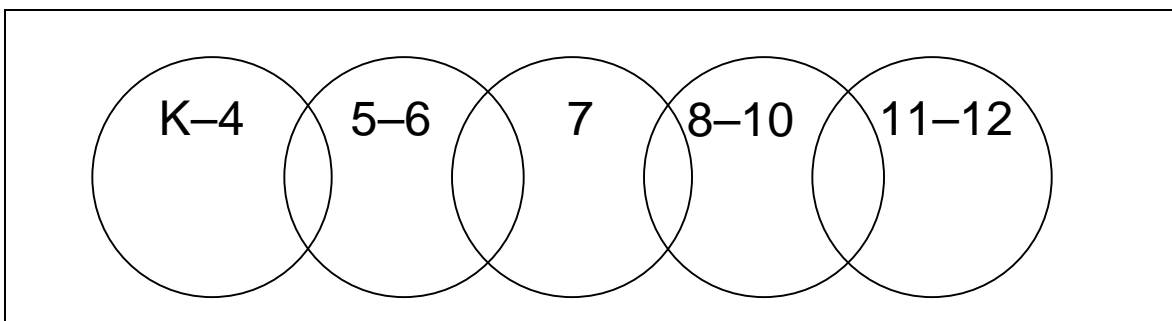
Figure 1: K-12 links at South West Country.

There are four staff whose main responsibilities lie in the Middle School, particularly the Yr 7 Middle School. The Middle School coordinator is responsible for liaison between the primary and high schools, for induction programs into various aspects of the middle school; the continuity of the Yr 5, 6 and 7 curriculum; and addressing student welfare and curriculum problems as they arise.

There are currently three home teachers for Yr 7. These teachers are specifically employed as middle school teachers. The teachers are employed because of their expertise and interest in this phase of schooling. At this point in time all teachers in the middle school have primary education qualifications. High school teachers are responsible for teaching the Rotas.

3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy – linking pedagogy with lifelong learning
A key aspect of the pedagogy in the middle school, and indeed across all Years in the schools is the notion of self-directed learning. This focus aligns strongly with the principles of lifelong learning in that teaching practices seek to develop and make explicit the skills that enable students to learn. Comments in both the interview and survey from students in Years 6-8 noted their emerging independence and confidence. The pedagogical and curricular practices are intended to encourage students to want to learn, to see the value of education, and to set high goals for themselves. Demonstrations of this include: high retention rate for students who are most 'at risk' as an acknowledgement of the importance of gaining the best qualification possible; students in interviews noted how much they enjoyed the range of subjects they have access to in the middle school.

The home teacher/class concept reduces the number of teachers and movement between classes for Yr 7 students. This concept also extends the ways in which students can build collaborative relationships with each other and with their teacher.

The home class also assists in the creation of conditions that enable purposeful learning and student support. Teachers know the backgrounds of students, the ways in which their learning can be extended, and how the individual needs of students can be catered for. Teachers noted that this structure provides a layer of support particularly useful for those students starting Yr 7 from some of the small schools in the region and also for those students who need additional academic support. The teachers are also in a

position to make connections across concepts in the syllabus documents and across Year levels. In terms of intellectual engagement the teachers work to build student interest and responsibility by asking the students to ask, "*Why are we learning this and where does it take us*".

3.2 Curriculum
The key curriculum focus is continuity across sets of skills and knowledge. The curriculum for Yrs 5, 6 and 7 is, by and large, based on the NSW Board of Studies syllabus documents. A key way in which staff have worked with these syllabus documents is through a series of curriculum mapping exercises that have aimed to enhance curriculum consistency. The mapping involved a comprehensive review of Syllabus guidelines across Yrs 5, 6 and 7 in the areas of English, Maths, Science, HSIE and Design and Technology. The purpose of this was to identify the connection and progression between skills and knowledge across Year levels and curriculum fields. The mapping provided a way of conceptualising how skills and understanding could be built and extended over a three-year period. A specific teaching project associated with this mapping involved the use of varied text types across the curriculum and Year levels as a way of explicitly building literacy skills.

In Yr 7 students study English, maths, science and HSIE with one home teacher. Having one teacher across these areas enables concentrated encounters, integration across content areas and the current focus on building of literacy and numeracy skills in relation to these areas. The Rotas provide a base for the acquisition and application of a range of specialist skills and knowledge.

3.3 Assessment and reporting
The schools use outcomes based assessment and reporting. The outcomes are based on the NSW Board of Studies syllabus documents. The teachers in the middle school use common assessment items which enable them to compare progress as well as to moderate the assessment processes and student work. Teachers use an array of assessment tools to build a comprehensive picture of student achievement. Teachers in the high school assess and report the progress of Year 5-6 students in the curriculum areas undertaken during middle school. Assessment and reporting by a mix of primary and high school teachers has not been an issue with primary school parents.

3.4 Timetabling and staff/student organization
The administration and organization of the middle school is shared by the two schools. The timetable has been synchronized so that recess and lunch are at the same time in both schools, facilitating the movement of students across the two sites for the Rota program in Yr 5 and 6 which begins after recess each Thursday

Likewise, the two schools share aspects of the middle school staffing. This joint approach enables teachers to work across both sites, and the employment of designated middle school teachers for the home classes in Yr 7. Moreover, with access to teachers with both primary and secondary specializations, the middle school can operate in a flexible way and organize the home classes in ways which reflect the particular needs of the student body.

This shared resourcing of the Middle School program in terms of staffing is critical to the success of the program as it reflects the commitment of both schools to the program, and it enables both staff and students to work across the two sites.

3.5 Professional development
A range of professional development opportunities has been taken up by teachers in the schools in order to develop the Middle School and extend professional knowledge.

- *Site visits.* Prior to the development of the Middle School, staff visited other schools that had established some form of middle schooling.
- *Presenting and attending conferences and workshops.*
- *Participating in school-based projects that have systemic or cross-school support.* The negotiation and collaboration between teachers across school sites in order to establish the middle school represents one key example of school-based professional development. Teachers involved in developing the program extended their knowledge of their different school sectors and took a critical role in designing the curriculum. There is a range of related projects stemming from this. For example, teachers in the schools participated in curriculum mapping projects which were supported through NSW Country Area Program funding.

The focus on curriculum and pedagogical reform at the two schools has provided teachers with an opportunity to consider their own professional learning. The nature of the reform has enabled and encouraged a culture of teacher collaboration and professional learning within and across the two schools. This reflects another form of lifelong learning in the school and it has provided the conditions for organizational collaboration, flexibility and reflection, and the development of a professional learning community.

3.6 Leadership
A critical aspect of the Middle School at SWC is the leadership provided by the principals of both the primary and the high school. This leadership has encompassed curriculum vision as well as the provision of structural supports. For example, the shared infrastructure, staffing and resourcing of the Middle School has depended on strong collaboration and commitment by the two principals. The principals have provided the necessary conditions for staff to take responsibility for and develop the curriculum. While each principal acknowledges their own distinctive style and approach to leadership, they have worked to build a complementary set of practices that have enabled the schools to develop a seamless approach to curriculum and pedagogy across K-12.

3.7 Pathways in Years 9 and 10
South West Country High School has a well-established set of pathway programs in Yrs 9 and 10. A vocational education program that combines work experience with school and TAFE study caters in particular for students who have special needs, who do not want to pursue an academic pathway, or who are at risk of not completing Yr 10. Each student has an individualised program that seeks to build particular sets of skills (eg communication, organisation, mathematical) in various workplace settings and to combine this with focused programs of study and certification. This program has been independently evaluated.

South West Country High School also operates an Enrichment Program as part of the elective choice. A range of self-directed modules are negotiated with students and they focus on such things as high level communication skills, public speaking, advanced technology skills, and current affairs. The enrichment program aims to extend students' confidence and forums for civic and intellectual participation.

4. TEACHER INSIGHTS

The four teachers working specifically with Yr 7 students are the core of the Middle School teaching team. The teachers noted that their backgrounds in primary education provided them with insights into where students were coming from prior to Yr 7 and the ability to take a holistic and integrated approach to the curriculum planning. The teachers noted that they had observed that the middle school practices at South West Country really enabled students to make a smooth transition from primary school to high school in ways that differed from those found in other contexts in which they had worked. Key aspects of the pedagogical practices employed by teachers include: connections across curriculum areas and to everyday concepts and practices outside of school; intellectual engagement and purpose through encouraging students to question why they are learning particular skills and knowledge; making explicit the skills base that students are developing; facilitating concentrated encounters with particular concepts to enable depth of learning; and encouraging students to work as collaborative teams.

5. STUDENT INSIGHTS

Seven students participated in the focus group interview (2 Year 8 students; 3 Year 7 students; 2 Year 6 students). This variation in student Year level provided an opportunity for different perspectives. Students noted that their experience in the Middle School provided them with an opportunity to gain independence, take on challenging work, broaden the range of subjects they can study, meet more people and make more friends through cross-age activities and through having one class and one teacher where they get to know people better.

The students noted that the teachers in the middle school assisted them to learn by "*making boring stuff interesting*", by "*explaining things clearly*", by setting up activities that enabled "*cooperation*", by "*taking time to help people*", and above all by being "*encouraging*". Students noted that this helped their "*confidence in learning*" and helped them to "*set high aims*".

The students liked learning a range of subject in the middle school. One student noted that the range enabled you "*to find something you were good at*". Each student noted their different interests, for example one student liked the "*creativity of English*", another the opportunity to acquire "*general knowledge through studying science*". Many of the students enjoyed learning subjects that had a 'practical' or practice-based focus such as Design and Technology or PE.

Through their comments students demonstrated a strong sense of the value of education. They saw their learning at school as important to their futures. The students typically indicated their learning goals in relation to particular subjects – for example, "*I need to get better at maths*", "*I need to improve my spelling*", "*I want to do something with science*". When asked why they had these goals students said that the skills learnt in subjects like English and Maths were important in terms of career. They were also able to extrapolate some of the broader and less well-defined skills that might assist their ongoing learning. Comments in this area included having a sense of "*what you are good at*", "*having confidence in yourself*", "*taking opportunities*", "*developing a strong sense of*

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discipline and hard work", "*aiming to extend skills*", being "*confident*" in your own abilities and developing "*independence*".

6. OUTCOMES

Given that the middle school has been in operation for over ten years, there are several indicators of its value within the school and in relation to students' social and academic outcomes. Evidence drawn on to indicate the value of the program include: standardised test results; in-school assessment results; anecdotal records; behaviour referral rates; external evaluations; school satisfaction survey results; curriculum documents produced within the school; participation rates.

- Students' results in state-wide standardised tests are used to monitor student progress over time as well as measure student achievement against state averages. The analysis shows that students in Yr 7 at South West Country are performing at or above state averages. There has not been a noticeable dip in results for students in Year 7.
- Student satisfaction survey. This survey was conducted in 2001 and considered students' feelings and responses to school, its environment and the curriculum. The results of the survey provided a clear indication that students were on the whole happy at school and satisfied with the educational opportunities they had access to.
- In 1999 Professor Eddie Braggett from Charles Sturt University, and a leading authority on middle schooling in Australia, visited the school and prepared an evaluative report. This evaluation noted that the school was exemplary in its middle school practices and 'possibly unique in the NSW state system'.
- Reduced referral rate for management problems in Yr 7 because matters are dealt with by home teacher and because supportive environment reduces management problems.
- High retention rate for most 'at risk' students. Staff noted that many of the students most 'at risk' are staying on at school because of the ways in which the school promotes the value of education and because of the range of programs on offer to cater for a wide range of student abilities and interests (Vocational Education and Enrichment Program are crucial to this, and build on the work in the Middle School).
- Teachers noted that students from small schools make the transition to high school in a smooth way and this is facilitated by the Yr 7 home teacher.
- Curriculum mapping documents and the school structure developed in relation to these documents provide a clear sense of connections, pathways and building blocks in key learning areas.
- Retention of students within the public education facilities of the town between Year 6 and Year 7.

7. SUMMARY

The environment at South West Country HS and PS, made manifest through programs such as the Middle School, the Vocational Program and the Enrichment Program, provide clear foundations upon which students can build their learning, as well as a set of pathways that meet the diverse academic and social needs of the students in the middle years of schooling. Perhaps, most importantly in the context of this study, the environment at the two schools has assisted students to recognise the value of learning,

to value the educational opportunities available to them, and to build their confidence as learners. This environment for students has been established through the innovation and leadership demonstrated by teachers and the senior administration within the school. The fact that the middle school has been in operation for ten years, and that it has evolved over that time, reflects the ways in which the schools function as a learning community for both staff and students. In this respect a culture of learning has been embedded in the structures and practices in the schools for both staff and students.

SOUTH WEST SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL (NSW)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

South West Sydney HS is an award-winning, comprehensive, co-educational high school located in the Campbelltown School Education Area. While the district generally is considered disadvantaged, 2001 Census figures indicate that the specific suburb where the high school is located is extremely disadvantaged, with approximately 85% of households tenured in rented public housing and almost 65% of persons with an annual income under $20K. Police data reveal extremely high rates of violent crime, drug-related offences, break and enter and public disputes. A high proportion of single parent families live in the area, it has an unemployment rate that hovers around 30% and a transient population with a mobility rate at the school of approximately 30% per annum. The Indigenous population of South West Sydney is significant (about 10% of the total) and ethnic diversity is high, but the majority of the population is Anglo-Saxon and 75% speak English at home.

These statistics and other situational factors have led to a very poor public perception of the South West Sydney community evidenced in disparaging remarks made by taxi drivers and other community members from the district. The school's image is further disadvantaged by its proximity to a juvenile detention centre situated opposite the school and next door to the main feeder primary school for South West Sydney High.

1.2 About the School

In spite of the negative public perception of its surrounding community, South West Sydney HS has recently been enjoying tremendous achievements and positive exposure at many levels. In 2003 the school was presented with a 'Highly Commended' in the inaugural *National Awards for Quality Schooling*, the only public high school from anywhere in Sydney, and one of only three public high schools in NSW to win an award. During the same year, South West Sydney HS won its third consecutive [NSW] *Director General's Award* for school achievement and in 2002 the school received an *Australian College of Education Redall Award* as well as being listed by *The Australian* newspaper as running one of Australia's Top 10 school initiatives in relation to staff training and development. That year also saw two staff members win National awards for *Excellence in Teaching*, the Careers Adviser was runner up in the *NSW Careers Adviser of the Year Award*, and the current principal won a *Director General's Award for Excellent Service to Public Education in NSW*. All of these and other accolades are, in part, one measure of the school's successful reform program that gained some major impetus when the current principal took up his position in January 2001.

At the beginning of 2001, collaboratively-derived organisational structures and procedures relating to curriculum and welfare were in place and were considered sound. According to the principal, there was "a sense of calm" owing to the hard work already done by the extraordinarily committed and talented staff. But there was

an imbalance in planning, financing and dialogue about welfare and a desire to re-focus on the core business of the school, teaching and learning. Therefore, in 2001, the pursuit of a shared vision (articulated by the principal as "The Dream"), to create a genuine professional learning community, began with a deliberate, planned process of re-culturing. The first step in this process was for the whole school community to collaboratie in deriving a "Values Platform" that would essentially provide the framework for all core aspects of the school's operation including pedagogy, administration, resourcing, behaviour management and welfare programs. For the values platform to become a reality in the classrooms at South West Sydney a "Learning Platform" was developed by the administrative team and staff were immersed in extensive professional development programs that focused on the relationship between pedagogy and cognitive learning theory. The principal describes the final overarching framework as "the heart and soul of things" and explains that the values platform and learning platform are "mirrored processes" that provide staff with a way of maintaining equilibrium and motivation in the face of often challenging daily realities experienced at South West Sydney HS.

The re-culturing program at South West Sydney HS was further enhanced by improvements to the school's physical environment. The entire front of the school was landscaped using resources accessed through the Commonwealth CDEP program. This initiative improved the visual impact of the school by diminishing the impact of the existing three-metre fence that surrounds school. The entrance foyer was also dramatically improved and now displays the school achievement awards as well as a wide array of student work. Student-designed murals are strategically placed around the school grounds adding much needed colour and life to the thirty-year-old buildings. In essence the school was attempting to send the consistent message that the work and achievements of both staff and students is highly valued. A video surveillance system also installed has reduced break and enter incidents at the school, resulting in significantly fewer disruptions to school learning and resource provision.

The school is part of the Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP) and the Priority Action Schools Program (PASP) and has a five-class Support unit. The PASP initiative of 2003 has enabled staffing supplementation which, according to the related report, "has resulted in achievements that can be linked to what we know of making schools more effective and facilitating organisational change through re-culturing". This report, written by a 'critical friend' employed under the PASP initiative, outlines the following indicators of the program's success:
- Strong cultural and strategic leadership
- High quality training and development
- Good teaching
- Emphasis on literacy
- [Appropriate] use of data

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

Current student enrolment at South West Sydney HS is 610, including a capacity Support Unit of IM and IO students. The student population represents 56 cultural backgrounds, of these 12% are ATSI and 17% Pacific Islander. The majority of students reside in the surrounding South West Sydney Public Housing Estate.

Total school staff is about 70 with a teaching staff of 55 including 2 STLDs, 6 support staff, an Aboriginal Education Assistant, 2 part time school counsellors and a Careers Adviser. The school administration staff includes a PSFP funded Community Liaison Officer (CLO), a PSFP Pacific Island CLO one day per week and 2 support persons for the PSFP and PASP programs. The principal describes the school staff as "brilliantly dedicated" and constantly points to the minimal staff turnover during the last 3-4 years as "one of the best indicators of how well things are going" (only three transfers at the end of 2003 related to promotion and proximity of work to home). The principal is regarded as an exemplary leader, commanding respect, loyalty, and confidence; and a leader who is visible, hardworking and strategic. He is a sought-after speaker in local, national, and international educational forums and donates earnings from these engagements to staff training and development (T&D).

Students' rights and responsibilities are explicitly taught at South West Sydney HS with one effect being that they are empowered to expect the best from their teachers. The high expectations of both students and staff result in an understanding that students are responsible for their own learning, but the school has an active SRC that has recently developed its own 'values platform' aligned with that derived by the adult school community.

The school is actively promoted in communities throughout the South West Sydney area -- both through media releases and ceremonies, and by the principal himself who, along with the P&C, performs a letterbox drop of the South West Sydney HS Community Newsletter at the beginning of each school Term.

A new school motto, "Strive to Achieve" was implemented immediately prior to the current principal's appointment replacing the existing motto "Be Mindful of Others". This change reflects the re-culturing of the school and the renewed focus on pedagogy and a balanced emphasis with the welfare support provided by the school. 'Personal best' was a phrase adopted by all members of the school community after the success of 2000 Sydney Olympics and is considered a priority target for school-related activities. It is viewed by many as the school's unofficial motto. The concept is frequently talked about and relates to a search for personal best at all levels of the school's operation and from all individual teachers and students.

2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Philosophy and Vision

Several Middle Schooling initiatives have been implemented at South West Sydney HS but the most significant in terms of efficacy has been *The Linkages Project* underway since 2001. Developed at South West Sydney HS, *Linkages* is designed to create structured dialogue between the high school and its four primary feeder schools. One of the main aims of this project is to enable relatively seamless transition for primary students moving across to South West Sydney HS. But the principal indicated that the preferred broader aim is to establish a coherent pedagogical (and welfare) approach for all students in the middle years of schooling. Therefore, the early stages of development of *Linkages* involved a sharing of ideas through T&D for all staff involved, in an effort to find congruence between values and learning in all cluster schools, and collaboratively to derive a consistent platform for

values and learning that could be implemented across the cluster. Once this was established, many staff teaching Years 5 through 8 were trained in the 4MAT System of learning (using South West Sydney HS T&D funds) to provide pedagogical discourse that could be utilised consistently across all sites. Once the common learning platform and discourse were established a series of events/meetings occurred to assist in the implementation of the project as follows:

- a combined executive staff workshop designed to share cluster school philosophies and structures and to compare syllabus and programming documents and ideas
- a combined schools' development day involving 170 staff from the five school sites
- the establishment of weekly ongoing lessons for Year 5 and 6 students held at South West Sydney HS (during compulsory sport afternoon) in a 4-weekly cycle to ensure students experience the breadth of the curriculum. These lessons involve team-teaching by South West Sydney staff with Year 9 students assisting and are open to all primary teachers.
- access was made available to all T&D events held at South West Sydney for all primary teachers in the cluster, at South West Sydney HS expense. This includes weekend residential conferences, extended executive workshops and travelling conference engagements.
- implementation trial of Schoolmate (a software program that records information about programming, assessment, BST results, reporting, interventions, funding, welfare, discipline, etc. developed by the principal of Noumea PS) across all sites in an effort to build a comprehensive middle years students database that is used to improve their learning.
- the formation of a steering committee which meets once a term and the aim of which is to oversee the implementation of the Linkages project and to provide feedback to each school site.

Within the Linkages Project is a Year 6-7 transition program similar that found at other NSW school sites that includes:
- visits to the feeder primary schools by Year 7 students from South West Sydney HS on a regular basis to report their experiences, e.g., about ELLA and SNAP; as well as establish relationships with prospective Years 6 students
- touring performing arts groups to all cluster sites
- visits by the South West Sydney HS principal to the primary sites for relatively informal 'chats' with prospective parents
- a Year 6 Orientation Day that concludes with a BBQ for all involved
- visits to the primary schools by Year 7 advisers to establish relationships and ongoing dialogue with Year 6 advisers and prospective South West Sydney students
- meetings between the Year 6 advisers from each primary school and the Deputy Principal from South West Sydney HS

The Linkages Project is therefore all about opening up communication channels between all cluster schools and forging professional relationships that ensure middle years students experience a consistent approach to their learning needs as well as a structured monitoring program that records their progress through this crucial period of their school career. A DP interviewed indicated that one aim of Linkages was

"trying to prevent de-skilling of primary students", an issue that stems from the lack of cohesion between pedagogical and welfare strategies in primary and high schools.

2.2 Selected middle years initiatives

Other middle schooling initiatives implemented at South West Sydney aimed to assist the success of the Linkages Project include:
- staffing Year 7 classes in a teamed situation;
- the provision of two advisers per Year level who move through the middle years of schooling with their cohort;
- a Year 7, 3-day camp held early in Term 1 aimed at relationship-building between students and teachers;
- a mentoring program involving peer reading and tutoring with Year 10 students; and a peer support program in which Year 11 students are trained to act as mentors for small groups of Year 7 students.

The school also has trained peer mediators from most Year groups who assist in the peaceful resolution of conflict between students. The explicit focus for all of these Year 7 programs is "getting along with others", a theme which appears to be having a significant impact on the current cohort who are more settled and exhibiting less extreme behaviour problems than in previous years.

Student work is explicitly valued and contributes to effective displays in public areas around the school and in classrooms, the latter made possible through provision of homerooms for teachers. A homeroom is considered important in the middle school, and homeroom teachers have significant responsibilities in relation to the welfare of students in their care. Extended roll class are an integral aspect of homeroom activities where topics relating to all aspects of students' lives are discussed along with semi-structured lessons in peer support, study skills and social skills.

Every attempt is made to establish open communication links with the parents/carers of students in the middle years. For example, teachers, administration staff and Year level Advisers from South West Sydney meet with prospective Year 7 parents/carers at the feeder primary schools and, after transition into Year 7, parents meet with Heads of Departments for morning tea. These meetings aim to make parents as comfortable as possible to ensure ongoing communication occurs between the school and parents. As explained by the DP, "I teach with the idea that I need to have parents involved". Across the entire school, the staff are encouraged by the principal to contact parents. This is often difficult as phone connections in the community are often temporary and constantly changing. Year level advisers supply the principal with the names of students who are achieving their personal best and he personally contacts the relevant parents or carers on a regular basis to inform them of their child's progress.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL-BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy

The C.L.A.S.S. Instructional Framework

The collaboratively derived 'Learning Platform' consists of seven statements which make explicit the beliefs and understandings about teaching commonly held by the South West Sydney HS learning community. In order to articulate the Learning Platform with faculty programs, a five-step process that reinforced a constructivist approach to learning, was developed by the school. The C.L.A.S.S programming tool examines five 'stages' of a pedagogical approach:

> Connections
> Learning
> Application
> Sharing
> Synthesis

Under each stage is a series of questions that enables teachers to break down the generic statements of the Learning Platform and analyse their respective curricula for the purpose of programming or evaluation. Apart from its value as an instructional and analytical framework, the C.L.A.S.S. programming tool also provides the pedagogical language for staff to engage in professional dialogue at every level of their teaching experience. Support was provided to South West Sydney staff (and interested cluster school staff) for examining existing programs or developing new ones in a series of after-school workshops.

The 4MAT Learning Cycle
In the years prior to 2003, the principal ensured that all South West Sydney staff, as well as many cluster school staff, were provided in-service training in a cognitive theory of learning, the 4MAT System, to help teachers to shift their mind-set to student-centred, constructivist strategies and provide a consistent approach to teaching and learning across the K-12 curriculum. The school's Strategic Framework and Values Platforms reflect the cycle of learning contained in the 4MAT System that is widely used by the school in faculties, classrooms, school planning and training and development activities. Significantly, the 4MAT System of learning is also explicitly taught (in an appropriately-modified version) to students at South West Sydney in various subject areas and also to the SRC as a valuable decision-making tool so that they can understand the sorts of learners they are (and can become) as well as gaining some metalanguage and some insights into teaching and learning strategies employed by teachers at South West Sydney.

The training in, and implementation of, the 4MAT learning model and the C.L.A.S.S. approach to programming are perceived by South West Sydney teachers to be invaluable for providing a language for professional discourse as well as providing the link between the philosophical statements of the South West Sydney HS Learning Platform and the cross-referencing of these statements against faculty programs. Combined with professional development in other aspects of pedagogy, the CLASS and 4MAT models ensure a consistent whole-school approach to educating South West Sydney HS students as well as enabling teachers to address the needs of individual students and specific groups of students.

As a result of the comprehensive professional development program offered to teachers at South West Sydney, teachers are more able to articulate their classroom strategies with a teaching philosophy that has lifelong learning as one of its underlying principles. According to one teacher of middle years students, "Lifelong learning is implicit in everything we do". This statement is supported by salient aspects of the curriculum such as:

- a focus on connectedness;
- a strong emphasis on reflection;
- the use of metalanguage to assist in the expression of ideas and students' understandings about their own learning;
- an overarching aim of achieving student independence; and
- democratic school processes that promote active citizenship along with student involvement in community-based projects.

As well as these curriculum components, lifelong learning is promoted at South West Sydney through staff acting as:
- explicit role models as learners;
- collaborators and team players who demonstrate strong collegial support;
- risk-takers; and
- professionals whose job is to pass on life skills as well as facilitate the learning process.

The consistency of staff responses to this issue during interviews was impressive and captured in this statement by a DP, "[we are] living what we say".

3.2 Welfare

At South West Sydney HS, pedagogy must be intrinsically linked to welfare initiatives to enable a holistic approach to student learning. Several innovative welfare initiatives are implemented at the school that assist in developing the skills of lifelong learners.

Year Level Advisers

Having two Year level advisers that move through the middle school with the same cohort has had a big effect on the strength of relationships between students and teachers and also appears to minimise extreme behaviour problems. These teachers not only play a 'parent' role to their cohort but also provide an important link between students and all other adults they have contact with including other teachers, administrative staff, parents and welfare workers. They also play a crucial role during student subject selection and in changes to classes/subjects during the year. In conjunction with Head Teachers, the Year advisers ensure that students in the middle years experience consistency in the curriculum across the primary/secondary divide effectively preventing repetition in learning experiences and maintaining a common pedagogy.

Extended Roll Calls

Extended roll calls are important for the welfare program at South West Sydney HS where the focus is on building positive relationships in the school community. These are held each Wednesday. In the middle years of schooling groups are divided up according to Year level and gender, with the rationale for the gender division being the fostering of more appropriate behaviour in a low-risk, safe environment where gender-specific issues can be openly discussed. Some of the 'lessons' involve guest speakers e.g., the police and other community members who discuss students' legal rights and responsibilities as members of society. For Year 10 students, this time is also used to develop leadership skills and for training in the mentoring program with primary transition students. Resources for extended roll calls are collaboratively designed by staff and sometimes by the students (as an example, for a forum on drugs the resources used were all designed and developed by the students). Values

are an underpinning element of this initiative and are 'played out' through a game in which students are given a series of value statements and must physically line up on a Lickert scale and justify their stance according to the strength of their conviction.

Community Liaison Officers

The employment of two CLOs at South West Sydney HS as a part of the school's PSFP funding is an indication of the importance of strong community links for the smooth operation of all school activities. PSFP expenditure is to a large extent at the school's discretion, and the decision to fund the CLO positions in preference to other funding options adds credence to the value the school places upon community relations. This initiative also demonstrates sensitivity to the diversity of needs in the broader community (for example, through the CLO, Arabic community members hold workshops at the school to foster an understanding of their culture). One job of the CLOs is to create occasions for the community to come into the school and to ensure that the community remains informed of public events that reward achievement at South West Sydney HS. Some specific events which elevate South West Sydney HS status within the community include the annual *Flag Ceremony*, a multicultural event celebrating diversity of origin of South West Sydney HS students. This is increasingly well attended by the public and local and mainstream media.

Selected welfare initiatives

Other community links include a reliance on *Trackside*, a government-funded group of youth workers from the local district, often used to sort out conflict and problems, that are not necessarily school-related, concerning South West Sydney students. This is a preferred option that allows qualified persons to deal with the students in their home environment and does not place teachers in possible compromising situations. The school also utilises trained mentors from a DET-funded operation called "Plan-it Youth". These mentors work one-on-one with students that have "real social issues" and follow up with appropriate feedback to relevant teaching staff providing, them with information that will assist in engaging these students at school. Additionally, a South West Sydney community youth worker, funded through the Uniting Church provides information, and tours about the South West Sydney community for teachers at the school so that "all aspects of students lives are made apparent to staff".

The school has an awareness of, and access to, any available programs/events that help to ground the fundamental values of South West Sydney HS and which will positively engage the students. Before committing to these programs, staff always ensure that their underlying concepts are linked to the school's Values Platform and will promote life skills and resilience in their students. For example, a theatre company from the northern NSW coast, *Brainstorm Productions*, presents a dramatic performance titled "The Hurting Game", which raises awareness about power issues experienced by youth, such as bullying and peer pressure, and can clearly be linked to the 'getting along with others' focus of the Year 7 cohort as well as to the ideas outlined in the *Mind Matters* program.

The school also holds an annual 'Anti-Violence Day' which puts into practice some of the issues discussed in extended roll calls. On this day, Year 11 students work with Year 7 students in a variety of structured learning tasks relating relationship building and conflict resolution activities for half of the day. The remainder of the day is

dedicated to social activities, such as a BBQ for all participants, which helps to sustain the ideas developed during the earlier lessons.

Other issues relating to the welfare of South West Sydney HS students are introduced into the curriculum where possible. For example, PD/H/PE has a strong welfare focus in the middle years specifically targeting sensitive issues such as sexuality, relationships, personal health and hygiene, drugs, etc. To ensure students attain maximum benefit from these classes they are also split along gender lines. PD/H/PE teachers are extremely sensitive to individual needs and find it essential to present the broadest possible spectrum of pathways for these students, thus explicitly recognising difference within the community.

4   INITIATIVES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

4.1 Timetabling and Subject Selection

To reduce the number of classes and teachers that middle years students are exposed to it was decided to combine some subjects and to increase the number of lessons for the resulting combinations. For example, LOTE and music were combined, as were geography, history and social studies to from HSIE. As far as is possible, the team of teachers that works with middle years students progresses through these years with the same cohort until Year 11.

For Year 8, subject selection is very much a reflective activity based on informed choice. Before students choose the subjects they will be 'locked into' in Years 9 and 10, the school employs a strategy whereby Year 8 students write their own 'report' in relation to their achievements and problems throughout the year. This is then discussed with their homeroom teacher and Year Adviser who focus on student strengths and weaknesses in relation to individual subject choices. Students are required to articulate clearly their reasons for selecting subjects, and thus are more inclined to take responsibility for their choices. Students are also made aware of the limited places in some more popular subjects. This has the effect of a very high return rate on parent/carer-signed subject selection forms by the due date.

4.2 Professional Development (T & D)

South West Sydney HS provides unparalleled opportunities in T&D in the form of weekend residential conferences (held 3-4 times per year); timetabled Faculty and Focus Group meetings; whole staff meetings timetabled on a regular basis; plus scheduled after-school workshops where necessary. This 'organisational learning' approach to professional development was intended to alleviate the pressure from daily school activities, and develop 'thinking time' for individuals and dialogue between staff members. This approach means that staff at South West Sydney HS are treated like professionals who feel they can take risks and present new initiatives and challenges for consideration by other staff in a less threatening environment. Over the last three years in-service training for all staff (including primary feeder staff) in C.L.A.S.S. and 4MAT has provided teachers with a common language to critique the learning activities they engage in with their students, as well as providing a consistent approach to pedagogy and programming. The principal is explicit about the learning that staff undertake in the school when he is talking to students (and

parents) at assemblies and other public gatherings and this has the effect of enabling students to perceive clearly that their teachers are lifelong learners.

In 2004 the T&D program at South West Sydney HS is set to develop further the pedagogical and relationship skills of its teachers through a structured peer observation program utilising C.L.A.S.S. and 4MAT models so that teachers can select categories and set up observational rubrics that help to depersonalise observation sessions and remove any threat of uninvited critique. In essence, in 2004 every teacher at the school observes another teacher in a classroom at least once every two weeks on a rotational basis. The focus for these observations is a collaboratively-developed observation rubric relating specifically to the unit of work being taught. Each Faculty has control over the logistics of the schedule, and each Head Teacher monitors and discusses the outcomes of all observations with the Faculty. This represents high quality professional learning which is structured around explicit observation of teachers teaching.

4.3 Resourcing

South West Sydney receives PSFP funds and since 2002, PASP funding, used to continue to implement some of the school reform efforts outlined above. The principal actively seeks funding and comfortably assumes an entrepreneurial role within his leadership style. He ensures that resources ("however limited") are targeted towards the collaboratively derived goals of the school. For example PASP funds in 2003 were used for five focus areas determined by South West Sydney staff including literacy and numeracy; teaching and learning (implementing C.L.A.S.S. and 4MAT); student welfare support programs that enhance attendance and retention; independent learning skills of senior students; and social skills for students including leadership and gender specific elements.

4.4 Information Technology

Since 2001, the school has improved its information technology capabilities with the installation of a computer network across the school and an upgrade of existing computers throughout the school. A new computer lab has now been completed in an effort to improve the student -to-computer ratio and exposure to new ICTs (few students at South West Sydney HS have access to a PC at home). Software programs that enhance student data collection have been installed including a trial of *Schoolmate*, a database that enables comprehensive tracking about all aspects of middle years students' lives. The school also has in place a system of tracking daily attendance of students through the use of a swipe-card that students are responsible for in cases of lateness or exiting school grounds early.

Information processing and technology is incorporated across the curriculum, embedded where appropriate in all faculty programs and used to enhance specific programs such as School to Work. Year 7 students are the only Year level that experiences Information processing as a stand-alone subject; presumably to ensure that all students entering South West Sydney HS have sufficient skills to cope with the IT requirements of the learning activities they engage in.

4.5 School to Work Initiatives

The Real Game

This structured real-life learning activity is an initiative of the NSW DET that South West Sydney HS has implemented into the Year 8 curriculum through PD/H/PE, running 1-2 lessons per week for an entire term with a strong link with the *School to Work* program undertaken in Year 9. For the duration of the 'game' each student is allocated a specific job and the implications of being employed in this role are explored in relation to all aspects of life. That is, apart from job-related aspects such as pay, tax, hours of work, type of labour, job satisfaction, holidays, unions, etc. Students also discuss housing affordability and other budget issues, explore alternative relationship arrangements that affect income, the effect of kids on a family's income, and other life skills issues and factors. The teacher's role is managing the game and in making appropriate connections to classroom and school (e.g., implications of being late; subject requirements for different life pathways), as well as links to the students' personal lives, enabling them to understand their own family's circumstances in relation to living in the South West Sydney community. The teacher interviewed in relation to this program outlined some of its significant features as follows:

- The game enables students to appropriate a metalanguage for discussing life pathways and relevant life skills.
- The program enables Year 8 students to understand the reality of their parents limited financial resources.
- One of the main goals of the game is to foster resilience in these students by presenting multiple/alternative pathways for students to access or explore.
- An outcome of the game is that it limits unreal expectations about life pathways available for these students.
- The game is all about choice and is a good method for imparting information about actions and real-life consequences in a contrived situation.

One final point this teacher made was that she always ensures students are not given the 'unemployed role' but she did make sure that dole-related issues were discussed so that students did not hang on to the perception that this was a good option as a life pathway.

School to Work

The Careers Adviser at South West Sydney HS has implemented the NSW DET initiative "Ready to Work: School to Work Planning" into the Year 9 curriculum. This program consists of a computer-based multimedia package of materials for students to attain employment-related skills and record their learnings in a logbook or 'careers portfolio'. Modified somewhat to suit the South West Sydney context, the *School to Work* program operates mostly on-line where students reflect on and record their real-life experiences, as well as in-putting various other forms of data and engaging in a variety of learning activities. Lifelong learning is implicit in this program as it makes connections between individual learnings and those experienced in the classroom, throughout the school and community, and in the workplace. The *School to Work* program is designed to dovetail into the Work Experience and Vocational Education curriculum in Year 10.

A significant amount of time is also spent on raising awareness of staff about the importance of Vocational Learning Outcomes, and this includes assistance for all staff in regularly referring students to their School to Work logbooks. The central aim is to see Careers education not as an additional element of the curriculum, but more

as an integral part of the curriculum and as every teacher's professional responsibility.

A final, but very significant feature of the South West Sydney HS philosophy towards lifelong learning is their open-door policy to all school leavers so that students may have access to pathways otherwise limited once they leave the school and its resources. This policy applies equally to students who have been expelled to assure this group of students that they are still valued members of the school community and to make them aware that their expulsion was due to unacceptable behaviour, not to their personal value.

4.6 Special Programs

Boys' Own [Girls' Own]

The *Boys' Own* program grew from a 'wilderness' camp that was established some years ago by two enthusiastic and adventurous teachers who wanted to provide 'at-risk' boys with a challenging program that required "adult" ability levels, but focused on choice or pathways. The success of the original program was measured in terms of the improved self-esteem and behaviour for all boys who participated. The *Boys' Own* program is now more structured, targeting boys across the whole spectrum of behaviours from 'at-risk' to potential leaders. The teachers who run this program are very clear about their roles as mentors in this exercise and aim to establish a relationship of trust and loyalty with the boys who participate. These days the program includes several self-directed projects, and has refocused relationship building within the school community. It is expected that in 2004 all boys will be part of the program and a similar program for girls is to be trialled.

Outward Bound

The principal has made a point of establishing good relationships with all local politicians, especially with the State Labour member and the current Federal Liberal member. As a result of these links, the local Federal member assisted with the resourced funding for the school's Year 9 cohort to take part in the *Outward Bound* program on an annual basis. This five-day orienteering course takes students out of their 'comfort zone' with anecdotal evidence suggesting that they all experienced improved self-esteem by merely completing the course.

Community Stuff

Wherever possible, the school tries to encourage its students to participate in community events that promote active citizenship. The HT Arts played an integral role in establishing the community networks that enabled students to become involved in these events. For example, she nominated South West Sydney students to work on a Housing Commission mural project and also got them involved in a beautification scheme for a neglected playground in the South West Sydney Housing Estate. This teacher was adamant that once involved, her role was not to supply ideas but to guide the students through the project so that they could claim ownership of their work and acquire some important skills in work-related issues and a sense of independence.

5   TEACHER INSIGHTS

During two days at South West Sydney HS, eight teachers (including Year level advisers and head teachers) plus the Principal and two Deputy Principals were interviewed. The consistency of the discourse around pedagogical reform at South West Sydney during these interviews meant individual teachers could clearly articulate their teaching philosophy and link this with their understanding of lifelong learning in relation to both themselves and their students. Their responses demonstrate that lifelong learning is embedded in their professional teaching practice and this can be attributed to the intensive T&D program undertaken at South West Sydney HS over the previous three years.

A pedagogical dimension that teachers referred to most often is ' Connectedness', or 'Connections' in terms of the C.L.A.S.S. model. As one teacher put it "this [C.L.A.S.S. and 4MAT] approach requires teachers to focus more on the reason for doing things and pay more attention to the connectedness of the total learning at school". Another talked of always making connections between school activities and students' real-life experiences to keep things in perspective. In other words, providing students with a purpose for learning anything, combined with making links to all other aspects of their lives, is a fundamental pedagogical strategy for maintaining student engagement in the learning process.

A number of teachers interviewed talked explicitly about the use of 'metalanguage' across all aspects the curriculum. They said that teaching in this way enabled students to express their ideas about social and their personal life skills and experiences; their understanding and learnings in specific disciplines; and career and employment-related concepts and issues.

The members of the school's executive team who were interviewed (and who are also teachers) tended to describe their perceptions of the outcomes of the reforms implemented over the last three years in relation to the effect of those reforms on teachers and students. All expressed the improved sense of professionalism amongst staff, a trend perceived by one DP to be due to the new approach to pedagogy that has enabled teachers to believe in themselves. This deputy also suggested that there is a direct correlation between the improved student/school outcomes and the change in pedagogy.

When teachers made specific reference to lifelong learning, they spoke of the importance of building positive relationships; providing a safe environment; valuing individuals; and overtly recognising difference, as well as modelling learning for their students. One teacher inferred that the emphasis placed on the purpose of learning and the connections between learnings, instils resilience in students at South West Sydney HS. All teachers interviewed clearly saw themselves as lifelong learners. One teacher attributed this situation to the principal, claiming that, "his focus on professional and personal development in a risk-free environment ensures that for teachers, the notion of being a learner is clear". According to a DP, students are also able to see their teachers as learners because of the principal's public messages regarding staff T&D, and also because they are taught a modified version of the same information that teachers receive on learning theories.

Final themes to emerge from the interviews were collegial/ peer support; collaborative work; sharing of resources; and the notion of the staff as a team. Teacher induction programs and ongoing support for new staff are considered essential in a school like

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South West Sydney High. The majority of staff interviewed were overtly political and comfortable with their roles as advocates of public education, as many objected to the Prime Minister's recent criticisms of public schools. The principal clearly supports the political nature of his staff and actively engages in his own political 'battles' at Area level. He describes the irony in his relationship with Area Office where a less supportive environment has emerged -- perhaps due to the successes experienced at South West Sydney HS, which have upset the status quo and, according to the principal, have proved that "schools can do it regardless of the structural support".

6 STUDENT INSIGHTS

In the main, students were unable to articulate clearly many of their answers to questions asked during the focus group interview, particularly when they were required to explain their understanding about their own learning styles and their interpretation of lifelong learning. But the insights that were gleaned from their responses include the following:

- With reference to changes experienced since last year, the students interpreted this question as 'personal' change and the majority responded that they felt more confident and had greater freedom.
- Students who had come to South West Sydney HS from another school indicated they learnt more at South West Sydney, the teachers were better at explaining things and they were no longer "copying from a book but really learning".
- Attitudes towards learning covered the whole spectrum from those who found learning "boring" to those who saw it as enabling them to "follow their dream".
- Most students agreed that it was the encouragement from their teachers that helped them to learn best.
- All students were confident that their teachers are lifelong learners with one student clarifying her response with an example claiming her teachers learn from their own mistakes.

7 OUTCOMES

The school takes every opportunity to collect and analyse data from many sources, as well as to use them to promote their achievements. But the Principal explicitly cautions his audience on the dangers of decontextualising individual pieces of data. His summary of the 'hard data' from 2003 states:

> In essence, in a school in one of the lowest socio-economic environments in the state, this [*sic*] data clearly shows South West Sydney High School making dramatic improvements as evidenced by attendance, retention, value added, enrolments, suspensions and staffing "trending" in a consistently positive fashion - both singularly and collectively.

The hard data the Principal is referring to are outlined as follows:
- ELLA - continued improvements in writing, reading and language. Targeted Year 8 students (20) improved between 5% and 10%.
- School Certificate value added on par with 2002 but significant improvement over the past three years particularly in the area of literacy
- attendance rate up 0.3% - now 4.7% better than in 2000

- decreasing short suspension rate - lowest in 5 years
- plateau-ing enrolments in a dramatically declining pool across feeder primary schools and the housing estate in general
- retention rate to Year 12 is 68.8% compared to a State average of 59.1%
- stable staff at all levels
- increase in the number of teachers prepared to accept leadership responsibilities outside their classrooms and their normal substantive roles

According to one DP, the principal presented these data to the staff at the beginning of 2004 and carefully "walked them through [them]" enabling the staff to realise that it is the increased emphasis on pedagogy that has brought them to this point. Other outcomes for students were summed up by the HT Welfare who indicated that all students experience some form of success at South West Sydney HS "despite the crap". She explained that all students exit the school with confidence and are assertive rather than aggressive. They are good at setting goals and taking up challenges and have a mutual respect for their teachers and peers.

In relation to the Linkages Project, outcomes data are mostly anecdotal and come from Year 7 teachers and advisers, DPs and the HT Welfare. Collectively, these comments suggest the following outcomes for middle years students:
- New Year 7 students to South West Sydney in 2004 are considered more settled, much of this being due to the students' familiarity with the school and contact with specific staff members.
- New Year 7 students are exhibiting fewer extreme behaviour problems and greater unity than in previous years.
- Improved performances during the ELLA and SNAP tests.
- Increased attendance and decreased truancy rates.
- Parents of Year 7 students report being happy with the transition to South West Sydney and appear more comfortable in contacting the school.

8   CONCLUSION

According to one DP, the principal's message when he arrived at South West Sydney in late 2000 was to "work differently". After three years of controlled, whole-school reform, designed to improve all outcomes for all students, the principal's message has clearly been received. All staff interviewed spoke eloquently of their mind-shift in relation to their pedagogical approach while still ensuring that the necessary welfare structures already in place prior to 2001 are maintained. Their commitment to each other was evident in their 'team' mentality and the quality of their collaborative efforts. Their unquestionable commitment to the students of South West Sydney was repeatedly expressed in statements pertaining to transformative pedagogies and goals relating to "getting these students out of the educational poverty cycle". The consistency of the discourse around pedagogy and welfare gave clarity to their experiences and imparted a sense of empowerment gained from working differently.

A major factor in the success and sustainability of the reform efforts at South West Sydney HS is the exemplary leadership demonstrated by the executive staff. The principal is clearly an outstanding leader who, when he joined South West Sydney HS in late 2000, became part of a well-established team for which he provided new structures to consolidate their thinking. He practices a dispersed leadership style and

actively promotes his ideas through messages such as "We are all leaders at South West Sydney High School" to every relevant audience. This is another message received and adopted by all staff interviewed who were always quick to praise the school executive for providing opportunities for them to show initiative as well as the support required to take risks and implement new ideas.

The combination of good leadership and a collective mindset geared for change to improve the outcomes for South West Sydney students has resulted in a professional learning community that has the principles of lifelong learning embedded in its practice. This situation ensures that students at this school are given every opportunity to become lifelong learners themselves.

CHAUCER PRIMARY SCHOOL (NSW)

1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Chaucer PS is a small, well-established co-educational primary school located in the inner south western Sydney educational district of St. George. The school is located next door to Chaucer Girl's High School (CGHS) and just down the road from Chaucer Boy's High School (CBHS). Chaucer, and its surrounding suburbs, are experiencing a period of gentrification which inevitably leads to higher property prices and changing demographics that can put increased pressure on people on the lower end of the SES who reside in such areas. Prior to this period of change, Chaucer was considered a disadvantaged area with a large immigrant population and affordable housing. Currently, the school is resisting pressure from its now middle class client base to provide a greater range of specialist activities such as those offered in nearby public and private schools.

1.2 The School

History is an important factor in this school's story with respect to the current refocusing of professional practice aimed at restructuring and re-culturing the school community. History is saliently represented through the well-preserved heritage buildings with extensive classroom spaces that enable the construction of truly rich learning environments. The grounds of the school are spacious, giving children a pleasant play environment.

Around ten years ago, the school had approximately 350 students and the Chaucer area was categorised as a relatively disadvantaged area due to the high proportion of low SES and migrant families and this that meant substantial Disadvantaged Schools' Project (DSP) funding was received by the school. These earlier enrolment figures meant more staff, broader expertise and, more importantly, more support staff. It was at this time that teachers at Chaucer PS began collaborative work in earnest with 'teamwork' as an overarching school value. Coherence and consistency were also rated significant elements in the curriculum for improved student outcomes and hence Years K-6 have always been perceived as a continuum across the primary years, not as a junior/senior, early years/middle years binary.

Chaucer PS has been fortunate in having a history of 'good' leaders whose ability to source funding has made a significant difference to sustainable pedagogical reform, particularly as it has enabled the staff to work collaboratively. The school boasts a very stable staff that are happy and motivated and share an ethos of 'equality' - apparently a legacy from their participation in the DSP during the early 90s. This ethos is also found in the school motto *Participation, Equity, and Excellence*; a vision that is embedded in all aspects of the school. Staff indicated that they have always had a lot of input into school planning issues; have always had the opportunity to question reform to ensure it enhanced student outcomes; and are always given the opportunity to demonstrate initiative. Teachers here are always looking for ways to improve their performance and, during these last ten years or so, most have undergone a major paradigm shift from a pedagogy focused on the teacher to one

that is student-centred and that features a curriculum that is collaboratively designed and implemented.

1.3 Students/Staff/Community

This school serves a culturally diverse community with 86% of students having language backgrounds other than English. Student enrolment figures presently hover between 230 and 240 students with this fluctuation in student numbers coming from movement around the Support Unit (for IM and IO special needs students) and the severe reading classes that are available to students from other schools in the district. The current acting principal is a teacher of long-standing in the school community and hopes to maintain this executive position, a decision to be made by DET NSW in the near future. Every child and adult in this school is regarded as a valuable member of a professional learning community that has a reputation for "fixing" kids with special learning needs. This is enhanced by the presence of the Support Unit.

Full-time staff at Chaucer PS cater for nine mainstream classes; two Support Units and two intensive reading classes; a severe reading class; relief-face-to-face; learning assistant; and ESL. Part-time staff includes teachers for ESL, community languages (Arabic, Greek , Chinese), library; and the district guidance officer who is based at Chaucer PS.

2   UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

In 2000, Chaucer PS joined the Chaucer Community of Schools (aka the Chaucer Research Group) that aims to create a professional learning community between the local cluster of schools including CGHS, CBHS, Ashbury PS and Chaucer South PS. Initially the focus of this group was on transition through the middle years of schooling and consisted of programs designed to familiarise the students with the respective high school environments and their students, through mentoring programs and visits to schools, with lessons in specific subject areas not offered in the primary school (such as pottery and photography; or home economics and science in laboratories).

Accessing NSN funding in 2002, the Chaucer Research Group refocused all of their reform efforts onto pedagogy in the middle years, in particular they examined how they could utilise 'backward mapping' from intended student outcomes to inform their curriculum planning. The group engaged the services of an educational consultant for professional development of a limited number of executive teachers from each school in Productive Pedagogies and in using Newmann's backward mapping tool with sessions conducted according to the NSN protocols and norms to ensure a democratic process was upheld during any meetings of the research group. The emphasis of the reform effort at this stage was on shared understandings about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment across Phase 3 and Phase 4 of schooling (that is, Years 5-8). Primary and high school teachers collaboratively designed learning tasks that had real world value and would be implemented in their respective classrooms with the outcomes collaboratively assessed. The current principal, who was an executive teacher at Chaucer PS during this time, "took on board" these reforms and held workshops for colleagues

within the school, as well as locally and across the district providing professional development in the Productive Pedagogies and backward mapping to assist in delivering a consistent pedagogical approach across the local cluster schools.

In 2003, money for continued middle years reform was funded through the DET initiative, *Values Education Study*, in a project titled "Pedagogy, Student Resilience and Values Education". To date, cluster schools had developed programs in Linkages, *Productive Pedagogies*, Mentoring and *Mind Matters* and there was a perceived need for a refinement of emphasis toward values education. The overriding aim of the project was to "teach students to value themselves as learners and know themselves as learners". This move created a more structured approach to the middle years that included the following elements:

- Year 6 visits to CBHS and CGHS for special subject
- Year 6 visits to CGHS for Science as an extended unit of work
- Year 6 visits to CBHS and CGHS during recess to experience playground activities
- Mentoring between Years 9/10 and Year 6 in Computing and as 'buddies'
- Year 7 visits to CPS, both formal and informal, to advise primary students (and staff) of joys and pitfalls of high school
- Year 7 adviser from high schools liaise with primary counterparts
- district guidance counsellor based at CPS shared between CPS and CGHS with established communication network between cluster schools
- formal visiting arrangements for peer observation of classroom teaching between primary and secondary colleagues
- employing the STEMS database to track electronically information about students through transition to high school
- a Year 6/7 survey to identify expectations and concerns of students and ways in which schools could assist

The funding sourced in 2003 allowed for collaborative efforts across the middle years of schooling to be sustained throughout the year and provided time and support for lower phase teachers also to make the required pedagogical shifts to align their teaching practices with the remainder of the school. Thus the emphasis on the middle years of schooling was now altered to become a whole-school approach to pedagogy, enabling consistency across the curriculum from Years K-6. While the interest in sustaining these reforms throughout 2004 has been maintained, there are no additional professional development funds for this to happen and the impetus to maintain existing programs may have been lost.

3 PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS & SCHOOL BASED MIDDLE YEARS INITIATIVES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

In relation to the principles of lifelong learning, it became apparent that these were so firmly embedded in the professional practice of teachers at Chaucer PS that they found it difficult to reflect critically on these attributes or practices. During the interview process teachers were able to articulate clearly a consistent teaching philosophy that was based on a whole-school approach to every aspect of students' lives, but needed some prompting to match this with a philosophy of lifelong learning. Once assisted in clarifying their ideas, teachers were able to affirm that their collaborative approach to teaching and learning, their emphasis on connectedness

and real-world learning experiences and a focus on learning-to-learn is clearly demonstrating and imparting some important lifelong learning skills. This was supported by data obtained from a focus group of students whose ability to articulate their ideas about lifelong learning was quite remarkable.

3.1 Timetabling and Staff/Student Organisation

A Federation initiative titled, "Twenty is Plenty" and aimed at reducing class sizes in the early years of schooling has been implemented at Chaucer which provided funding for an extra staff member. Although this had little effect on the larger classes found in the upper phases, it enabled reduced class size in Kindy and for the establishment of a straight Year 1 and Year 2 class while the remaining mainstream classes at the school are composites. In the middle years of schooling there exist two Year 5/6 classes both taught by experienced teachers whose collaborative work compliments each other's style and results in very productive and interesting learning environments for their students.

In order to allow teachers to work and plan collaboratively, the curriculum is 'collapsed' close to the beginning of term so teachers within the same Phase of schooling can focus on forthcoming units of work. The plan is made operable through replacing mainstream staff with support staff already employed at the school.

3.2 Professional development

Since Chaucer PS joined the other cluster schools in the Chaucer Research Group, their access to funding and resources for professional development has benefited the whole school in relation to a more coherent approach to pedagogy across the curriculum and a range of improved student outcomes. Although teachers in the middle years yielded the most rewards initially, the benefits have 'trickled down' to other teachers in the school through peer training and workshops and simply because of improved transition student outcomes which, in a small school like Chaucer, have a significant effect across the whole student cohort. The principal's enthusiasm for pedagogical reform has enabled the majority of the teaching staff at Chaucer to become aware of the benefits of adopting the principles of both backward mapping for planning and *Productive Pedagogies* for classroom practice. School size has also made a significant difference with respect to implementing reforms through the ease of communication and because the staff performs as a team that makes cooperative learning possible.

In the absence of any significant future funding for professional development it is feared that the momentum gained from the comprehensive professional development program implemented over the previous three years could be lost. There was one pertinent comment from a teacher who indicated a sense of frustration towards DET with regard to professional development. This teacher felt that the department often initiated reforms through one-off programs whose implementation was sometimes mandated by DET but the lack of follow-up programs or coherence between reform initiatives meant that further professional development was, in the main left up to individual teachers who not only had to find time and energy for ongoing personal development, but often felt inadequate/stranded in the absence of curriculum leadership from the department. Interestingly, this same teacher was aware of other innovative interstate initiatives and was disappointed that

DET was not proactive in educational reform and that this situation was leaving NSW teachers behind their interstate counterparts. Additionally, there are widespread fears of the efficacy of any future professional development programs due to the restructuring of DET from educational districts to regions that has resulted in the loss of district consultants (in literacy, numeracy and each of the KLAs) whose major role was keeping teachers up to speed with new department initiatives in these areas.

When funding was adequate, teachers were able to maintain the motivation to improve classroom and welfare practices with the aim of improving student outcomes. But lack of funding combined with departmental issues may result in a loss of momentum with regard to school reform at Chaucer, due to a sense of a lack of curriculum leadership and support from DET.

3.3 Information and communications technology (ICT)

ICT is not embedded in the curriculum at Chaucer PS where only one computer room is available for the entire school, but moves are afoot to rectify this situation and improve the whole school approach and attitude to technology and the curriculum. A newly appointed teacher with limited experience in the classroom but ample skills in ICT has provided major impetus to the integration of ICT in the curriculum. Last year she was the RFF teacher and focused the curriculum for these lessons on computing skills. She explained that very few students had PCs in the home and therefore the majority of students at the school had very limited basic computing skills. She was also aware of the lack of confidence in teachers at Chaucer to implement computers in the classroom due to their personal lack of knowledge and competency in this area. Currently she was implementing some intranet software for the school based on a program developed by the IT teacher at nearby St. George HS. Basically this software loaded a portal or template through which an array of school activities and student work could be displayed. Her hope was for another computer lab within the school and more emphasis on IT across the curriculum within a tighter framework that could be more easily introduced into the classroom. Her strategy was to improve teacher confidence with IT gradually, through a series of workshops and other forms of training, that she was possibly going to have to provide herself, for other staff.

3.4 Specific programs and other relevant initiatives

Chaucer PS has implemented the Commonwealth mental health initiative developed by the Curriculum Corporation called *Mind Matters*. Although developed for secondary schools, the program has had some success in upper primary. *Mind Matters* uses a whole-school approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention. The program aims to enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful. The rationale of the program is based on the notion that social and emotional wellbeing have been linked to young people's schooling outcomes; their social development; their capacity to contribute to the workforce and the community; and reducing the rate of youth suicide.

The welfare policy/behaviour management program at Chaucer PS is "ingrained" and effective because "everyone is aware" of the system. There is a high expectation of appropriate behaviour throughout the school, witnessed on a number of occasions

both in classrooms and in general playground activity. Having the District Guidance Officer based at the school enabled better tracking of student information across the transition to secondary school and in movements between primary schools. The presence of the Support Unit and the provision of 'severe' reading classes for all students in the district meant that Chaucer had a greater range of students with special needs and this seemed to have a positive effect on the behaviour of all students, in that a sense of caring for others was evident across the school.

The first day of my visit to Chaucer PS happened to fall on the day the Malaurindi Aboriginal clan were performing a full day of activities at the school. These 'special' events were held at least once per term to expose children to other cultures and ideas. The school also participated in a number of external events that showcased the talents of school students. One such event is the Wakikiri story and dance festival that is a commercially sponsored event in which students must perform a story through dance and compete against other schools doing the same at a large public auditorium. In keeping with their equality ethos all students at Chaucer PS are able to participate in this event and though the school does not win awards for talent, there are other less evident outcomes that assist in improving students' self-esteem and confidence. This ethos of allowing students to participate in any activity regardless of their ability has improved the confidence of Chaucer students to the point where, according to one teacher, they exit the school "believing they can do anything".

In 2003, the school was involved in the first annual Expo, an initiative of the Chaucer Research Group to showcase the talents of students and the outcomes of recent reform programs at the five cluster schools. This event was held at CGHS during term 2 of 2003. According to some teachers involved in the event, the Expo was too hastily conceived, resulting in a tight timeline for teachers; it put a lot of pressure on all schools' resources; and it was perceived as "showing off to the Superintendent".

A final observation with regard to lifelong learning initiatives is the overt political activity demonstrated by staff at Chaucer PS. Specifically, there was obvious frustration with the Prime minister's recent attacks on values in public education. More local political issues that raised staff ire were the lack of action on the noise pollution problem created by nearby Sydney airport and the need for a pedestrian overpass on nearby Chaucer Road. These and other political issues were often commented on during assemblies and other public school events. Another current impasse acted out at the school [and all participating public schools] is their refusal to produce the 2003 Annual Report normally due for publication around this time of year. The school also recently threatened strike action over an incident related to the IO unit. During my visit to the school the newly appointed Regional Superintendent, Dr. Phil Lambert along with the District Superintendent, came to Chaucer PS as part of a 'meet and greet' tour of the newly formed Sydney Region. But it was clear that they were focused on the IO Unit paying it special attention during their visit.

4   TEACHER INSIGHTS

Apart from the principal, two Phase 3 (Years 5/6) teachers were formally interviewed for the purposes of this research. Their insights into changes that have occurred at the school over the past few years were very positive but there was some trepidation as to whether these reforms were sustainable, considering the lack of ongoing

funding for initiatives. Both teachers were experienced and long-standing members of the Chaucer school community and both had found that the recent professional development programs in *Productive Pedagogies* had energised their practice and had provided them with new, effective approaches to classroom teaching and learning. They felt that their different teaching styles were complimentary and they clearly enjoyed working collaboratively.

Mrs. M

This teacher was quick to emphasise aspects of her teaching practice that had not necessarily changed as a result of recent reform, but that she had become more aware of. For example, she was always explicit with students about the reason for doing something and always ensured that there was a clear purpose for her taking any new initiative into her classroom. She also stressed the use of metalanguage in the classroom, a claim supported by the informative posters and other media displayed throughout the room. This aspect of here teaching is also enhanced by her ensuring that students are always able to explain what they are doing. She also viewed connectedness as important both between disciplines and lessons and with the everyday world. This teacher makes sure she takes advantage of 'special' or one-off programs that have real-life connections and that will clearly enhance student outcomes. For example, this year she has implemented two reading/literacy programs in her classroom, the [NSW] *Premier's Reading Challenge* and a *Sydney Morning Herald* initiative called "Scoop" which involves applying critical literacy skills to the daily newspaper.

This teacher is comfortable in her role as a collaborator with her Year level colleague, sharing workloads, maintaining a consistent approach to pedagogy within the Year level, and demonstrating this for other staff members. This teacher also felt she was an integral part of a clearly defined professional learning community with "good communication systems". She stressed that they [the staff] were always looking for ways of improving and always questioning change, which involved a lot of thinking and hard work. She saw the need to be involved in cluster meetings at all levels not only in her role as executive teacher but as a Year 5/6 mainstream teacher, and she commented that these opportunities were currently unavailable.

Ms G

Close to retirement, this teacher was still highly motivated by the recent pedagogical reforms put in place at the school. She had an awareness of interstate reform initiatives, particularly those underway in Queensland, and expressed frustration and a feeling of inadequacy as a teacher in the NSW public school system. With regard to the middle years initiatives at Chaucer PS, Ms G had an acute awareness of the difference between learning experiences in primary and high schools and saw the need for professional development in improving "independence training" for students in transition (referring to some Year 6 students as suffering "separation anxiety" when they leave Chaucer PS). She also expressed a clear desire for more time and support for implementing recent reform efforts, especially in the light of increased accountability for mainstream teachers who have to cover all KLAs, the *Basic Skills Tests*, WRAP, and computers in the classroom.

Ms G. was able to articulate clearly her, and her colleague's, pedagogical approach in light of the recent emphases on middle years of schooling. They believe in delivering 'rich' learning tasks that empower children through their connectedness to

the real world and that place an emphasis on transferable learning skills. She claimed they were "very explicit" about assessment outcomes employing appropriate metalanguage from relevant syllabi. Both of these teachers are highly motivated to improve the performance of all students while maintaining the ideal that "everybody gets a go". Ms G. explained that the staff worked as a mutually respectful team, truly sharing, with no one dominating. She expressed both loyalty and guilt toward her colleagues and to her students but not to DET. She saw the integration of the IO unit into mainstream school as an important demonstration that everyone in the school is valued.

5   STUDENT INSIGHTS

A group of eight boys and girls from Years 5 and 6 completed the survey and formed the focus group interview. These students initially had some difficulties with some terminology but once we had reached a shared understanding of the meaning of lifelong learning, their ability to articulate further understanding on the topic was outstanding. These students had no trouble explaining how the school and their individual teachers created safe, supportive learning environments with high expectations in relation to both academic rigour and positive behaviour. This group could explicate teaching and learning styles that were tailored to their needs and could specify teaching strategies that they thought led to effective learning. They were adamant that the school was preparing them well for high school and life in general and there was no doubt about their perceptions of their teachers as learners at various levels of interaction - with the students themselves, with their colleagues and through staff training arranged by the principal.

6   OUTCOMES

In relation to the reforms instigated by becoming a member of the Chaucer Research Group, the efficacy of the resulting professional development program has been realised in a number of positive outcomes for both staff and students. Principals from cluster high schools have commented on a smooth transition period for Chaucer PS students that has resulted in these students settling in more efficiently and being "less visible" than students from other feeder primary schools. The students themselves have reported feeling more comfortable in the transition and parents have made very positive comments on the process. The outcomes for staff were not as easily articulated, but my observations during the two-day visit indicated that teachers at Chaucer PS have clearly embodied the fundamental principles of the reforms that constituted the previous years of professional development.

Evidence of improved academic outcomes since implementing reforms was not available nor was it stressed as important; but ensuring students were well equipped to move into the next phase of their schooling was seen as important. This is not surprising in this school where competition is not encouraged (for example there is no school dux or 'speech night' but a formal recognition of all individual student achievements) and difference is a valuable attribute. What is apparent at Chaucer PS, since implementing recent reforms, was an improvement in social and behavioural outcomes for all students in transition to high school. This includes improved student confidence thanks to an increased awareness of the realities of all

aspects of high schools. Anecdotal evidence from the high school suggests much greater ease in settling in and considerably fewer extreme behaviour problems.

For the staff at Chaucer the recent reforms have resulted in a number of positive outcomes. For example, the primary school teachers are now much more aware of what happens in secondary classrooms and they are able to tailor their pedagogy to align it with secondary activities. Professional dialogue between cluster schools and within Chaucer PS has also increased, giving the staff a greater sense of inclusion in the whole-schooling process their students are subjected to, and a greater sense of professionalism in their roles as teachers. In relation to their own classroom practice, the teachers interviewed were clearly happy with the reforms in that they provided a fresh perspective on pedagogy that they felt improved students' learning.

7   CONCLUSION

Chaucer PS has been involved in a significant period of change since joining the cluster group of schools. While the outcome of these changes is not a major restructuring of the whole school, it has enabled pedagogical reform that has been implemented across most Year levels and disciplines. The school already had a well-entrenched welfare system that still maintains high standards of behaviour and it has an ethos that ensures that every student knows they are a valued member of the school community. The main observable effect from the recent reform efforts at Chaucer has really been in transition to high school, but this is not just a matter of making it a smoother move. Through the reforms instigated by the Chaucer Research Group, and subsequently through ongoing professional development, students in upper primary are now equipped with learning tools and coping mechanisms that enable them to move to high school with confidence and without fear. As well as this, staff at Chaucer appear to feel better equipped to cope with the increasing diversity of their student cohort by being equipped with pedagogical practices that focus on effective teaching and learning strategies, and that improve their own understanding of how students learn.

SEAVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL (NSW)

1. SCHOOL CONTEXT:

1.1 Location
The town - with a few shops, two service stations and an RSL club - is a small service centre for the local community of approximately 2000 people located on the western edge of the Great Dividing Range, roughly mid way between Bathurst and Lithgow in New South Wales. The development of the town was tied to mining and rural industries. Maintaining an employment base in small towns is difficult in the current economic climate, and this problem has been exacerbated in Seaville's case with the recent closure of a cement works which was the town's major employer. Seaville Central School is the only public school in the town, and there is also a Catholic primary school.

1.2 About the school
Seaville is a K-12 school with an enrolment of approximately 200 students. Staffing in the school comprises two senior administrators (principal and deputy principal) and 21 teachers (including assistant principals). The school buildings are a mix of old and new. A new wing of the school was built in the mid 1990's and it houses the primary classrooms. A second networked computer lab, for the exclusive use of K-8 students has recently been established.

The school currently faces a number of challenges in relation to student engagement, retention and completion of school. This is in part because the school is located approximately 40 minutes drive from two larger towns and so some students from Seaville are attending larger schools in these nearby towns. The challenges are also in part because Seaville is a small community that is experiencing high unemployment, and in which there are few job opportunities. In this respect the role of the school in engaging students and extending their future pathways through education becomes an important issue. The school is eligible for the state government's Priority Schools Funding program. This fund supports those schools in which a large proportion of students come from families experiencing economic hardship.

Within the school there is a range of initiatives and innovations that have been designed to meet the specific needs of students in the local community. Many of these initiatives have as their focus the development of strong and supportive pedagogical relationships between teachers and students; curriculum practices that are engaging and connect with students' lives; and pathway options that encourage students to complete school and gain value from their education.

Over the last three or four years a strong and stable staff profile has been developed. Prior to this there was a period of considerable change and movement of staff. The appointment of a new principal in 2001 and associated staff stability has enabled the school to renew its vision, and build a forward thinking and innovative school community. The middle school has been a key part of that vision and innovation.

2. ABOUT THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Background and Philosophy

The middle school has been in operation at Seaville for the last three years, and encompasses Years 5-8. The idea for the middle school was part of an overall school plan to reinvigorate programs and practices that would work not only to engage students, but also to raise their expectations, to assist in the transition between primary and secondary school, and to build retention and completion rates through high school. Though the school spanned K-12, there had been clear organisational and cultural divisions between the primary and secondary sectors. The idea of a middle school was seen as a vehicle that could bring these sectors together. The school called for volunteers to be involved and 4 teachers, two primary and two secondary teachers, indicated a willingness to participate. These four teachers, with the support of a NSW Department of Education and Training district consultant and Linkages Grant funding, engaged in a series of planned meetings and research activities to develop the fundamentals of the program. The team visited schools with middle years programs, considered research pertaining to middle schooling, and consulted with the community, in order to build a program relevant to the particular context at Seaville.

Those aspects of the philosophy and practice central to the middle school at Seaville include the following:

1. A caring and supportive classroom and school community that works to build students' confidence and capacities as learners. High quality and long-term pedagogical relationships between and among students and teachers are central to the development of such a community.
2. Student-centred pedagogy. Premises underpinning teaching and learning practices include: connected to students' needs and interests; engaging, problem-based and integrated; sensitive to a range of abilities; provision of opportunities for depth of understanding and skill building.
3. Coherent, comprehensive and integrated curriculum, with literacy and numeracy as high priorities.
4. Dynamic and evolving program that is responsive to student needs, subject to rigorous reflection and evaluation, based on recent research, and cutting-edge in its design.
5. A strong and collaborative teaching team.

2.2 School structure/organisation
The middle school at Seaville covers Years 5-8. Across these Years there are two multi-age groups. One group spans Year 5, 6 and 7. The other group spans Years 6, 7 and 8. Within each group there are two ability-streamed classes. There are, however, numerous opportunities for whole-group activities, team teaching and small-group configurations. Two teachers are primarily responsible for each of the multi-age groups. Each group has a home classroom/area.

While there is variation in this pattern, the timetable is typically structured into three sessions. The first session is focused on Maths and English, the second on integrated studies (incorporating English, Maths, HSIE and Science), and the third session on specialist subjects (with specialist teachers) for students in Yrs 7 and 8, and regular primary for those in Yrs 5 and 6.

There are four staff members whose main responsibilities lie in the Middle School. These 4 teachers work as a team to plan and evaluate all units of work. They also work in pairs to team-teach across two classes. Each pair comprises one teacher with a high

school background and one with a primary school background. 11 teachers on staff with particular curriculum specialisations also teach electives to the middle school students in Years 5 to 8.

3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy
There are strong links between the pedagogy in the middle school at Seaville and lifelong learning. The following features of pedagogical practice help to illustrate these links:

- Teaching and learning practices that extend students' confidence as learners through, for example, the creation of safe and supportive learning environments, assisting students to make explicit their learning styles, reflection activities that enable students to think about how they learn.
- Class activities that build students' communicative competencies through, for example, group work and other collaborative exercises, focus on literacy and numeracy and its integration across all curriculum areas; integration of ICT; and oral and written assessment tasks.
- Student groupings and units of work that enable multiple and flexible progression routes. Through the rotation of units of work and the pyramid approach to planning, students have opportunities to return to particular content areas and examine those areas in more depth and/or fold back over work covered and close gaps in understanding of particular concepts. They also have opportunities to follow particular extensions routes.
- The home class teacher also assists in the creation of conditions that enable purposeful learning and student support. Teachers know the backgrounds of students, the ways in which their learning can be scaffolded and extended, and how the individual needs of students can be met. Because teachers might be working with some students over a three-year period they can ensure continuity in the ways in which students build their skills and understandings. Teachers noted that this approach is particularly beneficial for those students who typically struggle with academic work.

3.2 Curriculum
The curriculum for Yrs 5, 6, 7 and 8 is, by and large, based on the NSW Board of Studies syllabus documents and the associated requirements of the Department of Education and Training. Teachers have engaged in a complex process of curriculum mapping to design units of work that link to outcomes specified in the syllabus documents. The curriculum within the school timetable has a strong literacy and numeracy focus. In 2003 integrated units that encompass science, maths, English and HSIE were introduced into the middle school.

Integrated studies scope and sequence – cycle C

Unit title	Focus KLAs	Assessment
House and garden chemicals	Science, maths, English, Careers	Unit portfolio (teacher/student negotiated)
Ancient Remains	HSIE and Mathematics	Research assignment
Home and away in space	Science, Maths, English	Practical investigation

In and around the world	HSIE and science	Half yearly exam
Water	Science, maths, HSIE	Student research project
Discoveries of the middle ages	HSIE, maths, science	Oral presentation/model
Egads – its an ecosystem	Science, HSIE, English	Field report
Negotiated Unit	Needs basis	Yearly exam/negotiated authentic assessment task

3.3 Assessment and reporting

Teachers in the middle school use a variety of assessment tasks in order to build a comprehensive picture of student achievement. The focus is on the development of authentic assessment tasks. As the table above indicates, these tasks include portfolios, practical investigations, written and oral presentations, research projects, and tasks that are negotiated with students. A range of diagnostic, formative and summative tasks are built into classroom practices. Teachers use these tasks to assist students to make their learning explicit and to identify areas for development.

Portfolios are used in the middle school to document student learning. Each term a selection of student work is included in a portfolio. Students comment on their work samples. Portfolios form an important part of the reporting process to parents/caregivers.

4. SCHOOL INITIATIVES THAT PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING

The following school initiatives provide indicators of ways in which classroom, curriculum and staff organisation, as well as relationships within and outside the school, support the development of different forms of lifelong learning.

4.1 Staff/student organization

As mentioned above the home groupings and teaching team are central to the organisation of the middle school and the conditions that support learning for staff and students. Moreover this organisation enables the development of teaching practices and programs that are responsive, creative and flexible.

There are also various aspects of the school organisation that enable links to be developed across the primary, middle and high school programs. Three of the teachers in the middle school team have responsibility in other sectors of the school. One member of the middle school team is also the school English coordinator and teaches in the senior program. One team member is the assistant principal in the primary school, and another teaches science in the senior school as well as taking responsibility for other whole school programs. Working across sectors enables teachers to know how the middle school fits alongside the primary and secondary programs. In addition, teachers have noted that some of the approaches to teaching and learning developed in the middle school have influenced approaches at the primary and secondary levels.

4.2 Teaching teams and professional development

The dedicated and systematic way in which the teaching team have built and extended their professional knowledge is crucial to the middle school program at the school. The team has met one evening per week for the past three years. This has provided the time

and space not only to develop the middle school program thoroughly, but also to build a shared set of values, and collaborative and collective practices within the team. The teaching team has been strongly supported by the input and encouragement of a NSW DET district consultant. Teachers in the school acknowledge the significance of this person's contribution to the middle school program through her attendance at team meetings, and through her advice, resources and perspective as a critical 'outsider'. One team member is also completing postgraduate study related to school reform and so brings to the meetings a range of research material that is relevant to the discussions. This research is drawn on to inform future practice. At the start of 2004 one of the original team transferred to another school. A first-year teacher has been appointed to the school and has become an integral part of the team. The team provides an important support structure and learning environment for the beginning teacher.

The team meetings have enabled a process of ongoing program evaluation and action. In this respect it is possible to chart changes to the program over the last three years as the team have sought to adjust, adapt and improve the program in light of their evaluative discussions. There are two obvious benefits associated with this. First, the middle school program has a dynamic and responsive element to it as it gets shaped in ways that seek the best options to meet the students' needs. Second, the team themselves are working as a community of learners as they systematically investigate aspects of their own practice. In this respect the work of this team provides an exemplary model for teacher professional learning.

Staff have also attended various professional development workshops organised through the school and the NSW DET. Staff most recently attended a professional development session associated with the Quality Teaching initiative. Teachers noted ways in which the Quality Teaching focus on intellectual quality, significance and quality learning environment aligned with existing practices in the middle school and could be drawn on to inform future practice.

4.3 Leadership and school culture

Leadership in the school has played a significant role in the establishment and development of the middle school. The Principal has been central in providing the structural conditions and support (staffing, resources, curriculum, environment) through which the middle school and related initiatives could be established and maintained. The conditions within the school have likewise enabled staff to take leadership responsibility for various initiatives. The professional culture that has been developed within the school is based on shared responsibility and strong leadership support.

4.4 Mentoring program

Seaville has established an innovative mentoring program for its students. The program involves students from a university located in one of the nearby towns taking on a mentoring role with individual students in the middle school. University students come to the school or the school students go to the university once a week and spend time talking over work, study and assignment skills, goals and aspirations and so forth. The program enables the mentoring pairs to build a strong relationship. The program is seen as having important benefits for the school students in that they can work closely with one person who can take on an advisory role in relation to schooling. Likewise, the university students benefit from the experience through the development of their own communicative, community and leadership skills. The mentoring program has grown rapidly. It is now embedded in the timetable structure at Seaville, *five* other local schools

have joined the program in 2004, and the university has built into its teacher education program a mentoring course that aligns specifically with the Seaville program.

One teacher in the school has been primarily responsible for devising the mentoring program. She drew inspiration from some mentoring schemes in the UK to create the particular and distinctive Seaville program. This teacher and the school principal were invited to talk about the mentoring program at a conference on new forms learning held in Wales in April 2004.

4.5 Vocational Education Program

Seaville offers a comprehensive vocational education program for all students in the senior years. Like the middle school, the Vocational Education program aims to provide the conditions in which students can both engage in their school education and build the skills, understanding and confidence that will extend their post-school options.

4.6 Technology

Seaville has recently developed two fully networked computer labs. The use of the technology has been integrated into the teaching practices in the middle school. Students are able to use the WWW for research as well as use multi-media tools for presentation of their work. Technology classes are also run in the evening to provide members of the local community with opportunities to gain qualifications in the ICT field.

4.6 Dynamic and responsive program

As mentioned above, the weekly team meetings enable staff to reflect critically on all aspects of the program and to take new action where appropriate. The program is thus responsive to emerging problems and new learning opportunities. The introduction of integrated units provides one example of this responsiveness. Staff are currently discussing issues related to the engagement/disengagement of some Year 8 boys in particular, and this creates a context for new forms of responsive action.

5. STUDENT INSIGHTS

12 students participated in two focus group interviews (3 students from each middle school Year level). On the whole, these students found the middle school experience positive. It was seen as different to primary and also an important stepping stone into secondary. One student said the work was 'not too hard and not too easy'. Other aspects of the middle school program that students found valuable included the mix of ages, the opportunity to make more friends, the support provided by teachers, the focus on cooperation, and the opportunity to do some fun and practical things (e.g. excursions, ways in which teachers introduced new units, activities outside the four walls of the classroom). Students identified the skills that they were learning in the middle school and noted ways in which these were important for the future. These skills included: comprehension, maths, language, cooperation, public speaking, personal confidence and technology. When asked about the sorts of practices that supported and motivated their learning, students noted the following: group work, teachers who were supportive, practical activities, fun things and excursions. Students noted that they liked working with the university mentors. The mentors provided them with strategies for studying, as well as building their confidence.

6. OUTCOMES

The middle school teaching team has consistently drawn on various forms of student data and outcomes to design and evaluate the program. There are several indicators of the value of the program. These indicators include: standardised test results; in-school assessment results; student work samples; anecdotal records; behaviour referral rates; external evaluations; and curriculum documents produced within the school.

- Students' results in state-wide standardised tests are used to monitor student progress over time as well as to measure student achievement against state averages. Teachers noted that this year there was a significant improvement in the school's overall results as measured by the State-wide English Language and Literacy Assessment test conducted in Year 7. This is the first group of students who have been in the middle school for three years. Results from the Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program for 2004 have not been processed.
- In 2002 a Learning Support Team from the then Bathurst District of the NSW Department of Education and Training conducted a review of the middle school. The review team surveyed parents, teachers and students. The review provided the school with positive feedback in relation to the middle school innovations.
- Reduced referral rate for management problems in Stage 4. Teachers attributed this to the home group and home teacher environment. Truancy rates and discipline problems have dropped in Stage 4 and again this is seen as linked to the home group environment.
- Staff noted a number of important social outcomes associated with student participation in the program. These outcomes include: increased self-confidence, willingness to 'have a go' and take risks, social mixing across Year levels, peer tutoring, and raising of expectations particularly for low-achieving students.
- Document collection of all work associated with the middle school. All details associated with the middle school - minutes of meetings, review details, curriculum programs, survey data, etc - have been collected and filed. They provide an important record of the history of the middle school and its achievements. The curriculum documents and unit plans provide a clear sense of the connections and building blocks within and across KLAs.
- Student work samples. As part of the documentation associated with the middle school a comprehensive record of student work samples has been collected. These samples provide insight into the range of tasks undertaken by students and the varied ways in which they have demonstrated their learning. This record enables teachers to make comparisons between ways in which students complete work as well as to consider how students demonstrate understanding over time.

7. SUMMARY
The middle school at Seaville Central has been developed in a context of challenges associated with student engagement and retention. In seeking to address these challenges the school has developed a set of principles and practices that are clearly oriented to lifelong learning. The program aims to build students' confidence as learners and to create the conditions that will enable students to value, and get value from, their school education. The home and multi-age groupings, and the teaching teams, play a crucial role in establishing these conditions for learning. Likewise, the mentoring program works to augment classroom based pedagogy. The approach to teaching and learning at Seaville is closely aligned with an integrated curriculum and authentic assessment tasks. The middle school has been in operation for three years and there are some important indicators of the value of the program in relation to students' academic and social outcomes. The middle school program that has been developed is

responsive to the needs and interests of students, as well as being generative of new and cutting-edge ideas associated with middle schooling.

The middle school innovations have developed within a strong professional culture within the school. Leadership that supports innovation; and strong team-work and collaboration, augmented by outside advice and research, have been central to this professional learning culture and community.

NORTH CANBERRA SCHOOL (ACT)

1. SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Location
North Canberra School is located in Gungahlin, a regional area in the north of Canberra. Gungahlin is the newest urban development region in the ACT, and is the key site for Canberra's current and future population growth. There has been significant housing development in Gungahlin, particularly over the last decade, and the area now has an estimated population of 23,000. A high proportion of the population (25%) is under 15 years of age.

1.2 About the school
North Canberra School is a K-10 school located on two adjacent sites. The junior site is for students in K-5. Students in Years 6-10 are located on the senior site. The K-5 site of the school opened in 1996 and the senior site in 1998. The original plans for the school were based on a mode of organisation consistent with most government schools in the ACT – a K-6 primary school and a 7-10 high school. The principal of the school, who has been there since its foundation, has been instrumental in creating a school that sought more deliberately to link the two sites, develop a K-10 focus, and establish a middle school. Within the senior site there are two sectors: a Yr 6, 7 and 8 Middle School, and a Yr 9 and 10 High School. Underpinning the development of the Middle School was recognition of the specific needs and interests of young adolescents, a desire to create an academic and social environment that encourages and extends learning at school and beyond, and a concern to foster constructive relationships between and among students, teachers and the community. The key focus in this case was on programs for Yrs 6, 7, 8.

North Canberra is currently the only school in the Gungahlin region catering for post-primary school students. Thus it attracts students from 3 feeder primary schools in the region, along with students from the adjacent K-5 site. A new high school will be opening in Gungahlin next year and this will shift the enrolment patterns and population of the school.

The school is modern in its design and has excellent facilities in terms of classroom space, specialist rooms, sport equipment/space, ICT, and playground areas.

1.3 Students/staff/community
The current student enrolment at the school (K-10) is 1276. Population across the three sectors within the school are as follows: 401 (K-5); 550 (6-8); 325 (9-10).

There is considerable diversity within the student body in terms of socio-economic background. There is some diversity in relation to ethnic background, yet the clear majority of students are of Anglo-Celtic origin.

There are currently 67 staff working in the school. The staff comprises 1 principal and 2 non-teaching deputies; 5 executive teachers and 59 teachers. Of the staff who work primarily in the middle school, 12 have primary teaching qualifications, 19 have

secondary teaching qualifications, and one staff member has a specialist middle school qualification. The school seeks to employ teachers who have an interest, commitment, experience or qualifications in middle schooling.

The school has fostered strong relationships with the local community. There was considerable community consultation in the process of establishing the school and this consultation remains as part of the school's ongoing operation.

2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

1.4 Philosophy

Core aspects of the approach and philosophy of middle schooling developed at North Canberra School include:
* The need for curricular and pedagogical practices to meet the specific needs of young adolescents;
* Depth of understanding and real world connections through integrated studies;
* Supportive classroom environments manifest through home groupings and home teachers;
* Teaching teams to support ongoing reflection and innovation; and
* Coherence and transition within and across educational experiences/sectors.

1.5 School structure/organisation

The middle school structure is organised around Year level home groups for the students. Key aspects of the curriculum, namely the Integrated Studies units, specialist electives and pastoral care, are conducted within these home groups. Each home group has their 'own' classroom and a home group teacher who is responsible for teaching the Integrated Studies units and maths, and facilitating the pastoral care program. The Integrated Studies units encompass the outcomes linked to the KLAs of English and HSIE, (though in practice there are typically numerous connections with other curriculum areas). Maths is taught as a separate subject because of its sequential nature. Each home group has specialist teachers for curriculum areas such as science, LOTE, PE, the Arts, and Design and Technology. Currently each Year level in the Middle School has 7 or 8 home group classes.

The staffing structure, and the classroom and staffroom design, support teachers working in teams within each Year level. This structure enables pairs of teachers to work together with home classes. Similarly, each Year level team (av. 13 teachers per team) is located in its own staffroom. Connected to each team is a Level 2 (HOD equivalent) who has responsibility within the team as well as responsibility for a particular curriculum area within the senior school. Each team also has a team leader (an experienced Level 1 teacher) who facilitates meetings concerned with planning, student welfare, unit review, etc.

There are three deputy principals in the school. A Deputy Principal heads each of the sectors within the school and also has cross-school responsibility. This responsibility is divided as follows:
* K-5 and Curriculum
* 6-8 and Professional Development and IT
* 9-10 and Staffing and Timetabling

The Principal has overall responsibility for the running of the school.

3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy

A key aspect of the pedagogy at North Canberra Middle School is the focus on practices that encourage critical thinking and reflection; depth of learning; connections and coherence in relation to all subjects and life outside of school; responsibility for own learning; and an awareness of the value of learning now and in the future. These practices are developed through the integrated approach to curriculum, the methods of assessment (particularly portfolios), and the interactions between students and teachers in classrooms. The pedagogy assumes the importance of productive learning relationships within classrooms. The home groupings are central to these practices in that they enable teachers and students to examine topics in depth and in integrated ways. They also enable students and their teachers to build the sorts of collaborative relationships conducive to productive classroom exchange.

Aspects of the Productive Pedagogies have been used as a tool for unit planning. A process of backward mapping is used in the school to plan curriculum and pedagogy. Dimensions of the PP (such as intellectual engagement, recognition of difference, connections, etc) have provided core teaching and learning outcomes, or one key starting point for the backward mapping process. Also built into the backward mapping process are the KLA outcomes framed with the ACT Department of Education curriculum documents.

Within the school there are several conditions that support innovation in pedagogical practice. The teaming arrangements and the opportunities for team planning provide forums for teachers to discuss and develop their approaches to teaching. This takes place within a broader school culture that promotes teacher innovation. One teacher interviewed for this research talked about a philosophy program she had researched and then introduced to her Yr 6 class. This program encourages students to think about their thinking, their strengths and weakness in terms of learning, and to develop the habits of mind that sustain critical thinking and dialogue. The teacher noted the following outcomes associated with incorporating the philosophical methods into her teaching: the students were really engaged and excited about learning; they were asking a lot of questions and 'taking part in life, not watching it go by'; students valued the opinions of other students; they were not afraid to take risks and to acknowledge when they didn't know something; students were able to identify the skills needed to extend their knowledge and understanding. When other teachers in the school expressed an interest in the philosophy program this teacher, aided by some of her students, ran a PD session for staff. The teacher noted that this participation boosted student confidence. Of note are the ways in which many of the above aspects of the philosophy program, and its approach to learning, align with practices of lifelong learning. Moreover, the PD session was an example of the ways in which teachers within the school exchanged ideas about teaching and learning, and worked as part of a learning community.

Another teacher interviewed talked about an approach to cooperative reading that she and a colleague use in their classrooms. This approach involves students working in groups of four to take on roles in reading and interpreting texts. These roles - code-breaker, discussion manager, illustrator, investigator - enable students to work together to interpret texts. The teacher noted that she could see ways in which students' reading

improved using this approach. Students interviewed for the research also commented on the value of this approach.

3.2 Curriculum

The integrated units are a key aspect of the curriculum at North Canberra School. Students complete three units per year. Examples of units include:

Organiser	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8
Environment and Technologies	How and why do we share the planet?	What is the relationship between physical environments and culture?	What are the benefits and costs of scientific and technological progress?
Life Pathways	Why is it important to respect the rights, opinions and feelings of others?	How can historical records capture the past and influence the future?	How do decisions and choices we make impact on our health and wellbeing?
Active Citizenship	What does it mean to be an Australian?	How can we as individuals make a difference and empower others?	Why is the global community interdependent?
	Negotiated Unit	Negotiated Unit	Negotiated Unit

Underpinning the Integrated units are links to KLA curriculum outcomes. Home teachers are responsible for linking English and HSIE outcomes to the unit. Maths is taught by home group teachers, but is taught independently of the integrated units. The time allocation for integrated studies (inc. English and HSIE) and Maths is 18 hours per week.

Specialist teachers take students in the following areas: LOTE, Science, PE, the Arts and Design and Technology. Each semester students undertake work in three of these areas. The time allocation for each of the three specialist subjects per week is 5 hours. If possible the focus within the specialist subject links with the integrated unit.

3.3 Assessment and reporting

Built into the pedagogy at North Canberra School is a wide variety of assessment tasks. This diversity of tasks enables teachers to build a broad perspective of students' understandings and capabilities. Assessment rubrics are widely used in the school by way of making explicit the expected learning outcomes, and the ways that those outcomes can be achieved. Within the Integrated Units there are opportunities for students to engage in and negotiate research projects and tasks. These research projects enable students to demonstrate ways in which they are able to locate

information, integrate and connect key ideas associated with the unit, and build a deep understanding of a particular topic.

A cornerstone of the assessment practices at North Canberra School is the student portfolio. Each term students put samples of work into a portfolio, along with a description of the context in which the sample was produced. These samples reflect the key learning outcomes for the term or unit. After the first term of the school year the portfolios are taken home for parents to consider. At the end of second term the portfolio forms the basis of a three-way interview between each student, their parent/carer and the teacher. The students are responsible for conducting the interview and use the portfolio to report their achievements, both social and academic, to their parents. In the fourth term the portfolio is sent to parents, together with a written report prepared by teachers. The purpose underpinning this form of assessment is that students can select and comment on samples of work which demonstrate particular learning outcomes and can also begin to take responsibility for documenting and making explicit their own learning.

4. SCHOOL INITIATIVES THAT PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING

The pedagogy, curriculum and assessment described above support a range of practices central to lifelong learning. Within the school there are several conditions and initiatives that support the approach to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, or that align with the purposes of lifelong learning. Some of these are listed below:

4.1 Staff/student organisation

As mentioned above the home groups and Year level teaching teams are critical organisational features of the school that enable learning communities to be formed both within classrooms and between teachers. The team meetings between teachers enable them to plan units of work, moderate assessment tasks and deal with problems associated with curriculum or student welfare/behaviour.

There are also important avenues within the school structures and practices that enable links to be made across K-10 school sectors. For instance, executive staff responsibilities cut across Primary, Middle and High school levels, and there are cross sector staff meetings. This enables the development of coherent practices across the sectors. Likewise, the process of preparing portfolios begins in Kindergarten and follows through to Yr 10. There is thus a comprehensive record of achievement, and students are able to build their ownership of the process and accountability for their learning.

4.2 Professional development

Teachers at the school have access to a range of professional development options. These include attending conferences and PD workshops. The school is also highly regarded both in the ACT and across Australia for its innovative approach to middle schooling. This has meant that teachers have had numerous opportunities to run workshops for other teachers, present papers at conferences and share their expertise with visitors to the school.

Critical to the PD of teachers are the opportunity to work in teams and the ongoing dialogue that forms part of the team-work.

4.3 School culture and leadership

There is a culture in the school that supports innovation and participation by both teachers and students. In interviews some staff commented that there is a 'feel' in the school that is different from that experienced at other schools in which they have worked. This feel relates in part to calmness amongst the student body. The home teacher, as an anchor point, is seen as crucial to this calmness. The feel is also related to the opportunities for teachers to work in ways that are innovative and not restricted by entrenched practices found in some schools.

Obviously the newness of the school creates opportunities to build new practices, but it is notable that the leadership in the school has played a critical role in providing the conditions that enable innovation to occur. This leadership is played out in various ways – there are the vision and associated structures established by the school principal (the principal has been at the school since its inception); the shared leadership amongst the executive; and the various opportunities for all staff to take leadership roles through PD activities, team meetings, innovations and so on.

4.4 Technology.
The school has access to a broad range of computer technologies. The use of these technologies is typically integrated through the curriculum.

4.5 Student pathways.
The ACT Department of Education has recently developed a model of individual student pathway planning for students in Yrs 9-12 (to be implemented in 2004/5). The Pathway Plan provides students with an opportunity to record their 'strengths, interests, goals and achievements'. The Plans are also intended to enable students to take 'an active role in planning their own transitions through secondary education to further study and work.' (for details see: http://www.decs.act.gov.au/services/pdf/B_Brochure.pdf). Lifelong learning is seen as an important part of these plans. This model of pathways planning is seen as consistent with practices already established at North Canberra School and the pathway plans devised by students can be embedded in their portfolios.

5. STUDENT INSIGHTS

Three Yr 7 students were interviewed. The students made the following observations about the school and what they liked about it: new opportunity to make friends; having different teachers for different subjects; integrated units that have enabled them to learn in different ways; double-classes and team teaching – students work together and teachers work together; the facilities (IT lab, reading room, specialist rooms). Students noted their developing skills in the following areas: reading skills (especially through the cooperative reading strategies); research skills (finding information, summarising, report writing); social skills (group work, going on a Year camp, meeting new friends). Students noted that the portfolios helped them to get a sense of what they have done and how they have improved. Without any prompts, students talked about the ways they can participate in the school. One student was a member of the SRC and talked about how this group organised a number of activities for students such as BBQs, fund raising, discos and uniform-free days. Another student talked about the democratic processes in his class – evident through class meetings in which students have a say in setting the agenda and voting on outcomes. Students saw these processes as important in enabling them to be part of the school and increasing their responsibility.

6. OUTCOMES:

6.1 Academic outcomes.
Results of in-school assessment tasks provide indicators of student academic outcomes. Staff noted that most students are achieving at or above the outcome levels expected at their Year level (KLA Level 5 and 6). There has been no noticeable dip across Year levels in relation to standardised test results or in-school assessment task. Teachers also reported on student responsiveness to learning tasks and improvements in a range of capabilities associated with particular pedagogies.

6.2 Social outcomes
Teachers reported that the home groupings were useful for promoting positive relationships between and among students and teachers. These relationships within the home class helped to reduce student management problems and minimise referrals to senior staff. When management issues arise they are typically dealt with by the home teachers.

7. SUMMARY

The structures, culture, relationships and principles associated with the operation of the Middle School at North Canberra are in many respects explicitly linked to the notion of lifelong learning. The environment created is one that supports ongoing learning for both students and staff. The home groupings provide a supportive learning environment for students. Likewise, the Integrated Units enable students to develop an understanding of a topic in depth and in ways that connect curriculum areas as well as connectiong schoolwork to events outside school. The pedagogy and assessment practices also support students' development of learning/thinking skills, and independence and responsibility with respect to their learning. The location of the middle school in a K-10 environment and the various links across the three sectors within this school make for programmatic coherence as well as transitions across sectors.

For teachers, the work arrangements support collaboration, innovation and ongoing professional learning. The leadership and vision associated with the school have been central to these developments.

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE (ACT)

1. SCHOOL CONTEXT:

1.1 Location
St Mary's Catholic College is a dual-campus 7-12 College in the Tuggeranong Valley, a large regional development in the south of Canberra. The first suburban development began in Tuggeranong in the early 1970s and the region has grown rapidly over the last 30 years. A town centre was built in 1982 as a focal point for work and shopping for many of the residents of this region. The population of the Tuggeranong Valley is estimated at 100,000 and over a quarter of the population in this area is under 15 years of age.

1.2 About the College
The College is the only Catholic secondary school in the Tuggeranong Valley and is the destination high school for a large number of Catholic primary schools. The College has also developed a strong reputation and consequently attracts a number of students from outside the region, as well as many students from non-Catholic backgrounds. The college serves a large student body. In any one Year level cohort there are typically at least 300 students.

The College was formed as the consequence of the amalgamation of two schools in the Tuggeranong Valley in the mid 1990s. It is located across two sites. The Wanniassa campus of the College accommodates students in Yrs 7-9. Students in Yrs 10-12 are located on the Isabella Campus. The formation of the College was associated with the development of specific curricular and structural innovations. Across the two sites there are three divisions: The Middle School for Yrs 7 and 8; the Bridging School for Yrs 9 and 10; and the Senior School for Yrs 11 and 12. The plans for the establishment of a Middle School and the associated Bridging School were formulated in 1997 and were first implemented in 1998 then revised in 1999. The key aims for development for this campus were: a school culture underpinned by the Catholic Ethos; an environment in which students felt safe and supported, particularly in making the transition from primary school to high school; an integrated curriculum that fostered independent learning; and positive sets of relationships between and among teachers, students and their families.

1.3 Students/staff/community
The current student population at the Wanniassa campus of the College is approximately 950. The current Middle School population is 640.

With respect to student demographics there is a relatively high degree of homogeneity in terms of the cultural background of the students (predominantly Anglo-Celtic although 3% of the students and 30% of parents were not born in Australia); but there is considerable variation in terms of the socio-economic backgrounds of the students.

There are currently 175 staff working in the school. (48 admin and 127 teaching staff). Of the staff 7 have primary teaching qualifications and 120 have secondary teaching qualifications.

2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

2.1 Background and philosophy

One of the key reasons for the establishment of the Middle School was the need to facilitate the smooth transition of a large number of students from primary schools into the College, and in so doing meet the academic and pastoral needs of large cohorts of students in their initial years of high school. The amalgamation of two schools provided the conditions upon which a set of curricular and structural innovations could be developed. The design of the Middle School was based upon a process of research that involved an analysis of existing literature concerned with middle schooling; visits to exemplary middle schools both locally and in other states; and an elaboration of the specific ways in which the College could meet the needs within its local community context.

While the middle school curriculum and structures are evolving in accordance with ongoing evaluation within the school, the current core and inter-related philosophical underpinnings include the following:

•　　School culture founded on Catholic ethos. This ethos is central to the pastoral curriculum and its inter-connection with the academic curriculum. Together, these two wings of the curriculum have as their focus the social, intellectual, spiritual and physical development of all students. More specifically, the Middle School curriculum encourages students to develop their confidence and independence in relation to decision making, learning, respectful relations and life choices. The Catholic ethos underpins the development of classroom practices, school structures and community relations that reflect and foster Christian principles.

•　　Integrated and holistic curriculum. This integration occurs at three levels. At one level there is an inter-connection between the pastoral curriculum and the academic curriculum. At a second level subject disciplines or key learning areas are integrated in ways that are 'contemporary, relevant, inclusive and accessible' (Integrated Core Curriculum Document, 2004). In this the curriculum seeks to meet the needs and interests of all students within the school. A third level of integration is focused on a coherent and holistic College program that supports student transition into the College, and through the Middle, Bridging and Senior Schools.

2.2 School structures

The organisational structures in the Middle School have been designed to support the pastoral program and the integrated curriculum.

A key aspect of the organisational structure of the College is the sub-school or cluster. There are four Clusters and each Cluster consists of three Year 7 classes and three Year 8 classes. Each class has two teachers (Principal Teachers) for the core curriculum areas: English, Maths, Science, Religious Education (RE), and Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE). Over the course of a year each class engages in four Integrated-Core (I-Core) units of study.

Curriculum studies outside of these core areas, such as PD/H/PE, the Arts, LOTE and Technology are taught by specialist teaching teams.

Each class has a Pastoral Teacher who has responsibility for day-to-day student welfare, as well as for teaching the pastoral program. This teacher is, where possible,

one of the Principal Teachers. The link that each class has with a cluster also supports the process of student welfare and connections that students have to a Cluster (each Cluster has a Pastoral Coordinator)

The staffing structure that supports the organisation of the school and the various schools/clusters within the school are as follows:
- Principal
- Campus Head
- Assistant Principal Pastoral Care
- Assistant Principal Curriculum
- Middle School Coordinator (curriculum)
- Curriculum Coordinators (both campus based and cross campus)
- Pastoral Coordinators
- Cluster teaching teams

The Bridging School, as the name implies, is designed to link the middle school curriculum to the senior curriculum and facilitate the movement from the Wanniassa campus to the Isabella campus of the College. The curriculum is primarily organised within KLAs. Teachers at the Wanniassa Campus of the College teach across Yrs 7, 8 and 9.

3. PEDAGOGIES, PROGRAMS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1 Pedagogy
A key part of the Mission statement of the College states that "the teacher's role is that of facilitator, mentor, carer, negotiator, guide and challenger…teachers help to motivate students and develop in them a love of learning" (Integrated Core Curriculum Document, 2004).

More specifically the College mission aims to put in place pedagogical practices that support lifelong learning through, for example, extending students' responsibility, choice, confidence, critical thinking, risk-taking, creativity, understanding of how they learn, and an awareness of their place in the world.

The home class structure is central to the pedagogy at the College. The pastoral teacher provides a key link in terms of attending to matters of student welfare and the development of the class community. Likewise the teaming of two principal teachers for each class enables the following: integrated curriculum; students are known well by a small group of teachers; teacher expertise is shared; and there is a reduction in the number of teachers and the amount of movement between classes that often exist in the initial years of high school.

3.2 Curriculum
There are two elemental components of the Middle School Curriculum. These two components are seen as connected and complementary.

The I-Core Units are the key feature of the middle school curriculum at the College. The integrated units have been designed with the purpose of providing students with learning opportunities that are relevant to their lives and intellectually engaging. The Integrated units aim to bring together the disciplinary knowledge integral to the KLAs of English,

maths, science, SOSE and RE. As well, the units, individually or collectively, are underpinned by across-curriculum perspectives which include:

- the Catholic ethos,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education,
- Australian education,
- environmental education,
- gender equity,
- information and communication technology,
- literacy,
- multicultural education,
- special needs education,
- work education,
- global perspectives,
- social justice perspectives and
- futures perspectives.

This dual purpose enables students to build disciplinary knowledge and skills and a range of communication and critical thinking skills. It also provides the conditions through which students can set those skills and that knowledge into a broad social/cultural/religious perspective.

The unit topics for Yr 7 are: A Just World; Conflict; Disasters; Health Focus. For Yr 8 the units are: Loyalty; Media and Society; Power and Authority; Science Fiction.

Mathematics was originally included within the I-core units, but due to the particular ways in which mathematics is sequenced the College decided to develop a separate mathematics program. Links are still made between mathematical concepts and the I-core units.

The second component is the pastoral curriculum. There is a strong focus here on Christian ideals, life skills, study skills, organisational skills and relationships.

Articulating and extending the links between the Middle School curriculum and the Bridging School curriculum (KLA based) has been identified by the school as one of the key priorities for curriculum development.

3.3 Assessment and Reporting

The College has developed a comprehensive reporting process based on both pastoral and curriculum outcomes. These outcomes are broadly derived from the ACT Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks; the National Curriculum Profiles; and the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn Treasures New and Old Guidelines. In addition, outcomes have been developed that reflect the specific purposes of the pastoral and I-Core units. The pastoral teacher is responsible for reporting on ways in which students engage with the pastoral curriculum and participate in the College community. The curriculum outcomes focus on a range of skills, knowledge and dispositions relevant to the process of learning; the specific integrated unit; and broad domains of knowledge and inquiry. Outcomes concerned with learning skills include working in cooperative and collaborative ways; working independently; using divergent thinking; locating information from a range of sources; and making meaning holistically by analogies, similarities, dissimilarities and logical connections. The outcomes also focus on integrated understandings and knowledge as well as discipline-specific skills

and understanding. Students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate outcomes and build their knowledge and understanding across the integrated units.

Teachers employ a range of assessment tasks to enable a broad profile of student achievement to be documented. Rich assessment tasks are utilised, incorporating the application of skills, knowledge and processes from a variety of KLA's.

At the moment the assessment system is tightly aligned with the curriculum and pedagogy that has been developed at the school. The curriculum implications associated with standardised literacy and numeracy tests for students in Year 9 are currently being considered within the school.

4. SCHOOL INITIATIVES THAT PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING

There are several practices within the College that seek to create environments relevant to the individual and collective learning needs of the students and the staff. Many of these practices also work to connect and make coherent the layers of provision and mission within the College.

4.1 Timetabling and staff/student organisation
Cluster, or sub-school, structures provide a home base for students. Each cluster and the classes within each cluster provide the conditions for relationship building, and the structures that support student welfare and the management of behaviour issues.

The staff rooms are cross-disciplinary in the way they have been established. This has served to break down the segmentation across disciplinary boundaries found in many high schools and provided opportunities for cross-curricular discussion.

4.2 Professional development
Various professional development opportunities have been taken up by teachers in the school in order to develop the Middle School and/or extend professional knowledge about pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and student matters. Teachers at the school were involved in the initial negotiation of the middle school. This involvement constituted an important form of professional development in terms of considering current research and visiting schools. Teachers have also attended various workshops run by the Catholic Education Office and other related conferences. Recent examples include conferences on education for boys. There are also many members of staff who have enhanced, or are in the process of, enhancing their professional learning and qualifications through postgraduate study.

Much of the professional development occurs 'in-house'. This includes various cluster meetings organised through the year, providing forums for collaborative planning, exchange of ideas and evaluation of curriculum; introductory programs for new staff; and informal professional dialogue between staff that occurs in the cross-disciplinary staff rooms and the staff common room. Within the school there is a strong culture of reflection pertaining to the teaching programs and this underpins the ways in which those working in the school can contribute to the shaping and refining of the practices and programs at the College. This culture serves as a model for lifelong learning within the school.

A number of staff noted the limited opportunities in current pre-service teacher education programs for specialisations or electives that have the middle years of schooling as their focus. The school employs a relatively large number of early career teachers and there was recognition that some background knowledge, related to middle schooling, integrated studies and young people, would enhance the preparedness of these teachers to work in the middle school.

4.3 Programs that encourage student participation, leadership and responsibility.

These programs are related to student participation at school and in the wider community. There are various avenues through which students can participate. For example, students are encouraged to organise and participate in Project Compassion fundraising and awareness raising activities. Yr 9 students are encouraged to run assemblies, attend and help with activities at the Yr 7 camp, and so forth.

4.4 Technology.
The school has a range of ICT resources in computer laboratories, the school library and classrooms. Use of ICT is considered integral to the literacy practices within the curriculum. A large number of students at the College have computers in their homes and thus bring to school considerable knowledge in this area. This also creates opportunities for making connections across sites of learning.

4.5 School culture that promotes reflection and innovation.
Discussions with staff in all forums indicated a willingness to reflect critically on aspects of the school program and to seek to refine various parts of its operation. There is a sense that the program has a dynamic element that is responsive to changing circumstances, student need and interest, and evaluative feedback. Adjustments have been made to the maths curriculum; the ways of coordinating the integrated and pastoral components of the curriculum are currently being redeveloped; staff and students are encouraged to evaluate core units regularly; and ways of enhancing the transition from the Middle school to the Bridging School are being discussed. The leadership within the school plays a critical role in enabling this culture to foster and develop.

5. TEACHER INSIGHTS

The teachers interviewed as part of this study represented a diverse set of backgrounds in terms of level of experience, qualifications (primary and secondary), and curriculum specialisations. Those in the interview group recognised the diversity among the staff as being crucial to their teaching and teamwork. Efforts are made within teaming arrangements to balance expertise, and this was seen by teachers as important, particularly in relation to teaching integrated studies and facilitating professional dialogue. Moreover, the teaming of teachers was fundamental to a workable system of student welfare and for extending opportunities for continuity across Year levels. The teachers acknowledged that the integrated studies provided students with an engaging set of tasks, but that this was demanding in terms of teaching, particularly when starting a unit, and in terms of teachers' own professional/content knowledge. The way in which teachers were made ready for working in middle school settings, through teacher preparation programs and post-graduate programs, was discussed as an important issue facing middle schools.

The key elements of the program that teachers saw as building the skills for lifelong learning were the research and communication requirements within integrated units; the connections that students needed to make across domains of knowledge in these units; the relevance of the integrated units to real life; and the focus on collaboration and respect through group work and pastoral care. The teachers also noted that teaching in both the Middle School and the Bridging School was useful by way of promoting coherence across these sectors.

6. STUDENT INSIGHTS

Three Yr 8 and three Yr 7 students participated in the focus group discussion. In noting some of the differences between primary school and middle school the students said they had more responsibility, more choice, and more opportunities to participate, and that there was greater focus on world issues. Students commented that in all their subjects they could see connections to things that they regarded as being important to know and to be able to do in the future. This included content knowledge related to what students were learning in English, Maths, Science or Design and Technology, as well as practical skills such as spelling; and learning skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, stating opinions and taking risks. Students also noted that the organisation of classes, and activities such as school camps, enabled them to extend their social skills in terms of making friends and taking responsibility. While much of the discussion about the type of learning that might be needed for the future focused on content knowledge needed to get work, at the end of the discussion one student volunteered that through her experience in the middle school she had developed considerable self-confidence. While she couldn't put her finger on what exactly had enabled her to build that confidence, she was able to connect it to her experience at school in general and to see that it was an important quality that would support her learning in the future.

7. OUTCOMES

The middle school program has been in operation for six years and there are some key indicators of the value of the program with respect to academic and social outcomes for students.

In relation to one of the main reasons for developing the middle school (a smooth transition into Yr 7 for a large body of students), there have been some important indicators of success. Staff observations and evaluations that have focused on student engagement, participation, enthusiasm and levels of confidence have noted that students, on the whole, are making a smooth transition into the College. Given the size of the student cohorts this represents a significant outcome. Moreover, the attention to pastoral issues has meant that the school is a place in which students make friends and feel part of a community. Behaviour referrals in this respect are minimised and if issues arise they are typically dealt with by the pastoral teachers. The focus on pastoral care and student welfare, and the integration of the academic and pastoral curriculum are considered central in explaining these programmatic outcomes.

Results of in-school assessment tasks provide indicators of student academic outcomes. Learning outcomes have been developed for each of the integrated units that focus on students' knowledge and skill development. Staff noted that most students are achieving at or above the outcome levels expected at their Year level. There has been no

noticeable dip across Year levels, and there has been consistency in the ways in which students have met outcomes through the years the college has operated.

Evaluative feedback from staff and students focuses on teaching strategies, learning tasks and content. Units are modified annually in light of the feedback provided.

It is of note that the first group of students to enter the Middle School in 1998 graduated from Year 12 last year. The Year 12 results achieved by this cohort were considered to be of a high standard. While not claiming any measureable correlation between the middle school curriculum and these results, they do provide a broad indicator that students were able to extend and connect their learning across the sectors within the College.

8. SUMMARY

The Middle School environment at St Mary's Catholic College is one which supports key aspects of lifelong learning, particularly in relation to the provision of a holistic program that supports transition across sectors; an intellectually engaging curriculum; student participation in the learning processes; and practices that build student confidence. The connections within and between the pastoral and academic wings of the curriculum are central to this environment, as are the alignments between the curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices. There is a clear set of cultural and organisational factors that support and maintain this learning environment in the College. These factors include a school culture and a model of leadership that promote staff reflection and commitment. Linked to this culture is a set of organisational structures that support student learning and welfare, as well as staff communication and exchange.

Given the size of the school, the scope of the reform, and the relatively short period of time for which the Middle School has operated, the development of this learning environment is a significant achievement.