



## Message from the President . . .

It has been a busy start to the year for the association. Our two PD opportunities were very successful and I thank all those who took the time to provide us with feedback.

The committee is meeting regularly to plan what promises to be an outstanding conference, while at the same time maintaining a local programme of PD on a term-by-term basis. I am representing the association at the AAMT conference on Middle Schooling Mathematics which takes place in April here in Perth. This is a joint project of the AAMT and the Mathematical Association of Western Australia (MAWA). It should be a very informative and thought-provoking event. Talking of information and thinking, in my president's report I would like to inform and also, I hope, provoke thought and discussion.

In my career I have been fortunate to work with many talented and committed teachers. I see being an expert in a field of study as secondary to being a teacher. I believe that among the richest resources young teachers can access are the skills and knowledge demonstrated by experienced teachers. Recently in a job application I was required to write down a one page statement of my philosophy as an educator. This really made me think and I found it a valuable exercise.

Current research into best practice bears testimony to the constructivist approach bearing fruits in terms of student learning. Engagement is central to the success of any learner. When students are engaged in the learning process they ask questions and expect answers which make sense to them. I believe that students need to be equipped with basic skills and knowledge; so that they can begin taking responsibility for their own learning. To achieve higher order thinking, students must **understand**. To me, constructivist theory is all about teaching in a way that will enable students to develop understanding. As an advocate of constructivism I acknowledge the need from time to time for an instructivist approach to teaching and learning.

The design of the Curriculum Framework allows, and I would say encourages, the breakdown of subject barriers and the design of a curriculum which engages students. Collaboration between teachers and students is essential. I work under the premise that students have different inherent needs and abilities, which they bring to the classroom. As we as teachers learn so much more about how students learn and how we can better teach and facilitate our students' learning, we must reflect this knowledge in our practice. The education of any child involves many people. Communication between all involved is important if we are to achieve the best outcomes for our students.

What is your personal philosophy? Why are you a proponent of the middle schooling model? I believe we can make the difference for our students. We may live in the age of technology, but nothing will ever replace the "human interface" for inspiring young people to set goals and to reach for them... I would like to hear from others about their personal philosophies and how they believe the association can continue to support learning.

Why don't you contribute an article? Terry and Pat would love to hear from you. Our strength is in the diversity of our combined experience which is harnessed towards a common goal. Let us hear your story!

Christine Lee

### Special Points of Interest:

- **President's Address**
- **Reforming the middle years of schooling: to go or not go the whole hog?**
- **A longitudinal evaluation of WA government middle schools**
- **Interesting websites!**
- **Letters to the Editor *New***
- **Reviews of our fantastic PDs - Michael Nagel and Andrew Fuller. Hope you didn't miss them!**
- **International middle schooling conference in Perth in 2006! We're keeping you informed.**
- **PD update - please respond ☺**

The editors would really like comments about middle schooling or teachers from your students.

Comments from readers about articles, suggestions for articles or information about programs being carried out in your schools would also be welcome.

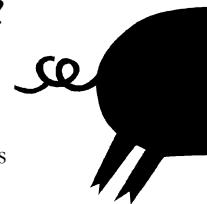
Please contact us, Terry de Jong or Pat Kershaw, at: MSAWA Newsletter, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup 6027. Alternatively, email to: t.dejong@ecu.edu.au or p.kershaw@ecu.edu.au

We're looking forward to receiving your bright ideas!



# Reforming the middle years of schooling: To go or not go the whole hog?

Terry de Jong



Based upon developmental responsiveness, the seminal *Turning Points 2000* design for improving middle years of schooling outcomes consists of seven inter-related elements, namely:

1. The delivery of a standards-based and adolescent relevant curriculum which is cognisant of how young adolescent students learn best, and uses a range of assessment methods;
2. The use of instructional methods that prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners;
3. The appointment of staff who are expert at teaching young adolescents and who are engaged in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities;
4. An organisational structure based on smaller learning communities which aim to create a caring, supportive community of learners within a climate of intellectual development and a shared educational purpose;
5. The provision of a safe and healthy school environment;
6. Democratic governance which includes all school staff members;
7. The involvement of parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development (Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 23-25).

Ensuring success for every middle years student requires a systemic approach to implementing all seven elements of the *Turning Points 2000* design. Downsizing or ignoring some of these elements will diminish the impact of this design, and ultimately make little or no difference to young adolescents achieving successful learning outcomes. Caution: no half measures. You have to go the whole hog. This argument is central to the middle years of schooling reform process advocated by *Turning Points 2000*. In fact, it is an assertion that has been articulated by Cummings (1998) as a major challenge to genuine reform in the middle years of schooling in Australia. In *Extending Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling: Challenges and Responses*, he highlights a number of key questions and responses in relation to the successful development of middle schooling in the Australian context. From the perspective of teachers involved in middle years reform initiatives, we are alerted to the dangers of embracing middle schooling rhetoric without a meaningful change of practice.

They [the teachers] made frequent reference to the danger of simply re-packaging existing arrangements – a form of educational window-dressing – that might simply result in the re-emergence of familiar routines under different names (p. 6).

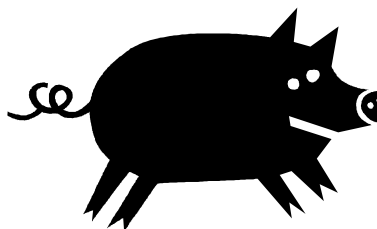
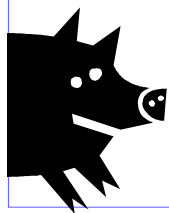
It is likely that most educators who have been, or are still involved in reform initiatives associated with the middle years of schooling, are familiar with this caveat. However, it is probably equally true too that there are many middle schooling reform processes that have not paid enough attention to the complexity and effective management of change. Indeed, it is highly probable that at the heart of the failure of many middle schooling reform initiatives are 'half measure' attempts, a poor understanding of the complexity of change processes, and subsequent lack of adequate and appropriate management strategies.

What are your thoughts and experiences in relation to the above propositions? Is it necessary to go the whole hog in reforming the middle years? Is it possible to go half a hog and still achieve successful outcomes for young adolescents? Let us know! Write to The Editors: MSAWA Newsletter, Terry de Jong and Pat Kershaw, ECU, School of Education, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, 6027.

## References

Cumming, J. (Ed)(1998). *Extending reform in the middle years of schooling: Challenges and responses*. Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.

Jackson, A. & Davis, G. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. New York: Teachers College Press.



# A longitudinal evaluation of Western Australian government middle schools ...

Dale Miller, Department of Education and Training Evaluation Officer

As discussed in the previous edition of the Middle Schooling Association of WA newsletter, the Department of Education and Training will soon be conducting a large-scale evaluation of the different approaches to middle schooling in WA government schools. The evaluation seeks to address two key questions:

1. In what ways do schools that adopt a 'middle schooling' approach have *different practices* from one another and from schools that have a more conventional approach?
2. Do schools that implement a 'middle schooling' approach achieve better *academic, social/emotional, behavioural and post-compulsory and post-school outcomes* for their students than schools that have a more conventional approach?

Our association is represented on the evaluation's Reference Group by immediate past president and principal of Coodanup Community College middle school, Gaylia Mitcham. This newsletter will run regular updates so as to keep our members informed about the evaluation's progress and key findings.

## Preliminary consultation

A large number of Principals from WA government schools that explicitly adopt a middle schooling approach have been involved in preliminary consultations with the evaluation team. These consultations have been invaluable, shaping the methodology and identifying some of the logistical issues associated with conducting the data collection and analysis. Preliminary consultations are expected to continue until the end of Term 1, 2005, yet already several key points and issues are emerging and the feedback is being incorporated into the evaluation's methodology. Some of these are:

- There appear to be a number of different models and approaches to implementing a 'middle schooling' approach and one of the aims of this evaluation is to identify the various ways that schools translate 'middle schooling' principles into practice. The evaluation's methodology is therefore being designed so as to be sensitive enough to capture differences between schools that adopt a middle schooling approach.
- The response from Principals has been very positive and there has been a strong interest in participating in the evaluation. There seems to be a general recognition that scientifically rigorous research of this nature (i.e. looking at the impact of middle schooling practices on student outcomes) is long overdue and will greatly assist schools in their endeavours to identify ways in which they can further improve.
- There was strong support for the evaluation's plans to examine whether a particular approach or set of practices achieve different student outcomes for different types of students (e.g. male / female; indigenous / non indigenous; more or less academically able, and those from high / low socio academic backgrounds).
- The evaluation must explore the philosophy and rationale underpinning a school's processes, practices and structures.
- Schools are not static; their practices and structures are constantly evolving. The evaluation's methodology will need to be sensitive enough to document such evolution and explore the rationale and implications of such changes.

## Who will be involved in the evaluation?

No final decisions have yet been made about which schools will take part in the evaluation. However the DET anticipates that approximately 50 WA government schools of various types, sizes and locations will be involved to some extent. Obviously, the confidentiality of participating schools and individuals is of paramount importance.

## What sort of methodology will be used?

The methodology is still being shaped and refined. However it will be designed so as to enable the evaluation to determine whether schools that adopt a middle schooling approach *add more value* to student outcomes than schools that have a more conventional approach. To enable fair comparison, the two groups of schools will be matched on a range of background variables that are known to influence student outcomes and schools' practices and policies, including socio-economic circumstances, student prior academic achievement, school location, school size and cohort size.

## What sorts of measurement instruments will be used?

Information will be collected using a range of sources (students, parents, teachers and Principals) and techniques including interviews, surveys, and written assessments. Some of the information will come from data already systemically collected by the DET but it is anticipated that the evaluation will probably also involve the administration of some additional surveys and assessments (e.g. to assess students' social and emotional wellbeing).

Naturally, one of the challenges of conducting research of this nature is finding measurement instruments and processes that are scientifically rigorous, appropriate to WA's educational context and not too time consuming to complete. To this end, the evaluation will soon be forming an advisory body to review and select appropriate measurement instruments and processes that the evaluation will use. This advisory body will have Principal representatives from schools that adopt a middle schooling approach as well from schools that do not.

#### When will the evaluation take place?

The evaluation will run in three phases. Currently the evaluation is in the first phase, which involves extensive consultation and preparation for the evaluation. This is expected to continue until the end of Term 1, 2005.

Phase two, which will begin in Term 2, 2005, involves collecting information about student outcomes and conducting a snapshot analysis to see if there are any differences between the schools that adopt a middle schooling approach and those that do not. Information about student outcomes will continue to be collected and analysed over the next three years, enabling longitudinal trends to be identified.

Phase three is likely to begin in late 2005 or 2006 and will involve an in-depth examination of how WA government schools that explicitly adopt a 'middle schooling' approach differ from one another and from other more conventional schools in terms of their school management and organisation, curriculum, behaviour management and pastoral care, and teaching and learning practices and policies.

#### Whom should I contact for further information?

Our association's representative for this evaluation is Gaylia Mitcham. Please do not hesitate to contact Gaylia if you have any queries or comments about this evaluation. Gaylia.Mitcham@det.wa.edu.au

#### **Interesting websites . . .**

Five websites that relate to early adolescence and developmental issues and challenges.

*Thanks to the 2005 Middle Years Grad Dip students for reviewing these websites!*

<http://www.kidshhealth.org/teen/> Subjects cover a wide-range of topics that are relevant to adolescents' concerns (eg. physical and psychological development, sexuality and health, food/fitness, drugs and alcohol. It is non patronising, handles the subject matter in a factual way, and uses language that is easy to understand. The site is reviewed by experts.

[www.puberty101.com](http://www.puberty101.com) This is a highly informative sight targeting approx 12-18 year olds. It contains sections on sexuality, STDs, drugs and mental health. Teens can also post questions to be answered and participate in online forums.

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au) This site deals with many issues including bullying, suicide, and sexuality education. It provides some great links and offers clear, concise information. Telephone and e-mail facilities are available as a resource for help.

[www.facetheissue.com](http://www.facetheissue.com) This site deals with major issues and problems faced by teenagers (e.g. drug use, depression). It is narrated by celebrities, and presented in a way that would appeal to the 14/15 yr old age group. It is non patronising, and offers professional advice and peer mentoring.

<http://www.thehormonefactory.com/index.cfm?flashOK=0> **The Hormone Factory**

Fun and interactive site for kids about to enter their teens. Explains how their bodies will change and answers questions about sex, families relationships, health etc.

### Letters to the Editor

*The editors would like to seek your opinion on whether you believe generalist or specialist teachers are better suited to teach in middle schools.*

Please send your letters to: [t.dejong@ecu.edu.au](mailto:t.dejong@ecu.edu.au) or [p.kershaw@ecu.edu.au](mailto:p.kershaw@ecu.edu.au)



Dear Ed - I'm writing this in the hope of feeling less like a fifth wheel. I was wondering if other members of the Association are having trouble coming to grips with the new requirements for professional development. Under the previous regime, schools had the flexibility and scope to plan tailored programs and target their whole school PD to their specific needs at specific times.

Under the new "rules", it feels as if PD is now a box that has to be ticked and the delivery of each program is prescribed from above. The danger is that ownership of the PD by individual teachers could be diluted, with the new system (currently) allowing less say from the ground up as to what

forms of PD are required.

Hopefully this will change as the system cranks into gear, and schools have a longer lead time to institute their PD programs. The danger is that in the meantime, 40,000 teachers are going to receive seven days of PD that they have little engagement in. The risk is that the delivery is like cod liver oil - just knowing it's good for you doesn't make any difference if it's not what you want (or need).

I'd be interested to read if any other members have a view on this issue.

Concerned Teacher  
Northern Suburbs

**Dr Michael Nagel**

**Monday, 28 February 2005 at Kinross College**

**Tuesday, 1 March 2005 at Penrhos College**

### **The Gendered Brain**

This workshop allowed participants to be given another window into early adolescent development. Just what difference does gender make to a young person's thinking and subsequent behaviour? To listen to what Michael said one would have to agree that it makes a big difference.

In this interesting, informative and often highly amusing presentation we were given valuable insights into the neurological and physiological differences. These differences have wide-ranging implications for how we teach and how our students learn in the middle years.

The workshop came at the end of a busy day in the classroom for many participants; however the pace of the presentation and the use of concrete materials and activities helped all to become fully involved in what I believe was a very valuable learning experience for all.

I have trialled some of the activities Michael suggested with my year eight classes with great success. I do know of others who have begun to trial them too. It is exciting to learn about the advances in knowledge we are able to harness with the use of MRI scans etc. Old assumptions have to be swept aside given this new information.

If you missed the PD and would like to find out more about this work, I suggest you look up Michael's website at [www.connectededucation.com.au](http://www.connectededucation.com.au) and the brain research websites listed below, which were recommended by Michael Nagel.

In conclusion I would like to thank Mr Hylton Hayes, Principal of Kinross College, and Mr David Hunter, Deputy Head of Middle School at Penrhos College, for the use of their schools' excellent facilities.

#### **Brain Research Web Sites**

<http://www.brains.org/>

[http://www.newhorizons.org/neuro/front\\_neuro.html](http://www.newhorizons.org/neuro/front_neuro.html)

[http://activated.decs.act.gov.au/reading/curr\\_jour\\_hotlists\\_brainresearch.htm](http://activated.decs.act.gov.au/reading/curr_jour_hotlists_brainresearch.htm)

[http://www.funderstanding.com/about\\_learning.cfm](http://www.funderstanding.com/about_learning.cfm)

<http://www.help4teachers.com/>

**Andrew Fuller**

**Thursday 10th March 2005 at Munja Gardens**

### **Creating a Resilient School**

This was an entertaining presentation which provided much food for thought. It was heartening to hear Andrew begin by stating the importance of teachers and their own responsibility to care for themselves first. Too often we can be so busy doing we do not take time to reflect and to focus on our own personal well being. An effective teacher is someone who aware of the need for balance in their personal and public lives.

Andrew advocates inclusive collaborative practices which engender shared responsibilities in the classroom. I believe that middle Schooling philosophy supports

this approach. Andrew told many amusing stories, he tested our preconceptions and he gave us the opportunity to participate in the movement of the straws exercise. I will never hear the names of the Wright brothers in quite the same way again!

He also most importantly referred continually to current research to substantiate the claims he made. I intend to do some further investigation of these interesting statistics.

It was good to see so many attend this after school PD. Several people asked about the books that Andrew had displayed and where they could obtain copies of the material.

Andrew suggested we visit his website for further information. Once again those who missed this informative presentation can find out more from the website.

[www.andrewfuller.com.au](http://www.andrewfuller.com.au)



# MIDDLE SCHOOLING ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC)

Announces the

## INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOLING 2006 CONFERENCE

"Motivation, Meaning & Management in the Middle Years"

Sheraton Perth Hotel  
Western Australia  
13-15 May 2006

For more information check out the website

[www.msawa.asn.au](http://www.msawa.asn.au)

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E: [admin@eventswa.com.au](mailto:admin@eventswa.com.au)

## PD Update ...

### *Celebrating Success*

The Middle Schooling Association of Western Australia invites staff from all Government and Independent schools to participate in a showcase of student work. Under the theme of *celebrating success* we would like to give you the opportunity to spend an afternoon sharing a glass of wine and your work with colleagues; showcasing student work or simply sharing a pedagogy that has worked for you in your context.

The proposed dates for this PD are Wednesday, 15 June from 4.00pm to 6.30pm for the southern suburbs and Thursday, 16 June from 4.00pm to 6.30pm.

This could take the form of a video, photos, poster, assignment work, a process or an innovative curriculum. In the first instance we would like to gauge the level of interest for this sharing PD. Please email Mark Jeffery on [Mark.Jeffery@det.wa.edu.au](mailto:Mark.Jeffery@det.wa.edu.au) to register your interest.