

DEVELOPING A MIDDLE YEARS APPROACH

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- 1. What are the middle years of schooling?*
- 2. What do we know about adolescence?*
- 3. What are the implications of adolescence for learning and teaching?*
- 4. How can we respond most effectively?*

So what are the middle years of schooling?

The 'middle years of schooling' focus on young adolescents at the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school (Years 5 to 9).

Students in this age group have particular needs that are different from those of younger children or older adolescents.

Most students progress satisfactorily during these years, but it is a time when some students switch off from schooling – they underachieve in class, disengage from learning and can feel quite alienated from school. This is more true of boys than girls, but girls also underachieve and disengage.

The middle years of schooling...

The middle years of schooling represent a critical phase of development in the lives of young adolescents.

It is a time traditionally associated with low educational expectations by both students and teachers.

It has also been perceived by many people as a time during which educational development is retarded, if not halted.

In reality, however, it is a time when students are potentially at the peak of their personal, social and educational development – yet what they are provided with in school is often the opposite of what they really need!

The middle years of schooling requires a middle years approach!

- An approach “that bridges the conventional primary-secondary divide with a view to responding more effectively to the needs of young adolescents.” (Barratt 1998)
- “An overall style of teaching and learning based on well-founded beliefs about adolescents and their development.” (Jackson 1998)
- “A whole-school approach to teaching, learning, curriculum, student welfare and school organisation that acknowledges and deliberately responds to the characteristics and needs of young adolescent learners at a variety of levels.” (Ralph 2006)

So what do we know about adolescence?

- 1. Current research findings*
- 2. Key areas of adolescent development*

Brain development – a quiz

1. Neurologically speaking, all fetuses start out as blank slates. During the first trimester hormonal surges of testosterone dictate whether the brain is fashioned along male or female lines.
2. Males can store trivia better than females, for a long period of time.
3. Children who begin their day with cereal and toast or other high carbohydrate diets are actually dulling their ability to learn.
4. In most cases, the female brain matures earlier than the male brain.
5. Infant boys will seek out women's faces rather than objects because they bond so closely with their mothers.

Brain development – a quiz

6. PET scans show the resting female brain is as active as the activated male brain.
7. Maturation has little to do with girls' early language skills.
8. Aggressive behaviour in young boys is mostly due to the influence of television and video games.
9. More girls suffer from dyslexia.
10. Oxytocin, a brain chemical that possibly promotes bonding, is much more functionally present in female brains.

Adolescents today

Michael Carr-Gregg

- One in six 8 year old girls are menstruating
- The brain is not fully developed until the age of 23
- Adolescents receive one positive comment for every five negative comments

Andrew Fuller

- Current cohort of early adolescents are unlike those we have educated before
- Born with a mouse in their hand
- ‘Click and go’ kids
- Shortened attention span
- Information rich, experience poor
- Heavily reliant on external rewards and motivation

The brain

Andrew Fuller

- Brain most active when we are young, never have more synapses than when we are 5 years old
- Brain prunes synapses that have not been used, especially in adolescence
- ‘Use it or lose it’
- Between 9 and 14 years of age, without stimulus, half of all synapses can be lost
- Frontal lobe is ‘closed for construction’ during adolescence

The brain

John Joseph

- “It makes no sense to try to teach adolescents without an understanding of how the adolescent brain learns.”
- Learning will go into long term memory if it is linked with previously stored information or emotion
- Adolescents require authentic, real-life, relevant learning experiences that engage the emotions.

Five key areas of development in adolescent learners:

- Intellectual
- Social
- Physical
- Emotional and psychological
- Moral

1. Intellectual development

- Moving from concrete to abstract thinking
- Capable of critical thinking, complex thinking
- An intense curiosity and wide range of intellectual pursuits, few of which are sustained over the long term
- High achievement when challenged and engaged
- Preferences for active over passive learning experiences
- Interest in interacting with peers during learning activities
- A growing capacity for reflective thinking

2. Social development

- An intense need to belong and be accepted/respected by their peers, while finding their own place in the world
- Actively engaged in questioning and forming their own identity, whilst exploring issues of racial, cultural and sexual identity
- Increasingly aware of social relationships and values
- Modelling the behaviour of peers and older students, rather than parents or other adults
- Immature behaviour when social skills lag behind mental and physical maturity, attention-seeking behaviour
- Interested in fads and popular culture
- Over-react to ridicule, embarrassment, rejection

3. Physical development

- Significant, rapid, irregular physical growth and change
- Restlessness and fatigue due to hormonal changes
- A need for physical activity because of increased energy
- Developing sexual awareness, often touching and bumping others
- Awkwardness and uncoordinated movements due to physical changes
- Concern about changes in body size and shape
- Physical vulnerability resulting from poor health habits or engaging in risky behaviours

4. Emotional and psychological

- Unpredictable mood swings, heightened extremes in emotion, e.g. anxiety, fear, joy, anger, love, jealousy, loneliness
- Needing to release energy, sudden outbursts of activity
- A desire to become independent and to search for adult identity and acceptance
- Self-consciousness and being sensitive/vulnerable to personal criticism
- Concern about physical growth and maturity
- A belief that their personal problems, feelings and experiences are unique to them

5. Moral development

- Idealistic, want to make the world a better place
- Understand the complexity of moral issues, not seeing everything in black and white
- Capable of and interested in participatory democracy
- Impatient with the pace of change, under-estimation of how difficult it is to make social change
- Needing and maintaining relationships with supportive adult role models who will listen and be trustworthy
- Relying on parents and important adults for advice, but wanting to make their own decisions
- Judging others quickly, but acknowledging one's own faults slowly

*So what are the
implications of adolescence
for learning and teaching?*

Key features of adolescent learners (1)

- Increased capacity for abstract thinking, critical thinking, reflective thinking
- Highly inquisitive, questioning - but short term focus
- Seek challenge and engagement
- Prefer active, hands-on learning
- Seek a degree of freedom/choice in learning tasks - the opportunity to make their own decisions and work at their own pace

Key features of adolescent learners (2)

- Like working on individual projects and research
- Like working cooperatively with peers on group projects
- Increasingly aware of social/moral issues, and want to explore these issues with their peers/others
- Enjoy small and large group discussion, debates, etc
- Insecure yet outwardly confident
- Sensitive to personal criticism, ridicule

*How can we respond
most effectively?*

Areas for action in the middle years

1. School culture
2. Teaching and learning
3. Curriculum and assessment
4. Student welfare and leadership
5. School and classroom organisation
6. School-community links

1. School culture

Schools should build a culture that acknowledges the critical importance of the middle years.

Such a culture is characterised by:

- a comprehensive understanding of the developmental needs of young adolescents
- a strong determination to achieve greater congruence across Years 5–9 in learning, teaching, curriculum, assessment, student welfare and support
- extensive professional learning for all staff
- extensive collaboration and sharing between schools.

2. Teaching and learning

Essential ingredients for quality teaching and learning in the middle years include:

- students who are actively engaged in practical, hands-on learning about real-life problems
- students who are actively engaged in co-operative learning, inquiry and research
- students who understand and take increasing responsibility for managing their own learning
- teams of teachers who are knowledgeable and committed to young adolescents, working together collaboratively for the benefit of students.

3. Curriculum and assessment

Central to maintaining students' engagement with learning is a challenging, relevant and engaging curriculum that provides:

- curriculum continuity 5-9
- an interdisciplinary or integrated approach to content
- assessment for learning
- regular, meaningful feedback and support.

4. Student welfare and leadership

Students expect schools to be safe, fair, equitable and creative places where they are:

- respected as individual learners
- challenged and expected to excel
- encouraged to participate in decision making about themselves and their learning (student voice)
- supported in developing their self identity, self esteem, self confidence and social relationships.

There should also be:

- a comprehensive range of student support services and programs that address their needs
- a range of challenging opportunities for student leadership and participation.

5. School and classroom organisation

School and classroom organisation should have the flexibility to accommodate the developmental needs of young adolescents and allow excellent teaching and learning.

This will require:

- a focus on student learning and achievement
- collaborative planning and programming
- creative timetabling
- curriculum experimentation and innovation
- teaming of teachers and students
- creative use of available resources and space.

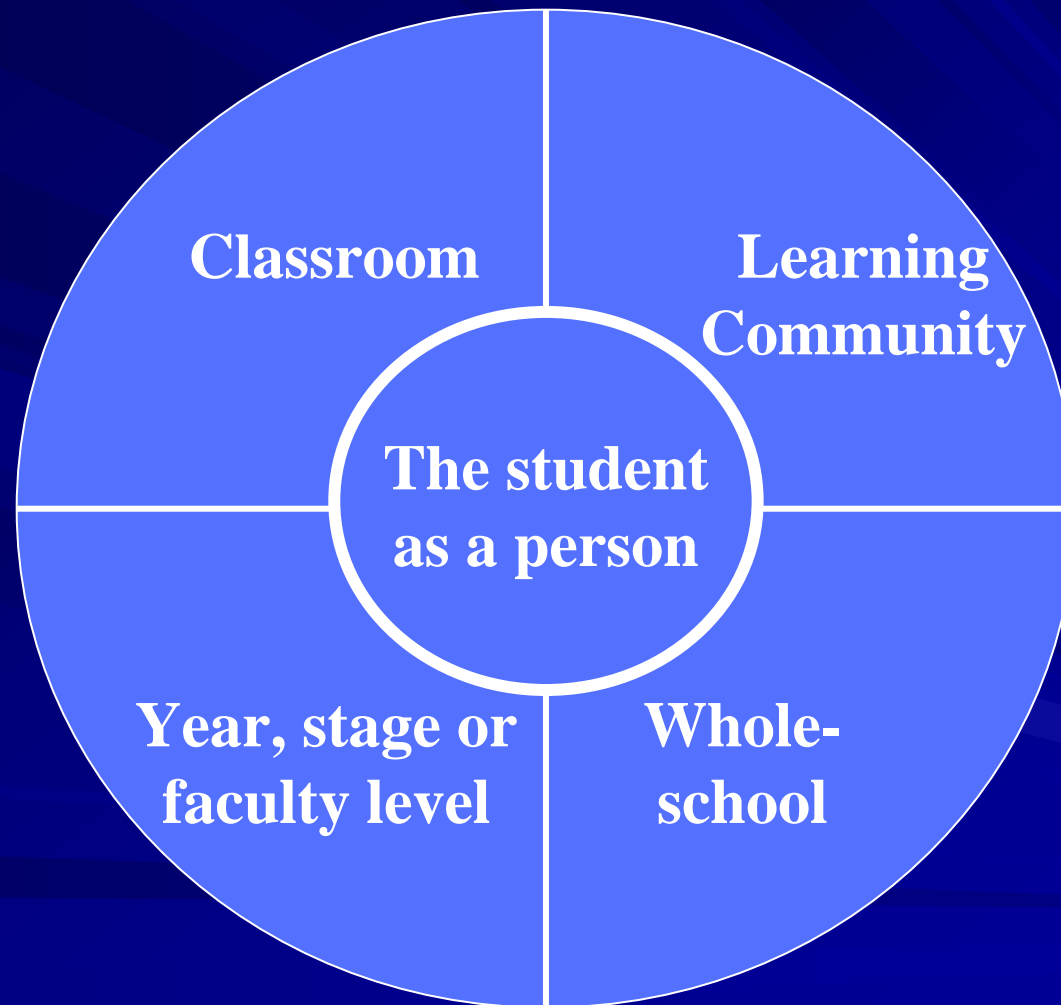
6. School-community links

The establishment of partnerships with parents, other schools, local agencies and community organisations, businesses, local industry and the local community in general is very important in the development and implementation of a school's middle years initiatives.

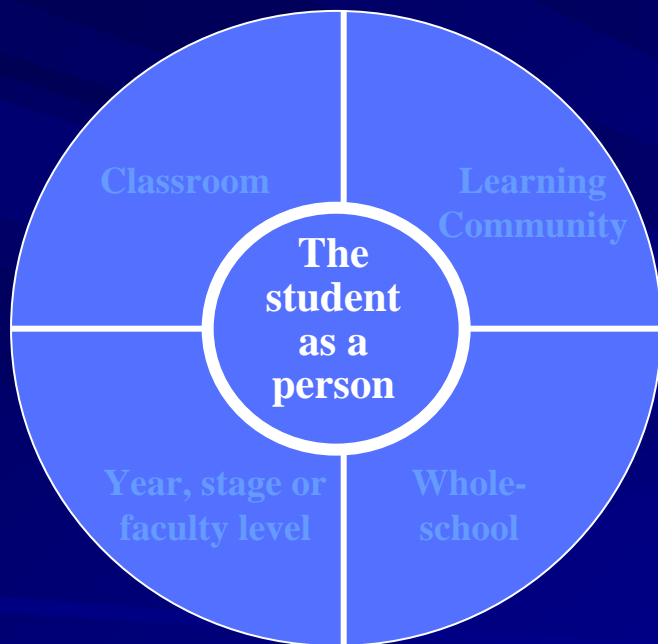
This can lead to:

- Enhanced parent/teacher/student communication
- Improved support for student learning
- Enhanced delivery of curriculum content
- Increased parent and community support for the school
- Improved school image.

The five levels of operation

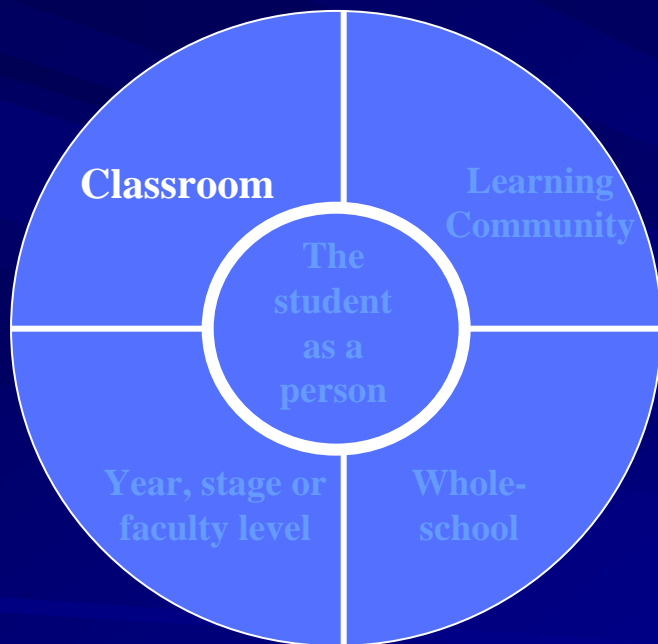


The student as a person



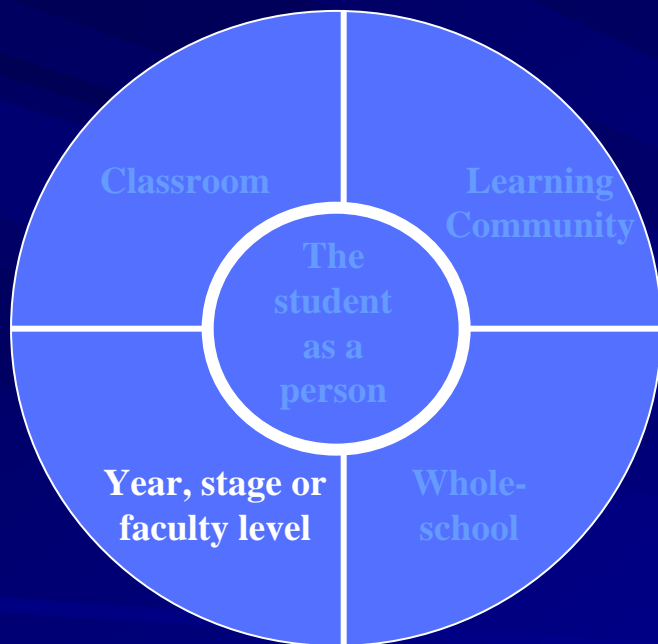
- **Stage of development**
- **Developmental needs**
- **Learning needs**
- **Special needs**
e.g. GAT, LD, NESB
- **Learning styles/preferences**
- **Prior learning and experience**
- **Attitudes to learning and school**
- **Previous success and achievement**
- **Home and family situation**

Classroom level



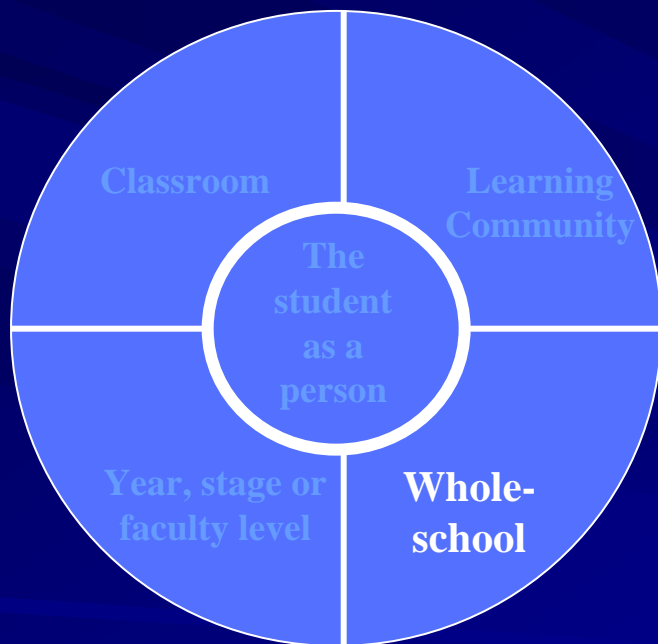
- **Cooperative learning**
- **Research and inquiry**
- **QT Framework**
- **Curriculum continuity**
- **Curriculum integration**
- **Assessment for learning**
- **Social/personal considerations**
- **Classroom organisation –
teaching teams, student
teams, etc**
- **Professional learning needs**

Year, stage or faculty level



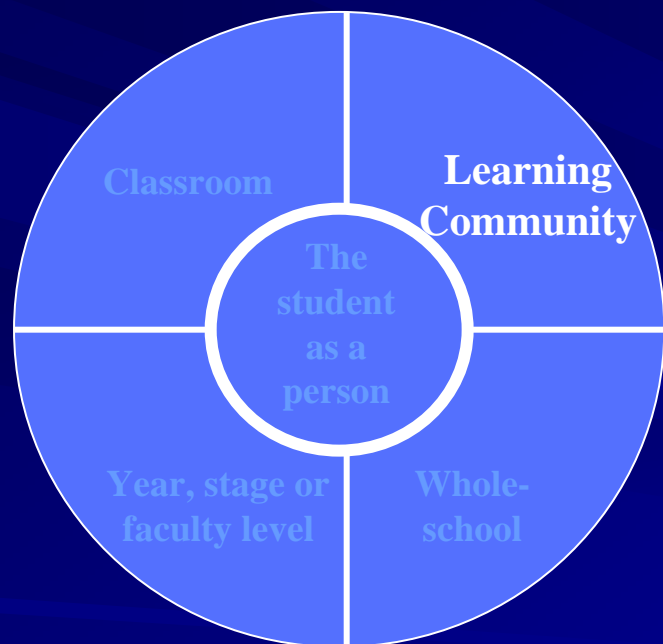
- **Management of learning**
- **QT/pedagogy**
- **Curriculum continuity**
- **Curriculum integration**
- **Assessment and reporting**
- **Student welfare, support, leadership programs**
- **Extra-curricular opportunities**
- **Class and teacher organisation**
- **Professional learning**

Whole-school level



- **Middle Years culture**
- **Focus on learning**
- **QT Framework/pedagogy**
- **Curriculum continuity**
- **Assessment/reporting**
- **Student welfare/support**
- **Student leadership**
- **Extra-curricular programs**
- **School organisation/staffing**
- **Professional learning program**

Learning Community level



- **Primary-secondary transition**
- **Information/data transfer**
- **Shared/common pedagogy**
- **Curriculum frameworks**
- **Curriculum continuity**
- **Specific across-cluster curriculum initiatives**
- **Programs in student welfare, support and leadership**
- **Extra-curricular opportunities**
- **Professional learning**

Exploring the possibilities

	School culture	Teaching and learning	Curriculum and assessment	Student welfare and leadership	School and classroom organisation	School-community links
Classroom						
Year, stage or faculty level						
Whole-school						
Learning Community						

*Workshop time –
Exploring the possibilities*

Some key questions...

1. Where are you now?
2. What could you do next?
3. How would you go about this?
4. What are your professional learning needs?
5. What resources and other support do you need?

So where to from here?

Some key ingredients in developing a Middle Years approach

- Increase staff understanding about the nature of adolescent development and the specific needs and characteristics of adolescent learners
- Develop and maintain a school culture focused on supporting the development of adolescent learners in the middle years
- Get to know each student as a unique individual
- Target student performance and achievement for all
- Implement programs to identify and support students with special needs, including those at risk of underachieving or disengaging

Some key ingredients in developing a Middle Years approach

- Implement pedagogy that best supports adolescent development, learning and engagement
- Develop curriculum units that reflect improved curriculum continuity, curriculum integration and assessment for learning
- Implement enhanced programs in student welfare, student support and student leadership
- Explore alternative models of school organisation that better support learning, teaching, curriculum innovation and students' social and personal development
- Explore how the community can contribute to creating more effective, engaged adolescent learners

Some key ingredients in developing a Middle Years approach

- Be prepared to commit yourself and your school to this important priority
- Identify and implement a range of initiatives at classroom, year/stage, school and cluster level that will target the areas for action
- Adopt a whole-school, integrated planning approach
- Implement extensive professional learning to support your middle years initiatives
- Build strong relationships with all schools in your cluster to create the possibility of a true 5-9 continuum
- Investigate how existing transition programs and links across schools could provide a strong foundation for future cluster-based action

Some key ingredients in developing a Middle Years approach

But let's also get primary-secondary transition right!

- ✓ Years 5-8
- ✓ Collaborative, cluster-based action
- ✓ Four stages –
preparation, transfer, induction, consolidation
- ✓ Areas for action –
 - overall planning and co-ordination
 - student data and information transfer
 - social/personal aspects
 - curriculum
 - teaching and learning

The middle years of schooling...

“The middle years of schooling should be so busy, so demanding, so active, so adventurous, so spectacular that young adolescents should barely have time for brooding introspection or watching Australian soap operas.”

(Barber 1999)

Strategic Initiatives Directorate

- **Primary-secondary transition website**

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/highschool/transitions/index.php>

- **Middle Years website**

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/highschool/middleys/index.php>

- **Key contact**

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