In Search of the Middle School Teacher: What differentiates the middle school teacher from primary and secondary school teachers

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Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

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Abstract

This study investigates ‘middle schooling’, in particular, the attributes of the middle school teacher and what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers: primary and secondary school teachers. This notion of a middle school teacher with its own unique set of attributes sheds new light on the centrality of the teacher in this reform. So much so, that it is challenging the default position that the attributes of the teacher are generic and not usually differentiated from other teachers. Teachers in this phase of education are focused on early adolescence in what is broadly defined in the Australian literature as ‘the middle years of schooling’. During the 1990s and into the present there are persistent and unyielding calls for schools to re-structure, re-culture and reform learning and teaching practices that focus on improving student outcomes. The purpose of this study is concerned with creating the conditions that support a different type of teacher who is responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents and to develop a model based on the understanding of these conditions.

The study was undertaken in South Eastern Queensland. The topic was researched out of professional interest in the middle years and the central role the teacher plays in improving student learning outcomes. This study makes a significant contribution to the current conceptualisation of the middle school teacher which is currently vague and informed by myth and intuit, rather than empirical findings. The study aims to generate data and develop theory concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher.

Using an inductive Grounded Theory approach provided an established analytical method for developing a substantive model for the middle school teacher. The field research was limited to six schools representing three sectors: Education Queensland, Catholic Systemic and Independent schools. The main data source was 40 semi-structure interviews conducted with principals, teachers and student focus groups and field observations recorded in memos.

The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), a theoretical holistic model generated from educators with broad and diverse experiences as middle school teachers is presented. The model identifies, for the first time, the attributes of the middle school teacher based on data elicited from the perspectives of a large sample of practising principals, teachers, and students. The model was constructed from the empirical data to illustrate how
the four attributes and the components of the model stand in relation to each other. The model depicts each component of the model as one of four, each having an interactive influence on the other. Each of the attributes consists of a number of elements as central to its construction. Furthermore, two sets of conditions have been identified: enabling conditions which facilitate and support the realisation of the attributes, and a set of disabling conditions that limit the actualisation of the attributes within the context of middle schooling. The findings of the study lead to a set of recommendations for secondary schooling, in particular, the middle school teacher and suggested implications of the study concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher in South Eastern Queensland schools. The thesis proposes that by adopting the model it is possible to identify and align the competing priorities and discourses that influence developmentally responsive middle schools and the effectiveness of the middle school teacher.
Acknowledgements

Choosing to embark on a PhD requires considerable preparation, discipline, re-learning, new learning, self motivation and confidence in oneself to stay the course. To stay the course requires support and encouragement from a diverse range of colleagues, friends and family. While the PhD study has been a journey of self-discovery, it has placed considerable demands on those people closest to you. Thank you to my wife and best friend, Susan, for her unconditional love and generous support in sustaining me on this PhD journey and to my sons Timothy, Thomas, Benedict, Luke and daughter Gemma, for their understanding and encouragement.

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Final acknowledgement goes to the principals, teachers and students from schools in South-East Queensland, who participated in the study. The study demonstrated that teachers and principals do not need to be convinced of the need for middle years of schooling reform, but they do require policy changes that support their vision for improved learning outcomes, engagement and well-being for the young middle years’ learner.
Refereed publications from the thesis

The research from this thesis is published in two refereed publications.

Rumble, P & Aspland, T 2009, ‘In search of the middle school teacher: What differentiates the middle school teacher from primary and secondary school teachers (A national curriculum conversation), Proceedings from the National Biennial Conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Canberra, ACT.


* In this thesis references, including in text citations and list of references, follow the Harvard style as adapted by the University of the Sunshine Coast.
List of Abbreviations

ACACA - Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities
ACT - Australian Capital Territory
ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACDE - Australian Council of Deans of Education
ACEA - Australian Council of Education Administrators (now ACEL)
ACER - Australian Council for Educational Research
ACEL - Australian Council of Education Leaders
ACSA - Australian Curriculum Studies Association
ADD - Attention Deficit Disorder
AEU - Australian Education Union
AGPS - Australian Government Publishing Service
BCE - Brisbane Catholic Education
CACE - Central Advisory Council for Education
CAF - Council for the Australian Federation
DECA - Department of Education and Children’s Affairs
DEECD - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEST - Department of Education, Science and Training
DES - Department of Education Services, Western Australia
DETE - Department of Education Training and Employment, South Australia
DEET - Department of Education Employment and Training, New South Wales and Tasmania
DETYA - Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DSET - Department of Science, Education and Training
ETRF - Education and training reforms for the future
GLA - General Learning Area
HMSO - Her Majesty’s Stationery Office
IARTV - Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria
ICT - Information and Communication Technologies
ISIG - Innovation Summit Implementation Group
KLA - Key Learning Area
LEAS - Local Education Authorities
MACER - Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal
MCEETYA - Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MPL - Middle Phase of Learning
MSAWA - Middle Schooling Association Western Australia
MS - Middle School
MY - Middle Years
MYRAD - Middle Years Research and Development Project
MYSA - Middle Years of Schooling Association (Queensland)
MYS - Middle Years of Schooling
MYT - Middle Years Teacher
NAPLAN - National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy Plan
NBEET - National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NBPTS - National Board of Professional Teaching Standards
NCEC - National Catholic Education Commission
NMSA - National Middle School Association (USA)
NMSF - National Middle School Forum
NSW - New South Wales
NT - Northern Territory
OECDD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP - Overall Position (University entrance rating 1-25 upon graduating from school in Qld)
PISA - Program for International Students Assessment
QBTR - Queensland Board of Teacher Registration
QCA - Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCT - Queensland College of Teachers
QCAR - Queensland, Curriculum, Assessment and reporting Framework
QLD - Queensland
QSRLS - Queensland School reform Longitudinal Study
QSCC - Queensland School Curriculum Council (now the Queensland Studies Authority)
QSA - Queensland Studies Authority
SA - South Australia
SATS - Standard Assessment Tests
SC - Schools Council
SEQ - South-East Queensland
TAS - Tasmania
theFAM - The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher
TIMSS - Third International Mathematics and Science Study
USC - University of the Sunshine Coast
VIC - Victoria
VQSP - Victorian Quality Schools Project
WA - Western Australia
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Setting the scene

At this point in history, the role of teachers is more pivotal than it has ever been. One of the most constructive things we can do, therefore, is to target constructively the quality of teachers... for teachers have the power to foster that creative and invigorating quality the world needs, namely, hope (Beare 2007: viii).

1.1 Introduction

This study is embedded in the context of ‘middle schooling’. In particular, it is designed to generate a substantive theory around the attributes of the middle school teacher and identify what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers: primary and secondary school teachers. Teachers in this phase of education focus their professional work on early adolescence in what is broadly defined in the Australian literature as, ‘the middle years of schooling’. During the 1990s, there were and into the present there are, persistent and unyielding calls from educational researchers (Barratt 1998; Connell 1998; Hill & Russell 1999; Luke et al. 2002; Smyth et al. 2003; Bryer & Main 2005; Carrington 2006) for schools to restructure, inclusive of organisational change of curriculum, changes in the deployment of teachers in the middle years, use of time and space and the use of technology. There was, and continues to be a call to re-culture, the mission and vision, values, beliefs, assumptions, and relationships in school organisational culture that claim to represent middle years. A further reform, to improve learning and teaching practices and student outcomes in middle years has been made (Caldwell 1993; Hargreaves 1994; Sizer 1994; Fullan 1994; Luke et al. 2002; Smyth et al. 2003; Fullan 2007). The reform of the middle years proves to be a rallying point for educators who were seeking changes in the role and function of the teacher across education sectors (Hart 1990; Conley & Levinson 1993; Schools Council 1993; Cumming & Owen 2001; Lovat 2003). Reform in the middle years sector demanded much greater accountability by the community in school governance and more ‘corporate managerial’ and facilitative approaches to decision-making in schools (Dunlap & Goldman 1991; Goldring 1993; Lawnton et al. 1994; Connell 1998; Chadbourne 2001).

The middle years reform in Australia and the United States has been largely a ‘grass roots’ phenomenon (Carnegie Council 1989; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000). From the early 1990s there has been pressure for schools to change, including the desire to have schools
become instruments for improving national economic competitiveness in a global market. New educational policies pressing for the achievement of much more ambitious intellectual outcomes (McLaughlin & Talbert 1993; Lingard 2001; Prosser 2006) are also evident. The middle years reform, with its focus on a learner-centred pedagogy, highlights the emergence of constructivist views of teaching and learning (Beane 1991, 1993; Leinhardt 1992; Edwards 1994; Hill & Russell 1999; Spady 2001; Chadbourne 2001; Lingard et al. 2002; Howard & Fogarty 2004; Carrington 2006; Hayes et al. 2006) and the reorganisation of school organisational structures to support such orientations. The reform is political as well as educational (Perkins 1992; Hill & Russell 1999; Chadbourne 2002; Carrington 2004; Prosser 2006).

This chapter introduces the study and includes an outline of the purpose, methodology, research question and the importance of the study. At the conclusion of the chapter the limitations of the study are outlined, with an overview of the content and organisation of the subsequent chapters.

Therefore, this chapter is framed as:

- presenting the research problem (1.2);
- presenting the aim of the study (1.3);
- outlining the research method adopted (1.4);
- outlining the importance of the study (1.5);
- outlining the limitations of the study (1.6);
- providing an overview of the content and organisation of the thesis (1.7); and
- providing a conclusion to the chapter (1.8).

### 1.2 Research problem

One of the major claims by advocates of middle schooling (Cormack & Cumming 1996; Barratt 1998; Withers & Russell 1998; Smyth et al. 2000; Chadbourne 2001; Pendergast 2007c) from around Australia is that all students aged 10-14 are ‘at risk’ of alienation, of disengagement, of underachievement, of leaving school early, of substance abuse, of delinquency, of depression and of criminal activity (Cormack & Cumming 1996; Withers & Russell 1998; Hill & Russell
These concerns reflect a similar global trend. For example, the PISA (OECD 2007) report claims that a significant proportion of 15-year-old students are seriously at risk of not “achieving levels sufficient for them to participate fully in the twenty-first century work force and to contribute to Australia as productive citizens” (OECD 2007:15). In contrast, according to PISA and TIMSS† reports of the late 1990s, most Australian middle school students are performing well on international comparisons (McLean 2001; Luke et al. 2002; OECD 2007). This is further echoed in tertiary admissions data from the various state-commissioned ‘pathways’ studies of the late 1990s indicating that students who are graduating from middle school achieve higher tertiary entrance scores (Smith et al. 1999).

It is becoming apparent that the middle years’ reform is a pathway to whole school improvement and renewal around curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, quality teaching and organisational structures (Hill & Russell 1999; Education Queensland 2002; Rafiq & Woolnough 2005). The middle years of schooling reform is charting a new course that is responsive to “new times” (Hall 1996:224), where significant change in the social and economic strata of the community is taking place. In particular, there is responsiveness to adolescent needs specific to the twenty-first century (Prensky 2005). How to define these thresholds of ‘child’, ‘adolescent’ and ‘youth’ is very much tied to the changes in social, economic, information and communications technologies and the impact this has on the way people live their lives (Luke et al. 2002). There is a growing recognition that the middle years make up a distinct developmental group: early adolescence, that needs to be considered and responded to by government and the different education authorities. Young people have to make many adjustments as they move from childhood toward adulthood and confront physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes. It is well accepted that adolescents speculate a great deal about their identity (Stevenson 2003). Some of them are afraid of the changes taking place, and self-confidence is especially vulnerable (Carnegie Council 1989; Barratt 1998). Thus, middle school reform is central to scaffolding the process of growth and development at this critical time for the young adolescent.

† PISA – The OECD Program for International Student Assessment is an internationally standardised assessment in reading, Mathematics and Science administered to 15-year-olds in schools.

TIMSS – The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study provides data on mathematics and science achievement of U.S. students compared to that of students in other countries including Australia.
A range of literature (Education Queensland 2000; Edgar 2001; Kennedy 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Wyn 2004b) points to the increasing diversity of the Australian population in terms of culture and socio-economic status, with an increasing number of students being ascertained as having learning difficulties within the middle years. There is evidence of an increasing cohort of ‘at risk’ students in Australian schools in this context of new times (Smyth & Hattam 2004; Yates & McLeod 2007).

The literature articulates that the present organisation of schools is no longer meeting the educational needs of young adolescents (Carrington 2006; Nayler 2009). As more and more young people live outside traditional narratives of childhood, family, and school, there is a likelihood of increased risk of educational underachievement, disengagement, and alienation (Cormack 1996; Withers & Russell 1998; Kennedy 2001; Luke et al. 2002). Where many young people in the middle years are not already ‘at risk’ in light of this new environment, it is likely that if school systems continue to be unresponsive, irrelevant and inflexible, these young people will be placed at risk (Luke et al. 2002). Students want to learn at this age as much as at any other, but research (Cormack & Cumming 1995; Barratt 1998; Carnegie Council 1989; Jackson & Davis 2000) suggests that these young people are switching off, slowing down, and sometimes going backwards. Barratt (1998) asserts that at this age, students are making the least progress in learning.

A consistent message from the literature is that the middle years of schooling, to be effective, require a shared philosophy, values, and beliefs from all stakeholders: school systems, the school leadership, teachers and parents (Barratt 1998; Hill & Russell 1999; Kennedy 2001; Pendergast 2005; Crouch 2006; Bahr & Pendergast 2007). Accordingly, middle schooling should be founded on a commitment to advancing the learning capacities of “all” adolescents (Carrington 2002). Opportunities should be provided for all young adolescents to successfully learn and grow in ways that acknowledge and respect this unique and special phase of their development (Barratt 1998). The focus of reform in the middle years of schooling has clearly identified that the early adolescent years are crucial in determining the future success or failure of millions of young Australians (Cumming 1994; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; NMSA 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Kennedy 2001; Pendergast 2005). Consequently, all sectors of society must work towards building a consensus to make the transformation of middle school a reality (Carnegie Council 1989).
Working to create effective and meaningful middle years is about choosing a future in which an increasingly diverse student group learns and achieves at a high level; this has become a motivational force for reform by teachers who are looking for a fresh approach to learning – to meet in the middle rather than be “caught in the middle” (Fenwick 1987:3) or be “stuck in the middle” (Luke et al. 2002:134). It is the teaching and learning that is the driving force behind this innovation called middle years of schooling, giving students a ‘fresh start’ and ‘fresh hope’ that will meet better their learning needs as young adolescents (Schools Council 1992, 1993; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Keamy et al. 2003; NMSA 2003a).

The quest of the middle school teacher is a response to the changing environment of schooling, to the challenges confronting schools, with the spotlight clearly on the teachers and the systems that manage them. Middle school reform is concerned with whole school improvement by developing supportive teacher relationships and partnerships with students, parents and community (Hill & Crevola 1997, 1999; Barratt 1998; Hill & Russell 1999; Rafiq & Woolnough 2005).

It is in this context of new times that the middle years’ reform has emerged. Middle schooling is not a momentary fad (Chadbourne 2001; Luke et al. 2002). The current traditional two-tier arrangement of primary and secondary school delivery of the teaching and learning process, however well-suited to previous generations, will not survive in this new environment (Kennedy 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Chadbourne 2002). The 2-tier system of schooling as it is presently organised and the proposed middle school reform changes is symbolised in Figure 1.1

![Figure 1.1](image-url)
This study is concerned with the middle school teacher. The focus of the study is on identifying the attributes of the middle school teacher, for there is a silence in the literature concerning this phenomenon. Given the pivotal position the teacher has in implementing the middle years of schooling philosophy and practice, it can be argued that a clear articulation of the attributes of the middle school teacher is the key to ensuring that the learning needs of the young adolescent are better met (Cormack & Cumming 1996; Braggett 1997; Lipsitz et al. 1997; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Cumming & Owen 2001; Dickinson 2001; Cutterance & Stokes 2001; Kennedy 2001; Luke 2004; Carrington 2006; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Nayler 2009). To date, such an articulation is not evident.

1.3 Aim of the study

The study is an inductive enquiry that aims to develop theory about the perspectives of key stakeholders concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher. This research will inform the void that exists in middle years of schooling research. There is a scarcity of useful empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of middle years of schooling practices on improving learning outcomes (Hill & Russell 1999; Erb 2000; Bryer and Main 2005; Pendergast 2005; Prosser 2006). According to Luke et al. (2002), the middle years of schooling reform to date has been “first generation”; middle schooling reform has tended to be more about “advocacy and development with some serious definitional limitations” (2002:7). Theorists argue that schools must have clearly defined standards that are consistent and accountable (Barratt 1998; Hill and Russell 1999; Luke et al. 2002, Carrington 2002; Nayler 2009). They contend that this has not been the case, making it difficult to find valid data for appraisal. Hence, Luke et al. (2002) argue for a “second generation of middle years theorising, research, development, and practice” (2002:8). Bryer and Main (2005) assert further research is required to inform the “practice gap” between “ideal and actual” (2005:89). This research study is contributing to these calls by Luke et al. (2002) and, Main and Bryer (2005) with its focus on generating empirical research relating to the attributes of the middle school teacher.

This research study therefore aims to explore the perspectives of middle school teachers, heads of middle schools, principals and students, regarding what they deem are the attributes of the middle school teacher. A central consideration of the study is that by exploring the day-to-day experience of the middle school teacher, and those who can reflect on its constructs,
comprehensive empirical data will be generated from their reality, as a sound data base from which to generate theory. Explication and exploration of perspectives must include understandings and involvement from the people themselves (Janesick 1994; Reason 1998). The study aims to identify convergent and dissimilar ideas that will lead to greater clarity about the middle school teacher, identifying her particular attributes and what constitutes the middle school teacher from the perspectives of key stakeholders. The method of study was chosen because of the theoretical potential of the research to be instructive in achieving the research aim: to generate a substantive theory regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher (Dey 1999).

1.4 Methodology

The study, as it is more fully explained in Chapter 4, is an interpretative enquiry embedded in a qualitative orientation to research. It uses Grounded Theory to develop theories regarding the emerging attributes of the middle school teacher, pointing to what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers: primary school teachers and secondary school teachers. The approach enables the study to focus on the phenomenon of the middle years teacher in its micro setting of South-East Queensland. The study uses procedures for data generation and analysis to develop an inductively derived Grounded Theory from the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

By engaging Grounded Theory as the research method, the study intends to develop substantive theory rather than generate formal or comprehensive theory (Dey 1999). It is hoped it will be comprehensible to participants in the study and those who teach in the middle years in other educational jurisdictions. Though the Grounded Theory generated applies to the context studied, it may be transferable to other schooling contexts relevant to the studied phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

In depth interviewing was the main method of data gathering, and the number of participants was determined by the process that generated comprehensible and substantial data concerning the subject matter, as well as by time limits of the study. Grounded Theory aims for the generation of substantive concepts and ideas rather than multiple replications of
similar data. As such the method was considered most appropriate for the enquiry into this micro phenomenon of the middle school teacher (Sayer 1992).

1.5 Importance of the study

There is increasing acceptance of the philosophy of the middle years of schooling across Australia and across different education sectors (Pendergast 2005; Bryer & Main 2005; Luke et al. 2002). Many schools are revising and implementing a middle years of schooling curriculum, with some universities offering specialised courses in pre-service teacher education. There are abundant and regular professional development opportunities for teachers offered by the newly formed middle years’ teacher associations (Hill & Russell 1999; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). While there is growing research into the effectiveness of this reform (Nayler 2009), there remains a scarcity of empirical research evaluating the efficacy of the teacher in this reform (Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). According to Bryer and Main (2005), there continues to be a “wide gap between theory and practice” (2005:89). Bryer and Main (2005) assert that the reality of the day-to-day experience of the middle years’ teacher is often out of step with the middle years of schooling philosophy and vision. The middle years reform has proceeded largely without any research-based evidence of the link between theory and middle schooling practice; this “absence has left the gaps unbridged” (Bryer & Main 2005:89). This study seeks to bridge some of these gaps.

In search of the middle school teacher is a study that seeks to contribute to the growing source of knowledge concerning the nature of the middle years of schooling by focusing on the teacher. Its goal is to identify those teacher attributes and competencies that will be most responsive to the needs of young people who are located in the middle years. It is hoped that the outcomes of the study will provide an insight to teacher education policy-makers, school and system administrators and teachers, and provide guidance in curriculum development and pedagogical reforms, recruitment, pre-service teacher education programs and professional development.
1.6 Limitations of the study

The study is limited to a selection of schools from within Education Queensland, Catholic systemic and Independent schools in South-East Queensland (SEQ), whose teachers and principals have introduced the middle schooling philosophy and principles within the past decade. While this in-depth study will provide rich data, the selective sample may decrease the generality of its findings.

Essential to achieving the aims of this enquiry is the need to gain access to participants with appropriate knowledge and understanding of the research problem and with motivation for the study from their professional experiences (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The professional connection to the middle school teacher and other educational experiences have enabled the inquirer to access perspectives of policy-makers and leaders who have identified and articulated their ideas and perspectives regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher.

1.7 Overview and organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised into 11 chapters. Chapter one, the introductory chapter, presents an overview of the thesis. The chapter introduces the study by providing an overview of the research project. This is followed by a statement of the research problem, as well as the importance of the study and the underpinnings of the research methods and the research strategies. Chapter one also presents some of the limitations of the study. The chapter ends with the format of the thesis.

Chapter two presents the context of this research. The chapter opens by providing a summation of the terms used in the middle years of schooling reform. This is followed by presenting the international and Australian context of the middle years of schooling reform and how this reform has given rise to a new kind of teacher with its own specific attributes. In addition, the chapter briefly discusses globalisation, national curriculum and teacher standards which represent shifting contexts of education impacting on the reconstitution of schooling for young adolescents in Australia. The chapter concludes by outlining the South-East Queensland context in which the study is situated.
Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature, reporting of the empirical research. This chapter encompasses the international literature as well as the Australian literature on the middle years of schooling. The concept of the middle years of schooling as defined in the literature is discussed in depth as is the efficacy and role of the teacher and its attributes. The impetus for establishing middle schools and the driving forces behind the reform are also discussed. The Chapter provides an overview of the literature on the essential elements of the middle school reform with particular attention to the emerging middle school teacher, the nature of adolescence and the philosophy and practice of the middle years of schooling. Based on this analysis, voids in the literature will be identified. Moreover, a case for the importance of the study will emerge.

Chapter four describes the research methodology used in the study, in particular the way in which the principles of qualitative research and Grounded Theory were used. Chapter five provides an in-depth description of the research methods, including the participants studied and how they were engaged, the data collection process, the issues of validity and reliability, the structure and method of the analysis with interpretative comments describing the stages that emerged through the study.

Chapter six through to Chapter nine presents the findings of the research from the data analysis of this study. Each core proposition is delivered in a chapter of its own, presented as theoretical elements, reflecting a plurality of both standing alone as well as being emerging propositions and sub-propositions.

Chapter 10 interprets the findings as the theory that has been generated in this research study by presenting the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM). A theoretical holistic model is presented according to the perspectives of the participants in the study.

Chapter 11 discusses the summation, relevance and implications for policy, practice and further research. The chapter also discusses the practical and theoretical importance and other issues requiring further research.

Chapter 12 concludes the thesis identifying the list of references, followed by the appendices referred to in the thesis.
1.8 Conclusion

The focus of this study is to generate the perspectives of important education stakeholders concerning the identity of the middle school teacher, the attributes of the middle school teacher and the impact the middle years teachers’ have on the learning outcomes of young adolescents. The study is important in that it provides qualitative data and theorising about the middle school teacher and what differentiates the middle school teacher from primary and secondary teachers. The middle school teacher evokes responses of either affirmation or concern. Affirmations come from the situations where the middle school teacher is supported as they engage with learning within an innovative and creative integrative approach to curriculum design and pedagogy. The concerns cover issues of: leadership; the cultural transitions from a learner-centred approach of the primary school to a subject-centred approach of the secondary school; pedagogy, in particular, integrative approaches to curriculum design and teacher teaming, and to the expectations of professional development.

In summary, the middle years of schooling represents an emerging new space in the research, policy making and reform, aimed at improving the educational achievement, engagement, motivation and well-being of students in the middle years. The next chapter presents the research context which informs this study.
Chapter 2

The Context of the Research Study

There is now within the social and political order a specific problem of childhood. A problem inseparable from those of sexuality, drugs, violence, hatred and all the insoluble problems posed by social exclusion. Like so many other areas, childhood and adolescence are today becoming spaces doomed by the abandonment to marginality and delinquency…Today, the quickening of the pace of life condemns childhood to accelerated adolescence (Baudrillard 2002:102,104).

2.1 Introduction

Reform of the middle years of schooling is taking place at a time in human history that is characterised by unprecedented, rapid and transformational cultural change. Such change is turbulent and is being driven through the development of information and communication technologies in what the literature is calling “new times” (Hall 1996:224).

This change is also perplexing and discontinuous because no one knows what lies ahead (Limerick et al. 1998, Freeman & Watson 2008). The media, new communication technologies and popular youth culture, with its many guises and messages, portray a world that is in crisis, be it environmental, driven by the threat of global terrorist attack, or by the erosion of self-identity (Somerville 2000; Giroux 2003; Crawford & Rossiter 2006). These authors describe a world that is angrier, more insecure, uglier and meaner than before and in which nothing is predictable, where still less can be taken for granted (Giroux 2003). Shifts in world views and awareness of new world orders provide the world community with various contexts for contemporary living and various lenses from which to construct world views and discourses of meaning (Epstein 1998; Cormack 1998; Giroux 2000; McLaren 2003; Crawford & Rossiter 2006; Knipe 2007). The changing realities of the child’s life-world (Habermas 1998) in new times, is characterised by the young person’s capacity to access new technologies in sophisticated ways. Childhood has changed (Giroux 2000) illustrated through globalisation, new technologies, increased urbanisation, and changing family structures, all of which are changing the way young people interact and engage with the world of the twenty-first century.
Some people argue that this new reality of childhood is forging a vision of a world that is based on fear and is negative and frightening (Giroux 2003; Furedi 2006). Today's generation of young people is among the “most photographed, regulated and watched” (Latham et al. 2006:3). The child’s life-world is changing and educational institutions, like schools, are required to provide the structures and processes that will ensure teaching and learning environments have relevance in new times. In addition, through quality teaching and learning, the teacher will not only be required to meet present needs of the young persons’ life-world but be able to forecast their future life-world and support them as their needs continue to change (Lovat 2003). According to the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), schools need to be organisations that help students navigate change and diversity and move away from “old models of learning” to “new learning models”. The new learning models are characterised by an emphasis on cross curriculum knowledge, problem solving, teacher teaming with flexible and innovative environments, and learning that is lifelong (ACDE 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast et al. 2005). Teaching in new times will place different demands on teachers, and for many teachers in the middle years, the new learning models represent new ways of working with young people. The type of attributes required of the middle school teacher to work successfully with young people in new times is the focus of this study.

The key characteristics shaping young adolescents in new times include:

- the digital revolution: Internet, chat lines, email, Blogs, SMS texting, twitter;
- school violence and bullying;
- war on terror (Afghanistan and Iraq);
- September 11 and the Bali bombings;
- climate change (Adapted from Giroux 2003; Snipe & Zevenbergen 2005; Furedi 2006; Latham et al. 2006; Pendergast 2007a).

The challenges of living in this new learning society are profound (Hargreaves 2003). Contemporary youth are influenced by a range of factors, the most important of which is the media and communication technologies (Giroux 2000; Pendergast 2007a). The challenge for educators is how to utilise new technologies in such a way so as to improve the learning outcomes and agency for young people in new times.
Educationalists and policy makers are showing great interest in the needs of young people and how curriculum development and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning can lead to improved student achievement, engagement and well-being. This is the context in which this study is set.

This chapter is designed to outline the context of the study. As such, it is framed as:

- presenting a summary of the terms used in the middle years reform (2.2);
- outlining the concept of middle years reform (2.3);
- presenting the international context in which the reform is set (2.4);
- presenting the Australian context in which the reform is set (2.5);
- discussing the changing context of the middle school teacher in Australia (2.6);
- presenting the South-East Queensland context in which the study is set (2.7);
- examining the shifting contexts of education (2.8); and
- providing a conclusion to the chapter (2.9).

### 2.2 Clarification of terms

As a concept, middle schooling, while not new in Australia, is only a recent development in the education landscape. It is gaining high priority as adolescence is increasingly recognised as a category of its own - early adolescence (Pendergast 2007a). As such it is a ‘non-descript’ term – it means a lot of things to a lot of people. While there is no single definition of middle schooling, no one template or formula, the terms used in the field: middle years, middle school, middle years of schooling, middle schooling, amplify this lack of coherence and agreed definition (Pendergast 2005). However, this variety of terms, argues Pendergast (2005), is its strength and needs to be more fully articulated, as the early chapters of this thesis will do. According to Chadbourne (2001), there is broad agreement on the use of the terms “middle years”, “middle school” to refer to the cohort of young adolescents, and “middle schooling” to refer more to middle school philosophy and principles. These terms are fully developed in Chapter 3 but some clarity is required at this juncture to gain an understanding of the context in which the terms are used.
2.2.1 Middle Years (MY)

The Schools Council (1993), Jackson and Davis (2000) and Barratt (1998) identify the middle years as applying to early adolescence with the age range of 10-15 years. The Schools Council (1992) identified the middle years of schooling as a distinct entity “(e.g. Year 6-8, 7-8; 7-9, or 6-9) that has been implemented in some schools around Australia” (1992:9). However, there exists a significant variation across education jurisdictions in this country covering Years 4 to 9 as represented in the shaded area in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Concept of middle years of schooling in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY SCHOOL</th>
<th>SECONDARY SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P 1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td>7 8 9 10 11 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.2 Middle School (MS)

Chadbourne (2001) identifies the middle school as an “organisational unit separate from primary and secondary school that provides education for students in the middle years” (2001:2). However, “this education may or may not be based on the principles of middle schooling and may be no different from traditional practice” (2001:2). He further argues that a purpose built middle school does not necessarily guarantee learning and teaching pedagogy that reflects middle schooling philosophy and practice.

2.2.3 Middle Years of Schooling (MYS)

The term ‘middle schooling’ refers to a particular philosophy and practice that is responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents (Carnegie Council 1989; NMSA 1995; Barratt 1998; Chadbourne 2001; Manning & Butcher 2005). It is a contested ‘tier’ of education that is situated between upper primary and lower secondary school and spans between 3 to 6 years depending on the state jurisdiction and the particular sector. The underlying philosophy of middle schooling demands a seamless transition from primary schooling to secondary schooling and adopts practices such as teacher teaming, block scheduling, integrated curriculum, democratic classrooms, authentic pedagogy and assessment (Carrington 2002, 2004, 2006; Pendergast 2005). Furthermore, it is increasingly being recognised that young people in middle school have unique developmental needs: physical, cognitive, social and emotional. Failure to meet these needs by middle schools may exacerbate the rising problems of alienation, substance abuse, violence, crime, suicide and early school leaving (Carnegie...

2.2.4 Middle Phase of Learning (MPL)
This term refers to a broad range of schooling specific to the Queensland context of schools. It forms part of the three-tier approach to school reform: Early Phase, Middle Phase and Senior Phase (Education Queensland 2002, 2003). The middle phase is divided into two stages Year 4-5 and Years 6-9. In Queensland, years 6-9 are referred to as the middle years of schooling (Education Queensland 2003).

There is an array of terms used in the literature and adopted by education authorities to describe the middle years of schooling and with it, an array of different meanings. Needless to say, there is limited consensus amongst the authors of research literature and less again among the eight Australian state and territory education authorities. The terms which are frequently used in the literature - middle years, middle school, middle schooling, middle phase, middle years of schooling, middle secondary school (Braggett 1997; Chadbourne 2001; Pendergast & Bahr 2005) reflect variance in the key concepts of middle schooling. Chadbourne (2001). According to Chadbourne (2001), there is broad agreement on the use of the terms “middle years”, “middle school” to refer to the cohort of young adolescents, and “middle schooling” to refer more to middle school philosophy and principles.

2.3 Middle Years Reform
Since the early 1990s, concerns regarding adolescent disengagement and alienation from classroom and school learning have generated systemic reform in the middle years of schooling. This phase of learning encompasses young people from age 10-15 (Barratt 1998). These students are experiencing the onset of puberty and have particular physical, emotional, social and cultural needs that require attention. The middle years’ reform in schools advocates opportunities for young people to learn and grow in ways that acknowledge and respect this

‡ Throughout this study the preferred term, middle years of schooling, is used, and refers to developmentally responsive middle schools for young adolescents.
distinctive phase of learning, in relation to the contexts of education, schooling, learning and teaching.

The middle years of schooling reform is based on the premise that a need exists to revitalise the curriculum (Barratt 1998). This education reform is a response to the changing nature of adolescence and the unprecedented rapidly changing society, where new technologies and global communication are having a profound effect on youth identities (Latham et al. 2006). In addition, there is recognition that the middle years’ learner is increasingly being “alienated” from learning, and this is evidenced by students not achieving, disengaged and leaving school early (Cumming & Cormack 1996; Barratt 1998; Smyth et al. 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Nayler 2009).

Educators leading middle years’ reform argue that improved educational outcomes for students in the middle years have much to do with their social, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being (Carrington 2006; Crawford & Rossiter 2006; Nayler 2009). Educationalists (Barratt 1998, Carr-Gregg 2002; Carnegie Council 1995; Jackson & Davis 2000; Schwarz & Kay 2006) point to cultural and societal influences such as the mass media, the availability of drugs and alcohol, the impact of technology and lifestyle changes as factors that are causing an earlier onset of adolescence and thus, posing many challenges for primary school teachers in educating young adolescents (Eyers et al. 1992; Bahr 2005; Carrington 2006; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007). Carrington (2006) argues that the prevailing adolescent discourse surrounding the Australian middle years’ reform is the idea of adolescence as “a risk” to society or “at risk” from it. This discourse draws on the long held view of adolescence as a biological and age-stage construct portraying adolescence as being “trouble” and therefore, needing to be “controlled”. For the purpose of this study middle years’ reform is seen as an avenue to forge a new discourse on adolescence (Patel-Stevens 2007) and to view the young persons’ life-world as diverse, constantly changing and individualised. This has implications for school leaders, teachers, curriculum and pedagogy.

The middle schooling reform is seen as progressive, a “turning point” (Carnegie Council 1989, Jackson & Davis 2000), which aims to contribute to the betterment of society and questioning some aspects of the status quo (Jackson & Davis 2000; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). At the heart of the middle years’ reform, argues Jackson and Davis (2000), is its commitment to
social justice, providing a vision of hope that every young adolescent can learn and succeed. Such a vision, with its focus on the needs of the young adolescent, will inevitably challenge the established social and economic inequities that exist between different groups of people. Breaking down these social and economic hierarchies fosters the dream that every young adolescent can enjoy success and, at the same time, become the very best person they can be (Dickinson 2001; Stevenson 2003; Smyth 2006;).

Advocates of this reform (Beane 1993; Jackson & Davis 2000; Dickinson 2001; Smyth et al. 2003; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Knipe 2007; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007) are committed to the idea of middle years of schooling as learning and teaching for young adolescents who are informed by the following values and principles that are symbolised in Figure 2.1. Clearly, central to the middle years' reform are three key processes: the restructuring of educational organisations; the re-culturing of the teaching profession; and the reshaping of pedagogical practices, curriculum development and assessment.

Adapted from Jackson & Davis (2000), Fullan (2003); Smyth et al. (2003), Smyth (2006)

Figure 2.1 Features of the middle years of schooling reform
The schools that are implementing the middle years of schooling philosophy for young adolescents place great importance on advancing and enhancing the teacher-student relationship; they seek to develop collaborative approaches to learning and teaching; they negotiate appropriate aspects of the curriculum with students; and they integrate the personal and social concerns of students into the curriculum. Above all, the middle years of schooling requires a specific kind of teacher, one that nurtures a teacher-student relationship which values the development of a democratic and inclusive culture (Apple & Beane 1999; Beane 1999; Jackson & Davis 2000; Smyth et al. 2003; Pendergast & Bahr 2005).

2.4 The international context

The concepts of middle schooling and middle schools are complex ones. However, the concept is discussed widely in education circles and has become an important focus of research, policy making and reform. The idea of middle schooling or schooling for young adolescents was evident over a century ago in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) (Manning & Butcher 2005). Therefore, the overall concept is not new. Furthermore, the concept of middle schooling or schooling for young adolescents and its raison d'être is similar across the UK, the USA and Australia.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, by the late nineteenth century, middle schools were not unlike primary schools, with a focus on the education of the adolescent. These schools were established to improve discipline, teaching and religious instruction (Barber 1999). The support for middle schools came with the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education (CACE) 1967), which proposed a change, to the three-tier system of schooling to include middle school, accommodating students between the ages of 8-12 years (Gillard 2004). However, while there was not universal acceptance of middle schools as ‘best policy’ as proposed in the Plowden Report (1967), the national education system was expanding rapidly due to the post-war baby boom and the raising of the school leaving age to 15 in 1972/73 (Hargreaves 1986). Nonetheless, a number of Local Education Authorities (LEAS) in the UK introduced middle schools during the 1960s and 1970s, accommodating a diverse range of ages: 8-12 years of age, 9-13 years of age, 10-14 years of age and 11-13 years of age (Herbert 1965). The middle schools provided a low cost alternative to the more expensive primary and secondary schools.
and were largely ‘add ons’ to the primary school (Gillard 2004). Middle schools became known as either “middle-deemed-primary” following a standard primary curriculum or “middle-deemed-secondary” following a specialist subject curriculum (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office (HMSO) 2002). According to the UK National Middle Schools Forum (NMSF), middle schools reached their peak in the early 1980s, with the number of Middle Schools falling from approximately 2000 to under 279 in 2009 (Wyatt 2009).

By the late 1980s middle schools in the UK began to contract in number with the introduction of the Standard Assessment Tests (SATS) and the implementation of a National Curriculum. The National Curriculum, developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) restructured schooling by returning to the traditional two-tier system of primary school and secondary school. The new system still in practice is characterised by the curriculum being split into 4 key stages: stages 1 and 2 (primary school) and stages 3 and 4 (secondary school) (QCA 2004). The new structure suggests that middle schooling in the UK was not able to establish and sustain a separate status and identity (Manning & Butcher 2005). As a consequence, middle schools are being phased out because middle schooling philosophy does not align with current organisational priorities or the structure of the national curriculum (Kubicek 2006).

**United States of America**

Middle schooling in the USA is more “rhetoric than reality” (Beane 2001) because of the competing interests surrounding education reform. Middle schools in the USA are embedded in the complex American junior high school concept going as far back as 1910 (Beane 2001). According to its founder, Thomas Briggs (1920), the concept of junior high schools were introduced to meet the needs of young adolescents and Junior High Schools were constructed as an instrument “of democracy whereby nurture may cooperate with nature to secure the best results possible for each individual adolescent as well as for the society at large” (1920:327).

During the 1940s and 1950s the junior high school movement enjoyed a “renaissance” (Lounsbury 1996). Gruhn and Douglas (1956) highlighted the strengths of junior high schools by identifying its major functions:
integration of skills, interests and attitudes that result in ‘wholesome pupil behaviour’;
exploration of interests and abilities;
differentiation of educational opportunities based on student background, interests and aptitudes;
socialisation experiences that promote adjustment, guidance in decision making; and
articulation that assists youth in making the transition from an educational program designed for pre-adolescents to a program designed for adolescents (Adapted from Gruhn & Douglas 1956:12).

According to Lounsbury (1996), these major functions remain the foundation stones for defining effective middle school practices today in the USA.

Over the ensuing decades, the junior high school experienced steady growth and became the dominant feature of school organisation for young adolescents in the USA (Cuban 1992). However, by the early 1980s the junior high school was ‘caught in the middle’, between elementary school and secondary school (Beane, 2001, Manning & Butcher 2005). Furthermore, many of the distinctive functions of the junior high school were being eroded (Cuban 1992; Manning & Butcher 2005). Beane (2001), described junior high schools as “on its last legs” and a “wasteland” (2001: xii, xv). Infiltrated by the “high school” with its specialist subject approach, self contained classrooms, forty minute lessons, streaming of classes based on ability groups, and the introduction of graduation and junior proms, junior high schools became more like a “high” school with many of the dreams for reform shattered (Cuban 1992, Anfara 2001; Beane 2001; Manning & Butcher 2005). According to Allen (1992), the junior high school failed to forge an identity and a rationale of its own and was systematically absorbed into the secondary high school.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s middle schools were growing and displacing the junior high school with a strong focus on the distinctive needs of early adolescents (Cuban 1992). However, in 1967 school boards and superintendents “removed the ninth grade from junior high schools and moved the sixth grade from elementary schools to a new situation called the middle school” (Cuban 1992:243). A distinct middle school movement in the United States had been born (Anfara 2001).
The middle school movement attracted much interest from advocates, particularly, William Alexander (1984), seeking reform in the education of young adolescents. The National Middle Schools Association (NMSA) was formed and advocated a more rigorous curriculum in middle schools and called for specialist teachers to work with this age group (NMSA 1982). Pedagogical reform was also being advocated by Beane (1993, 1995, 1996,) and a case for integrated curriculum, while Neumann (1996) advocated for an authentic pedagogy. The shift to middle school and the call for reform of curriculum integration and pedagogical practices raised the stakes between innovative and traditional approaches.

As debate continued, the Carnegie Council (1989) published their research project titled *Turning Points*. This research identified for the first time non-alignment between young adolescent learning needs and school structures and curriculum. It also identified, based on extensive research data, high levels of student disengagement, alienation, truancy and poor quality teaching. Central to the Turning Points agenda of promoting developmentally responsive middle schools was the development of a vision for middle schooling which enabled all students to succeed. The Carnegie Council (1989) identified eight elements, taken holistically that would “vastly improve the educational experiences of all middle grade students” (1989:9). Their vision identified five qualities of the middle years learner that was envisioned in a 15 year-old student who had been well served by middle school. These included:

- an intellectually reflective person;
- a person *en route* to a lifetime of meaningful work;
- a good citizen;
- a caring and ethical individual; and
- a healthy person (Adapted from Carnegie Council 1989:15).

In 2000 the Carnegie Council published an expanded and updated *Turning Points* (Jackson & Davis 2000). This publication built on the earlier document by advancing important, new research knowledge regarding young adolescents, their developmental requirements and educational needs. It contained seven recommendations for effective middle schooling:
teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best;

- use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners;

- staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities;

- organise relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared education purpose;

- govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best;

- provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens;

- involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development (Adapted from Jackson & Davis 2000: 23-24).

As the new millennium unfolded, middle schooling in the USA was positioned at the “crossroads” (Anfara 2001). According to Beane (2001) and Dickinson and Butler (2001), middle schooling in America arrived at a stage of “arrested development” (Dickinson 2001:4) where the middle schooling philosophy had not been fully implemented and had grown static and unresponsive. Dickinson (2001) suggested that this has been a constant feature of middle schooling reform in America since it began. Middle schooling reform in the United States has always struggled to expand beyond localised settings and has been subject to economic, political and demographic pressures (Cuban 1992). To confront this arrested development, Dickinson (2001) called for a middle schooling reform movement to pursue a path of “reinvention” (2001:15). This required teachers and schools to reinvent themselves in the interests of young adolescents. Dickinson and Butler (2001) argued that the middle school movement was founded on meeting the distinctive needs of young adolescents. It has been argued that “the original concept that embodied it, is still valid… and we need to reinvent middle schools in that image once again” (2001:12).
Amidst the tensions and criticisms, middle schooling reform, with its strong philosophical foundation, has made middle schooling one of the longest running, most extensive education reform movements in the United States (Lounsbury 2000). The United States middle schooling movement, as a movement for educational reform, has strongly influenced Australian attempts to reshape the schooling of its young adolescents.

2.5 The Australian context

Like the American and United Kingdom experience, Australia is also committed to educational reform in order to address student disengagement, alienation, and early school leaving (Hill & Russell 1999; Smyth et al 2000). However, unlike the United Kingdom and the United States with its long tradition of middle schools behind them, middle schooling reform in Australia is only a relatively recent idea.

Within the Australian context, interest in middle schooling has been evident through reports and documents since the early 1990s. The focus on the education of young adolescents was initiated with the report from the Schools Council (1992, 1993). The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (QBTR) (1996) Report focusing on the preparation of teachers for the education of young adolescents builds on its earlier documentation on the Education of Young Adolescents (1984). This focus on the young adolescent was also made explicit by the South Australian Report Junior Secondary Review (Eyers et al. 1992). During the 1990s the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) commissioned a number of longitudinal studies with the aim of highlighting middle schooling reform as a site for socially just education (Brennan & Sachs 1998; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). One of the important studies to emerge focused on disengagement and alienation of young people (Cormack & Cumming 1996). The study argued for the need for greater ethos of care and a desire to engage the middle years’ learner as an active participant in their learning. These calls for learning reform embraced holistic approaches to curriculum through flexible school structures and teacher teaming (Cumming 1993, 1994). In addition, like the American model, they advocated an integrated curriculum (Brennan & Sachs 1998), authentic/productive pedagogies (Lingard et al. 2001) and authentic assessment (Cormack et al. 1998).
At the national level, a Commonwealth Government funded initiative focusing on the middle years of schooling was launched (Barratt 1998). A series of forums were conducted in all states and territories to gauge an understanding of the needs of young adolescents and to establish strategies to improve educational outcomes for young people and future directions of middle schooling. This initiative resulted in the *Shaping of Middle Schooling in Australia* (Barratt 1998) which for the first time worked towards a common approach to middle schooling in Australia. In 1997 the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) produced a collaboratively developed national statement on middle schooling. The vision and direction of this statement embodied a framework for addressing the challenges encountered in the middle years. From this point onward, in Australian education sectors, the concept of middle years of schooling gained momentum in Australia.

2.6 The changing context of the middle school teacher in Australia

Since the early 1990s, education system authorities have developed policies targeting the needs of the middle school learner and the importance of the teacher in education reform. This included the following State and Territory reports: in Queensland, the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) (2002), *See the Future: Middle Phase of Learning State School Action Plan* (2003), *A Flying Start for Queensland Children 2009*; *The Victorian Quality Schools Project: A study of school and teacher effectiveness* (Hill et al. 1996); *Teaching and Learning in the Middle Years in the ACT* (DET 2005); *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework* (DET 2008); *Curriculum & Learning: Middle Years* (DECA 2007); *Middle Years Learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful: An Education Strategy for Years 5 - 9 in NSW 2006-2009* (DET 2006); in the Northern Territory (NT) *Policy Middle Years of Schooling* (DEET 2006); *Planning for middle schooling in Western Australia* (DES1999). The publication of discussion papers and articles (The Australian Education Inquirer 2007), National, State and Territory reviews (MACER 2003; MCEETYA 2003, 2007, 2008; Queensland College of Teachers QCT 2007) highlighted the need for education reform of the middle years. The implementation of research development projects (Schools Council 1993; Barratt 1998; Lingard et al. 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast et al. 2005; Hayes et al. 2006; Eckersley et al. 2007); overseas studies (Jackson & Davis 2000; NMSA 2003; Hough 2009) further highlights calls for reform in teacher curriculum and pedagogical practices. New ways of constructing adolescence were generated from a range of agencies (Australia 21, Australian
Youth Research Centre, Mission Australia Youth Surveys 2002-2008; Australian Government Office for Youth 2009). The growth of Middle School Associations around the country promoted innovative and creative learning and teaching practices in middle school settings (see for example, a range of case studies in Middle Years of Schooling Journal, MYSA Qld Daly 2001; Kelly 2004; Vague 2009).

The transformation of teaching advocated by the many research reports listed above, including the most recent from Australia by Evelyn Douglas and Jessica Harris (2008) Why Not the Best Schools?, demand change on the part of education authorities around the country, particularly in relation to adolescence. Douglas and Harris (2008), highlight the fear that many teachers have of change, and their reluctance to invite the young adolescent learner into the classroom as a learning partner. Clearly, this transformation is not an easy task. As has been witnessed in the 40 year American middle years of schooling experience the call to reinvent the middle school in light of the changing context of this new learning society is not straightforward (Hargreaves et al. 1996, Beane 2001; Dickinson 2001; Whitehead 2006). The challenge posed by the reform for teachers, is not only to navigate the transition successfully from childhood to adulthood for the young adolescent learner, but also, to navigate the transition to an information-based culture and economy (Carrington 2006; Latham et al. 2006). Therefore, in Australia the middle school reform is identified as a strategy of school improvement, proposing a transformation of the learning and teaching that will better meet the needs of young adolescents and improve their present and future ‘life chances’ (Jackson & Davis 2000; Erb 2000; Kennedy 2001; Lingard et al. 2001; Lovat 2003; Carrington 2006; Nayler 2009).

In Australia, the extent to which schools are able to bring about this transformation of the middle years of schooling will hinge, to a significant extent, on the teacher. The quality of the learning and teaching depends directly on the teacher in the classroom (Hattie 2003; Dinham & Rowe 2008), and indirectly on the part played by teachers in the organization of schools and school systems (Duncan et al. 2004; Barber & Moursheed 2007). Learning and teaching in this new learning society is dependent on how responsive teachers are to the needs of young adolescents and the extent to which they provide the conditions under which learning can take place in order for students to be engaged, motivated and committed to lifelong learning.
2.7 The South-East Queensland context

South-East Queensland (SEQ) is the setting of this study. Three types of schools exist in Queensland: the Government sector, Education Queensland schools, Catholic systemic schools and independent schools.

In 2002, the Queensland Government released a White Paper, a Report on the Education and Training Reform for the Future (ETRF) in Queensland. This report (2002) provided a strategic focus on three phases of learning in Queensland schools: Early Phase (P-3), Middle Phase (Year 4-9) and Senior Phase (Year 10-12). The ETRF White Paper highlighted the need for action in the middle years of schooling. The White Paper documented a commitment to strengthen the middle phase of schooling through focusing on: the curriculum, teaching methods and policy considerations associated with adopting a phase of schooling;

- innovative ways to improve student achievements in the middle years;
- providing continuous support to students through different stages of learning;
- specific strategies for students at risk of leaving school early; and

The ETRF Report (2002) preceded The Middle Phase of Learning: State School Action Plan in 2003. The report responded to the growing concerns of young peoples’ disinterest in school and declining student achievement and engagement (Education Queensland 2003). The action plan identified Years 4-9 as the critical middle phase of learning, and for the first time, provided a clear focus on learning, teaching and curriculum that was shaped differently for young adolescent learners. The Report made a clear commitment to ensuring that every Year 4 to 9 Queensland student in government schools:
• engages with purposeful, intellectual and challenging learning;
• is provided with opportunities to achieve success;
• is supported in their transition from year to year and from primary to secondary education; and
• interacts with teachers who are prepared to meet the distinctive and diverse needs of students during early adolescence (Adapted from Education Queensland 2003:5).

The “cornerstone” of the Action Plan was to align “curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to bring greater consistency and rigour to what is taught” (Education Queensland 2003:5). In addition, it aimed to have programs in government schools led by innovative and creative teachers who are valued and recognised as a distinctive cohort. The Action Plan argued for a pedagogical and organisational framework rather than purpose-built middle schools. However, according to Crouch (2006) the Queensland Government signalled limited support for dedicated middle schools as sub-schools within newly established P-12 schools. According to Pendergast (2007b), this trend of government schools combining primary/secondary schools into P-12 organisational structures with identified sub-schools has been a particular feature of the Australian educational landscape over the past 10 ten years – a practice, that on reflection, was at odds with the Action Plan (Education Queensland 2003).

Non-Government sector of schools
Since the late nineteenth century (Carroll 1989; Duncan et al. 2004) Catholic systemic and Independent schools have been an alternative to state education provided by government, despite the school curriculum that is mandated. The non-government sector, while much smaller and less centralised, is free to introduce different organisational structures and configurations in implementing the mandated curriculum. A significant number of independent schools are organised as P-12 schools and increasingly, any new Catholic systemic schools are also organised within a structural P-12 framework. This structure includes a preparatory year (Prep) through to Year 12 located on one campus or multiple campuses, and provides the opportunity to develop a seamless curriculum from reception to graduation (Brisbane Catholic Education 2004). This framework allows for more flexibility to create alternative organisational arrangements in the Catholic and Independent sectors which are achieved more easily, given the size and relative autonomy of these schools.
The largest non-government employing authority in South-East Queensland is Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE), of the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane. In 2004, after concluding a middle schooling project 1998-2002 trial of 10 schools (Hearfield 2001), a position paper on middle schooling was produced. This paper, *Pathways for Middle Schooling: Walking the Talk*, identified an auditing process for all schools in the area of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This audit was central to BCE’s strategic renewal process 2002-2006. Drawing on Barratt (1998), the *National Middle Schooling Project* identified eight principles of effective middle schooling practice underpinned by a commitment to quality *ethos of care* by which schools were to audit their curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. The eight principles of effective middle schooling practices are:

- learner-centred,
- collaboratively organised,
- outcome-based,
- flexibly structured,
- ethically aware,
- strategically linked,
- community oriented,
- adequately resourced (Adapted from Barratt 1998:30-31).

Implicit in this context of reform are new conceptualisations of the school, the teacher and the adolescent. The *school* is purpose built and provides the physical infrastructure for a dedicated middle school and adopts the philosophical underpinnings of middle schooling. For the *teacher*, new ways of working with young adolescents are required by working in teams around innovative pedagogical practices, such as integrating the curriculum, will require considerable adaption of their pre-service education and experience for the reformed workplace (Chadbourne 2001). Aligning schooling practices with the contemporary needs of *young adolescents* will better support student achievement, engagement and well-being. Moreover, to reconstruct adolescence within a new paradigm that extinguishes deficit views is imperative to address the decline in student achievement, engagement and well-being in the middle years (Nayler 2009).
It is in this context of Education Queensland schools and the non-government sector of schools that the perspectives on the middle years of schooling gained momentum and on which this study will develop. Furthermore, this study focuses on the centrality of the teacher, the middle school teacher, their experience and their conceptions of what comprises the attributes of the middle school teacher.

2.8 Shifting contexts of education

The middle years of schooling reform in Australia is occurring at a time of unprecedented social, cultural, educational and technological change. In these conditions, referred to as new times, the middle school reform is challenging the way teachers and learners think about school and education. Implicit in this context are a range of factors impacting on the reconstitution of schooling for young adolescents. The factors of globalisation, the development of a national curriculum and the development of standards of practice for teachers represent the key factors influencing the changing nature of schooling and how teachers work with young adolescents in the context of Australia (Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2005; Fullan 2007, Nayler 2009). It is these factors, according to Fullan (2007), that make middle years’ education reform urgent.

Globalisation

The impact of globalisation, the neo-liberal (Carrington 2006) and neo-conservative (Singh & Taylor 2007; Latham et al. 2006) narratives, with their emphasis on efficiency and economy, have reshaped schooling priorities and understandings of what determines quality schooling (Hayes et al. 2006). There is an increasing body of evidence (Taylor & Henry 2000; Lingard et al. 2001; Latham et al. 2006; Reid 2009) that demonstrates the increasing influence market forces are having on educational provision and management of schooling systems. For example, school performance and effectiveness is increasingly being defined within narrow parameters of standardised testing such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) without regard for quality teaching and learning (Taylor & Henry 2000; Lingard et al. 2001; Connell 2002; Luke et al. 2002; Carrington 2006; Reid 2009).

Pressure to perform in this global environment with the corresponding decline in government funding of education has undermined the focus on improving student learning outcomes and
improvements in teacher pedagogy (Reid 2009). According to the report on Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS), Lingard et al. (2001) assert that “market forces have compromised the core business of schools with its focus on management outcomes, an overemphasis on basic skills, teacher belief and classroom practice” (2001:xv) and narrowly defined understandings of student success and achievement. Lingard et al. (2001) argues that schools lack “pedagogical leadership” (2001: xxiv) and that this focus on market forces is “counterproductive in generating productive student performance” (2001: xv) by emphasising management priorities over reform in teaching and learning, thereby shifting the focus away from student learning. In addition, the external accountability measures for schools and teachers, such as publishing ‘league tables’ of school performance further amplifies the priority of market forces (Reid 2009). According to Luke (2004), this leads to mistrust of teachers and questions professional practice. In the Australian context, these issues are of particular concern for middle years teachers as such policies will tend to further exacerbate student disengagement and alienation, furthering the decline in student achievement (Lingard et al. 2001; Hayes et al. 2006).

**National Curriculum**

The present framing of the national curriculum in Australia resembles the policies of the “back to basics” orientation. The main reason for a national curriculum in Australia is twofold. Firstly, “the railway gauge argument” (Reid 2009:6), which argues for uniformity and consistency of curriculum across all states and territories and to reduce duplication of resources as a high priority for government (Reid 2009). Secondly, it is argued that a national curriculum will provide a solution to the wide variations in educational outcomes among states. Furthermore, it is deemed that a national curriculum will improve retention rates (Reid 2009). According to Reid (2009), the national curriculum in its present framework is based “solely on technical reasons” (2009:7) conceptualised in a limited way. In addition, any debate on curriculum needs to be concerned with “debates about a nation’s soul. About its values. About its beliefs” (Kennedy 2009:6). Moreover, the national curriculum in Australia needs to be seen in a “cultural framework after-all it is the nation’s curriculum” (Kennedy 2009: 6).

Within the context of Australia, aligning curriculum with the young adolescent is the main intent of the middle school reform. Reform of this type is focused on curriculum and pedagogical change involving a major rethink of teacher practices and beliefs. The National
Curriculum, according to Reid (2009), comprises a curriculum structure that resembles “most states in 1901”. The middle years’ curriculum is not about returning to the past or maintaining the status quo but about equity and social justice, improving achievement, engagement and well-being for all students (Beane 1991; Carrington 2006).

The emergence of middle schooling reform in Australia during this same period of the proposed change to a National Curriculum is a defining moment, as it identifies for the first time that the young adolescent is someone who was caught in the middle; hence, the need to respond more specifically to the learning needs of young adolescents. To avoid the outcomes of the United Kingdom experience, middle schooling reform in Australia will need to forge its own identity with its own vision, by refocusing clearly on the life-world of young adolescents. This second wave of research (Hill & Russell 1999; Luke et al. 2002) will require a more holistic and all encompassing approach to middle years' reform. This study draws attention to the needs of the middle years’ learner and a refocus on the centrality of the middle school teacher with its specific attributes. How this is woven into the national curriculum conversation remains to be seen. Furthermore, while curriculum documents are currently being written from a traditional primary/secondary school perspective, one must ask what is the place of the middle years’ teacher in a context that appears to be reproducing curriculum development that reflects mistakes of the past and shows little regard for the unique needs of the middle years learner.

Standards of Practice
The Australian teaching profession is undergoing review. This review has occurred in the context of a range of reports commencing with the National Competency Framework for the Beginning Teaching (1996), the Senate Report, A Class Act (1998) and The Australia Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) position paper Preparing a Profession (1998) and The National Framework for Professional Standards (MCEETYA 2003). In addition, the Board of Teacher Registration in Queensland, now the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), conducted an inquiry into the teaching profession in Queensland during the period 2000-2002. This has resulted in an endorsement of the standards framework by the Queensland College of Teachers with the publication of Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (QCT 2007). The Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers and the accompanying Program Approval Guidelines for Pre-service Teacher Education (QCT 2007) detail ten standards in...
three cluster areas, with each of the ten comprising “practice”, “knowledge” and “values” explanations. The titles of the ten standards are:

1. Design and implement engaging and flexible learning experiences for individuals and groups;
2. Design and implement learning experiences that develop language, literacy and numeracy;
3. Design and implement intellectually challenging learning experiences;
4. Design and implement learning experiences that value diversity;
5. Assess and report constructively on student learning;
6. Support personal development and participation in society;
7. Create and maintain safe and supportive learning environments;
8. Foster positive and productive relationships with families and the community;
9. Contribute effectively to professional teams;
10. Commit to reflective practice and ongoing professional learning (Adapted from QCT 2007:7-16).

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) argues that standards of practice can provide the conditions necessary to learn new ways of working together as teachers (QCT 2007). Central to the achievement of these standards of practice are stronger avenues for teacher professional learning that will result in re-culturing the working conditions within which teachers work, including middle school teachers. Standards similar to these can be found in every state and territory of Australia. Some teachers qualify to be registered in specific teaching sectors, primary and secondary, while others register teachers more generally, without specifying a teaching sector, although the discipline in which one is to teach is always made explicit. Conversely in Australia, a national teaching authority is also defining a set of standards and requirements for sector-specific teacher registration. In not one of these education jurisdictions can a set of standards be identified for the teacher of the middle years.

2.9 Conclusion

In the context of Australia, it has been argued (Barratt 1998; Lingard et al. 2001; Luke et al. 2002, Chadbourne 2001; Carrington 2006; Hayes et al. 2006) that quality pedagogy, relevant curriculum design, strong pastoral support and teacher quality are the critical factors that will
improve the learning performance, engagement, motivation and well being of students in the middle years. Whilst this type of debate is stimulating, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence supporting claims made by advocates of the middle years reform agenda. Furthermore, while the centrality of the teacher is acknowledged in this reform, just what type of teacher attributes are required, is still evasive in terms of the empirical research. This study will inform the gaps in the empirical research.

This chapter has outlined the context of the study. It is this context that has framed some of the issues that informed the development of this research study, *In search of the middle school teacher* and its focus on the attributes of the middle school teacher. The next chapter presents both the international and national empirical literature that has been instrumental in (i) shaping the study, and (ii) conceptualising the particular type of study required to meet a specific lacuna that exists in the empirical literature. It will be critiqued to identify the themes, research findings and deficiencies within the literature and present an argument to inform the purpose of this study.
3.1 Introduction

Schools are one of the important means by which twenty-first century society seeks to introduce young people to their cultural heritage and to enhance their capacity to live rich and fulfilling lives. The goals of schooling are broad. They are concerned with social and individual purposes. They address cultural, social, emotional and cognitive aspects of life.

That breadth of purpose is often lost in the current national curriculum debate. As national economies have become more exposed to global competition, the goals of schooling have tended to become more utilitarian. At the social level, the main goal appears to be concerned with raising the skills of the national workforce. At the individual level, the main goal appears to be focused upon enhancing employment prospects.

At the core of its philosophical reasoning the middle years of schooling does have broader purposes than utilitarian or career success. It is important to clarify the rationale that provides a platform for middle school at the outset of the study. In the current national curriculum debate, considerable focus is placed on the final years of schooling with little or no focus on the middle years of schooling, more particularly, the centrality of the teacher in educational reform. The middle years of schooling are the formative years in which many young people are growing their identity as they make an often turbulent transition from adolescence to adulthood. Young people engaged in middle years of schooling are futures oriented and eager to assume their place in the adult world. However, with the increasing focus on standards and assessment practices there is evidence to suggest from the national level that there is a shift, in both policy and practice, away from addressing educational and social needs of young people, particularly, disadvantaged groups (Whitehead 2006) to a focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes. Furthermore, there is a tendency in this shift in policy and practice to take adolescence for granted and, in so doing, ignoring the importance of the young persons'
life-worlds and social locations. In short the place of young people in the reshaping Australian curriculum agenda is invisible. While there is a plethora of research concerning the effects of class, gender, race and ethnicity on young peoples’ educational outcomes, there is limited evidence of this research in the formulation of policy and practice of the middle years of schooling (Whitehead 2006).

There is general agreement amongst educational researchers in Australia that educational change is necessary to ensure young people will be appropriately equipped for life in the twenty-first century (Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Carrington 2006). In recognition of the changing contexts of the lives and futures of young adolescents, including their vulnerabilities and distinctive needs, the middle years of schooling have become an important site of research, policy making and reform (Pendergast et al. 2005; Carrington 2006; Hunter 2006; Whitehead 2002, 2006; Nayler 2006, 2009). The importance of this reform is clearly expressed in Education Queensland’s education policies including: New Basics (2001), the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) (Lingard et al. 2001), Literate Futures (Luke et al. 2000) and Educating and Training Reforms for the Future (Education Queensland 2002). These reports recognise the changing life-worlds of young people in the middle years and strongly argue the need for school reform in order to meet their compelling needs. The middle schooling reform calls for a new vision of middle school curriculum. Aligned with this vision, is a constructivist approach to curriculum design organised around themes that connect learning to the world of the individual, where ‘real’ issues and contexts are connected to the world beyond the classroom (Beane 1991). Middle schooling reform aims to redress the regression in student performance, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy; and to improve the well-being of this age group by confronting alienation and disengagement which is a widespread experience for many young adolescents in their schooling situation (Cumming & Cormack 1996; Smyth & Hattam 2004; Yates & McLeod 2007), potentially, threatening their achievement and success (Nayler 2009).

The emergence of middle school reform during the 1990s was a defining moment in Australia as it identified for the first time that the young adolescent was someone who was “stuck in the middle” (Luke et al. 2002:134). That is, young adolescents caught between the “protected coddling” of primary school or the “alienated subject driven” secondary school (Connell 1998; Wormeli 2001; Smyth et al. 2003). The middle years reform initiative argues for “bridges of
transition” to be built as a way of crossing the primary/secondary school cultural and curriculum divide to ensure students navigate successfully their way through the often turbulent waters of adolescence. Hence, the growing interest of policy makers in middle years education. State and Territory governments have commissioned studies and reports seeking changes to school structures and action plans that set new directions and commit to education reform of the middle years (Education Queensland 2003; Whitehead 2000). These reports and studies offer insight into the direction education systems are considering, further highlighting the priority and legitimisation of middle years education in Australia (Whitehead 2001). These reports and studies include the South Australian Junior Secondary Review (Eyers et al. 1992); The Middle Years of Schooling Discussion Paper (Schools Council 1992); In the Middle: Schooling for Adolescents (Schools Council 1993); From Alienation to Engagement (Cormack & Cumming 1996); Teachers Working with Young Adolescents (Queensland Board of Teacher Registration 1996); The National Middle Schooling Project (Barratt 1998); Planning for Middle Schooling In Western Australia (Jackson 1999); Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project (Hill & Russell 1999; Russell 2003), South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework - Middle Years Band (SACSA 2009); Beyond the Middle (Luke et al. 2002); and Developing Lifelong Learners in the Middle Years of Schooling (Pendergast et al. 2005). In the non-government sector, similar directions in middle schooling are taking place. In 2004 Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) released a position paper Pathways for Middle Schooling (BCE 2004). A range of professional associations, including the Australian Primary and Secondary Principals’ Association and Middle Years of Schooling Association Queensland (MYSA) also produced position statements (MYSA 2008) and reviews, echoing calls for restructuring, re-culturing, reforming, and improvement in the middle years of schooling, in the interests of enhancing education for young people. These reports, studies and position papers suggest that the concept of middle schooling has reached a position of legitimacy and is not a “passing fad” in both government and non-government sectors (Whitehead 2001; Chadbourne 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Chadbourne & Pendergast 2005; Pendergast et al. 2007). Some time ago Cumming (1998), noted that this reform of the middle years was complex and that it raised the following questions which might focus future research:
What constitutes genuine reform in the middle years as distinct from superficial change?

What should be the focus of the reform in the middle years and who are the key players?

How can reform be planned, implemented and evaluated most effectively?

Which factors are most likely to promote and inhibit genuine reform?

What are the short and long term implications of genuine reform?

What distinguishes effective practice in the middle years (e.g. from the early or senior years of schooling)?

(Cumming 1998:5)

The literature (Rowe 2002; Hattie 2003; Fullan 2007; Pendergast et al. 2007; Dinham & Rowe 2008) identifies the teacher as the key to successful educational change. The middle years of schooling reform represents significant change with its proposed reforms aimed at the best way to facilitate the transition from childhood to adulthood in this context of schooling. The reform calls for a repositioning of the centrality of the teacher and to relocate young people at the centre of learning, inviting them to participate in their own knowledge construction and management. Drawing on the innovative teacher literature the key qualities of the teacher are “altruism, passion and creativity” in people who are “self starters, ideas people and highly attuned” (Cumming & Owen 2001:3) to young person’s life-worlds with their emphasis on popular youth culture. When identifying the context of the middle years of schooling teacher there is an underlying assumption that the middle years teacher is a person who understands the social and global context of the twenty-first century and as such needs to be reconstituted to reflect this new context.

This chapter will present a review of the empirical literature that underpins the study. As such is framed as:

- the conceptualisation of adolescence and adolescents as learners in new times is examined (3.2);
- schooling for early adolescence and the evidence of adolescents disengagement and alienation with schooling are discussed (3.3);
- the philosophy of the Middle Years of Schooling is outlined from the perspective of Australian States and Territories with definitions of middle schooling are outlined (3.3);
- society’s expectations of adolescence are examined (3.4);
new ways of working as a middle school teacher are examined (3.6);
the building of a new identity for the middle school teacher is argued (3.7); and
a conclusion to the chapter is provided (3.8).

3.2 Conceptualisation of adolescence

Every day in Australia over one million young adolescents (ABS 2003) enter school in what is broadly defined in the Australian literature as ‘the middle years of schooling’. The notion of middle schooling like that of adolescence is a relatively new concept. It is a tenuous concept and the growing amount of research and literature with its many contested ideas and theories has made it clear that adolescence and therefore middle schooling is not an exact science (Braggett 1997; Gunstone et al. 2004; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Knipe 2007; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007).

Moving from childhood to adolescence is a critical time in the life of the young person. Puberty is one of the most traumatic biological upheavals an individual will ever have to endure. However, puberty and adolescence are not synonymous. Rather, puberty is more about a child’s maturation and their capacity to reproduce (Patel-Stevens et al. 2007; Knipe 2007). While there are significant physical changes taking place for the young adolescent there are fundamental changes in their social environment as well; high amongst these is their transition from primary school to secondary school (Cumming and Fleming 1993; Chadbourne 2001, Gurian et al. 2001; Luke et al. 2002). It is a time when young adolescents involve themselves in exploratory behaviours which are developmentally appropriate and socially adaptive but which can carry high risks. These include, drug and alcohol related incidents, and other incidents related to sexuality and individual wellbeing (Carnegie Council 1989; Schools Council 1993; Cormack & Cumming 1996; Barratt 1998, Carr-Gregg & Shale 2002). Nevertheless, these years are characterised by a readiness for the formative work of nurturing values and instilling behaviour patterns which could enhance young adolescents’ education choices and other life choices such as health, thereby giving them confidence and a sense of hope about the future (Cormack & Cumming 1996; Lingard 2003; Crawford & Rossiter 2006; Knipe 2007; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007).
What emerges from the literature is an array of discourses which attempts to characterise and define these thresholds of what it means to be a child, adolescence and adolescent and who we might locate in them. Other theorists describe adolescence as a roller-coaster ride (Winston 1998; Carr-Gregg & Shale 2002; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007) for young adolescents who are undergoing monumental change, physically, neurologically, emotionally and socially. However, as challenging a time these years can be for young adolescents:

....it is only since the beginning of this century [twentieth century] that we can speak of adolescence as a specific and distinct phase of the life course (Knipe 2007:4).

Prior to the twentieth century, adolescence as a life-course simply did not exist. In traditional societies, physical changes determined the time at which a child became an adult. This included the way they dressed, as well as the roles and responsibilities they had. For example, during medieval times, girls were often married as young as 13 years old, or younger, and gave birth to their first child very soon after (de Vaus 2004; Gunstone et al. 2004). They had the responsibilities of running a household, mothering children and helping provide for the needs of the family at a very young age (Gilding 2001; Gunstone et al. 2004). Historically, adolescence was considered as a biological event, concerning physical changes that occurred (Gilding 2001; Gunstone et al. 2004). Adolescence as a stage of the life-course has increasingly been recognised since the early 1900s in Western society with Standley Hall’s (1904) groundbreaking work on adolescence, though it has gone through some changes in that time.

Today, the social and emotional changes that occur during adolescence are increasingly being recognized. The Schools Council (1993) asserted strongly that young people of this age range (10-15 years of age) should be considered as a distinct developmental group with less focus on the traditional separation of primary and secondary schooling which has “contributed to a general lack of attention to the collective needs of this age group” (1993:3). Like any type of change, it is recognised that these changes can be difficult to deal with. When you compare the roles and responsibilities of the older generation of Australians when they were in their youth, with the roles and responsibilities that young people have today the landscapes are quite different (de Vaus 2004). While the needs of young people may remain the same, it is the way they engage, seek and find fulfilment in satisfying these needs that are different.
compared to previous generations of young people (Giroux 2000; Gilding 2001; de Vaus 2004; Bahr & Pendergast 2007).

Recognition of adolescence as a legitimate and distinctive developmental phase was only proposed a little over a century ago. The term adolescence was originally penned back in the early twentieth century from the work of American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who asserts in his 2 volume ground breaking work in 1904, that a growing child between the ages of 10-14 years is at the dawning of adolescence. He describes this stage as one when:

The child is driven from his (sic) paradise and must enter upon a long viaticum of ascent, must conquer a higher kingdom of man (sic) for himself (sic), break out a new sphere, and evolve a more modern story to his (sic) psychophysical nature (Hall 1904:71).

In England the Hadow Report on The Education of the Adolescent (Hadow 1926), a milestone report for its time, borrows a Shakespearean illusion:

There is a tide which begins to rise in the veins of youth at the age of eleven or twelve. It is called by the name of adolescence. If that tide can be taken at the flood, and a new voyage begun in the strength and along the flow of the current, we think that it will move on to fortune (1926: xix).

So, as early as 1926 there was recognition of adolescence in the Western world, as a distinctive phase of development with significant implications for schooling, that is, that all children should be transferred, at the age of eleven or twelve, from primary school to secondary school (Barber 1999).

Stanley Hall's (1904) work and other literature that followed (Erikson 1950; Piaget 1954; Freud 1968) gave rise to the nativist view of adolescent development characterized by grand theoretical models and an emphasis on a biophysical model. In retrospect this has been redefined as a deficit view of adolescence. Hall (1904) was seriously discredited for his theory of recapitulation (Arnett 2004), that is, that the individual repeats the major stages of evolution in the course of his or her development. To Hall (1904), adolescence represented a "phylogenetic period" when human ancestors went from being a tribal and uncivilized beast, to ultimately evolving into mature and civilized human beings (Conger & Galambos 1997:10). Hall (1904) considered development during adolescence as a "period of storm and stress", (Hall 1904 Vol. 1: xiii) and as a time of complete developmental upheaval. Hall (1916) further
contended that development was controlled by genetically determined physiological factors. He states the environment plays a role whereby heredity factors interacted with environmental influences to determine an individual’s development. In summarising Hall’s theory, Adams et al. (1994) state:

Thus, at adolescence the progression of recapitulating instincts gave way to the primacy of cultural influences. Hall believed firmly that if human civilization was to be advanced, effective changes could be induced only by supplying the appropriate educational experiences for the generation of adolescents; childhood was too early, and adulthood was too late (1994:31).

This portrayal of adolescence suggest a period of evolution that is extremely complex and turbulent. The concept of adolescence had been passed down from one generation to the next and was recapitulated in the development of each individual as the storm and stress of adolescent development.

Since the late 1970s a growing body of specialist publications addressing issues associated with adolescence, has developed and has continued to proliferate well into the new century (Bahr 2005). The benchmark book that gave impetus to this new attention to adolescence was the publication of Joseph Adelson (1980), The Handbook of Adolescent Psychology. According to Bahr (2005), the book reflected the growing multidisciplinary interest in the field with chapters discussing levels of organization ranging from biology through history. Chapters were also included on the history of the youth movement, on the growing interest in systems models of adolescent development, on the importance of longitudinal methodology and on the increasing interest in diversity issues of adolescence. However, it is important to note that while the book gave considerable attention to the problems of adolescence it nonetheless still portrayed adolescence within its biological constraints, and continued to present adolescence as “homogeneous, passive and deficit” in nature (Bahr 2005:56).

Hall’s (1904, 1916) work was nonetheless unique and filled a void in the literature regarding the phenomenon of adolescence. His work came at a time when the industrial revolution had transformed early twentieth century American society. In the Western world, the rural economy was giving way to a growing manufacturing economy, society was becoming increasingly urbanized and the nuclear family was replacing the extended family model which had suited the farming and cottage industry of the time. Other changes took place which
would redefine childhood: the passing of laws against child labour and the advent of compulsory elementary school. For the first time, children were to be protected from the adult world and the school became the institution which would protect the child (Luke et al. 2002). In this new environment Hall (1904) and his contemporaries (Freud 1968) were confronted with unprecedented social and cultural change, signaled by the establishment of the emerging women’s movement, youth gangs and the rise of youth criminality, school-age pregnancy and the rebellious child (Carnegie Council 1995; Luke et al. 2002; Newman & Newman 2009). This further conceptualised adolescence as “trouble”, adolescents characterised as immature and in a state of instability concerning physical, social and emotional development. Therefore, a need was identified for constant surveillance, control and regulation by adults and by schools (Beane 1999, 2001). Williamson and Johnston (1999) argue that the defining middle schooling within this limited discourse of adolescence has led to an orthodoxy that does not question its precepts. In addition, Beane (2005) claims that: “middle-level reformers have elevated puberty, a moment in human development, to the status of an ideology, which clearly it is not” (2005:xiii). Furthermore, it is argued by Dinham and Rowe (2008) that the central barrier to achieving middle school reform is the tendency by teachers, schools and universities to continue to value ideological beliefs which assume individual student performance is due to developmental differences. Dinham and Rowe (2008) claim that there is little empirical evidence to support such an assumption. Rather, Dinham & Rowe (2008) have found that the empirical evidence points to the teacher as the key determinant of student perceptions and experiences of schooling including engagement and achievement progress, not adherence to biological and social determinism views of early adolescence.

The world of the late twentieth century is not dissimilar to that of Stanley Hall’s time. It too has ushered in a new culture of childhood which has evolved according to Newman and Newman (2009) as a series of social and cultural constructions rather than psychological theories. The emergence of the learning society in a globalised world has posed many challenges in an increasingly volatile Australian society. Australia has seen the emergence of a multicultural, multi-faith, and multi-lingual society but despite the prosperity of the past decade many Australian families and young people are still living in difficult economic conditions. As well, remote and rural Australia is economically and socially destabilised (Hargreaves 1994; Hart et al. 2003) which poses many challenges ahead for education policy makers, particularly in relation to schooling.
A century has passed since Hall’s (1904) proclamation of adolescence as an age/staged period of storm and stress. During the ensuing years these tenets emerged as the dominant discourse on adolescent development (Arnett 2004; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007; Kemmis & Johnstone 2007). Accordingly, this dominant discourse has shaped the central assumptions of how to construct and represent adolescence, that is, as a biophysical predetermined condition. Hence, this discourse relegates young people to a position of powerlessness, as passive victims of their world, a world which needs control, surveillance and restriction (Lesko 2001). According to Giroux (2000), present representations of young people range from young people being seen as a threat to society and defenceless against the powerful consumer nature of popular youth culture. As this discourse continues, argues Giroux (2000), into the twenty-first century, it diminishes the complexity of young people’s lives. Furthermore, he asserts that this discourse:

Often works to undermine any productive sense of agency among young people, offering few possibilities for analysing how children actually experience and mediate relationships with each other or with adults. Such representations...erase any understanding of how power relations between adults and young people work against many children. The discourse of hope is replaced with the rhetoric of cynicism and disdain (2000:20).

According to Giroux (2000), childhood at the end of the twentieth century has been transformed into a “market strategy” where increasing commercialisation of young people has turned them into “citizens of consumerism” (Giroux 2000:95). At the same time, while being enticed with the multinational consumer culture, it is their engagement with new communication technologies and their immersion into the world of popular media that is their hallmark. The visual world of the mass media profoundly influences fears and hopes of young people for the future, their relationships with family and friends, their concept of self and others and their beliefs and values (Carnegie Council 1995; Cumming 1996; Barratt 1998; Giroux 2000; de Vaus 2004; Crawford & Rossiter 2006). Consequently, a new notion of what it means to be a child, what it means to be an adolescent is radically being forged (Lipstitz 1997; Gurian et al. 2001; Knipe & Johnstone 2007; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007).

Johnstone and Lowrie (2006) argue that adolescents are both individuals and social beings who are both “producers” and “contributors” to their own cultural life-worlds. It is important therefore to see adolescence and adolescents in a social context, not just as individuals and
to recognise young people as subjects, but as active contributors, giving shape to their own identity and to their world around them.

Although often captured as an age range, chronological age is just one way of defining adolescence. According to Arnett (2004), adolescents are not sure about the term. The terms most acceptable to adolescents are “young adults”, “teenagers” and “young men and young women” (Arnett 2004:8). However, in defining adolescence, the literature (Hall 1904) clearly indicates they are not adult. The literature has tended to define adolescence as on a linear pathway to adulthood. This is captured in the literature variously as:

- Adolescents are not yet fully independent of their parents and family jurisdictions (Schaffer 2001);
- Adolescents are not yet cognitively complete (Fuller 2004);
- Adolescents have not yet developed a range of mature interpersonal relationships (Graber et al. 1996);
- Adolescents have not yet completed their personal construction of identity (Marcia 1980; Selman 1980; Swanson et al. 1998).

Therefore, this conceptualisation of adolescence suggests they have not yet arrived; they remain “in-between” and “unfinished as adults” (Bahr & Pendergast 2006:67). The long standing narrative on adolescence portraying young people as unfinished, unrefined, troublesome, unpredictable and undefined societal roles has persisted for over a century (Bahr & Pendergast 2008). Moreover, “…the term became an insult. The stage of life was a torment to be survived” (Bahr & Pendergast 2008:67). However, new research is emerging (Arnett 2004; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Krause et al. 2006; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Dinham & Rowe 2008) that is beginning to portray adolescence in more human and gentle ways as opposed to demonising a life-course, or present development as a deficit progression (Bahr & Pendergast 2008).

Adolescence is a human journey from childhood to adulthood marked by their increasing vulnerability brought on by puberty: “a period of development more rapid than in any other phase of life except infancy” (Carnegie Council 1989:22). It is apparent that this generation of adolescents has been set apart from childhood and have been constructed as ‘rude’, ‘gum-chewing’, ‘noisy’, ‘careless’, ‘disrespectful’, ‘unruly’, ‘risky’ and ‘trouble’ (Cormack 1996; Barratt...

The Carnegie Council (1989) and the National Middle School Association (1995) recognized the need for clarification and a new direction for adolescent youth in America. The report, while acknowledging the difficulties of defining adolescence in this changing environment, observed that some of the traditional safety nets for young people had fallen away and that “the guidance they needed as children and need no less as adults is withdrawn” (Carnegie Council 1989:22). The Carnegie Council (1989) in its ground-breaking report asserted that a large number of adolescents were at risk of leaving school early and were poorly prepared by the school system to participate and contribute fully as productive citizens in the adult community.

Cormack (1992) has argued that, “rather than being a way-station between childhood and adulthood, adolescence has its own characteristic elements and challenges” (1992:5). Piaget according to Brainerd (1978) viewed early adolescence as a most “exhilarating and productive” stage of life. It is a time when one plans for the future and fixes the goals for one’s life; it is a time of self-sacrifice and acute awareness of injustice; it is a time of great hopes and a time when simple answers are just not good enough (Brainerd 1978:30). Erickson (1993), portrayed adolescence as marking out a new identity amidst this developmental upheaval or run the risk of an “identity crisis”. Yang (2002) on the other hand suggests that adolescence is not a disorder but rather something “profound” and “amazing” full of “wonder” and “life”. As the literature notes (Krause et al. 2006; Arnett 2004), the experience of adolescence is not the same for all young people and therefore, there is a need to be cautious in suggesting that there is little difference amongst adolescents; as social beings. To continue portraying adolescence in this way perpetuates the dominant discourse which constructs adolescence along biologically determined and deficit lines, further marginalising young people.
Emerging from the literature are descriptions/definitions of adolescence which represent a range of discourses concerning adolescence. However, the assertion still remains that this plethora of contemporary literature on adolescence is no closer to a commonly shared agreement on who the adolescent is (Bahr 2005). According to Nan Bahr (2005), there is no agreement on “age markers”, the boundaries for qualitative dimensions of adolescence. Bahr (2005) found very few empirical studies published in recent times that clearly identify an age range for their research on adolescence. Earlier literature, including Ausubel (1954) and Kimmel and Weiner (1994) as well as later contemporary writers (McInerney & McInerney 2002), describe the physical and other qualitative attributes of adolescents, but do not identify an age range. Much of the literature, contends Bahr (2005), tends to avoid identifying chronological age ranges in preference for biological markers such as the commencement of puberty or notions of social responsibility as adolescents move into young adulthood. Lefrancois (1976) argues strongly against the use of chronological age markers in favour of more distinct sequences of adolescent maturation: physical, emotional and cultural role expectations.

An overview of the research literature defining adolescence covering the last one hundred years is presented in Table 3.1. The table demonstrates the varying understandings of adolescence from the dominant bio-psychological conceptualization of adolescence to the social and cultural discourses. Needless to say, there are quite divergent discourses on what constitutes adolescence. Recent research suggests it is time to rethink the enduring age-stage developmental discourses as they tend to position adolescence as problematic or defective in making the transition toward adulthood (Lesko 2001; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007; Carrington 2006; Bahr & Pendergast 2008). According to Patel-Stevens et al. (2007), this negative biopsychological construction of adolescence has pathologised particular behaviours citing the rapid increase in Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and other diagnoses that “cast young people as needing intervention, remediation and diagnosis” (Patel-Stevens 2007:114).
Furthermore, it is apparent that the dominant theories surrounding the nature of adolescence as a deficient stage remain “resistant to widespread transformation, rejection and/or deconstruction” (Patel-Stevens et al. 2007:110).

The variable age range of adolescence evident in the diverse literature is presented in Figure 3.1 and suggests a mean age for this distinctive period of human development.

### Table 3.1 Adolescent age range in literature 1904-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature by Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Age range of Adolescence</th>
<th>Theoretical themes &amp; Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescent development process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Hall G.S</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hadow Report</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Erikson E.</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>12-18</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tanner J.M</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>(a) Early 10-14</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Middle 15-17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Late 18-21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eichhorn D.</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Havinghurst</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>13-18</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lipszit J.</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Schools Council</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Bragett E.</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. World Health Organisation</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>(a) Adolescents 10-19</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Youth 15-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Young people 10-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Shaffer D.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>12-20</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Santrock J.</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10/13-18/22</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Krause et al.</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>11-21</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Marsh C.</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Peterson</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>13-18</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Kellouch R. &amp; CarJuzza J.</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>(a) Middle 10-14</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Late 15-19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Steinberg L.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>(a) Early 10-13</td>
<td>active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Middle 14-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Late 19-22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Bahr (2005)
In seeking alternative theoretical frameworks in which to locate adolescence and to shift it away from its developmental and deficit underpinnings to a framework that promotes positive developmental trajectories in adolescents, requires a vision that is "elastic, pliable and contoured" (Bahr & Pendergast 2006:68) and recognises the relational character of the adolescent in their diverse socio-cultural contexts. Although there remains a focus in the literature (Steinberg & Morris 2001; Dinham & Rowe 2008) on the psychological and the social problems associated with this adolescent developmental stage, there is a shift taking place. There is an increasing focus on the "plasticity, diversity and individual agency which serves as a key basis of the person’s ability to act as an agent in his or her own development" (Steinberg & Lerner 2004:51). This notion of "plasticity" provides a framework that portrays adolescents as having strengths, not problems, with the potential for positive development (Steinberg & Lerner 2004). In order to respond better to the adolescent life-course a reconstituted social
space is being created, which is different for other younger and older students. This new space in which to develop is portraying young people in terms of adolescents “personal assets” without presuming weaknesses because of a positioning on a particular developmental continuum (Bahr & Pendergast 2006). Hence, (refer Table 3.1) new kinds of theory are recognizing the active agency of young people, (Luke et al. 2002; Smith & Lovat 2003; Stenberg & Lerner 2004; Carrington 2006; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007; Kemmis & Johnstone 2007; Bahr & Pendergast 2006) and, at the same time, recognising that the world has changed profoundly and it is not possible to categorise adolescents into a “one size fits all” approach (Jackson & Davis 2000; Carrington 2002; Beamon 2005; DET 2005; Grandin 2008).

Perhaps any new discourse regarding the nature of adolescence and adolescents is required, if young people are to be liberated from being the passive victims of dependency, control and compliance of the developmental discourse. An alternative discourse will express an understanding of adolescents as active agents/subjects who participate actively in constructing themselves and their own life-worlds (Lesko 2001). While there are suggestions to replace the term adolescence within the discourse, the term has persisted and has provided a focus in which to view a distinctive group of society. Hence, it is useful, not as a rigid frame but as a reference point for inquirers to focus on a particular life course. Patel-Stevens et al. (2007) and Bahr and Pendergast (2006) suggest, the term needs to be used with “gentle care” enabling the young adolescent to be portrayed as an ambiguous subject who is unpredictable and who therefore eludes “pre-conceived and pre-existing conceptions of identity” (2007:121) as understood through the deficit discourse. This in turn has the capacity to free the adult and the teacher to engage in a more authentic discourse where “young people can learn about and understand their personal stake in struggling for a future in which social justice and political integrity become the defining principles” (Patel-Stevens 2007:121).

To continue to rely on the concept of adolescence as constructed by Hall (1904) does not engage adolescence as socio-historical and cultural construct, which it needs to be if the students’ social locations are to be recognised (Williamson & Johnston 1999; Beane 2005). As a consequence, adolescence from a deficit view will remain an ideology detached from any “compelling social vision that might elevate its sense of purpose, attract more advocates and help sustain the concept against its critics” (Beane 2005: xiv).
Young persons' life-worlds are not unlike a tug-o-war (Figure 3.2). The two worlds, childhood and adulthood, are pulling against each other, characterised by the way they might respond to the intrinsic and extrinsic conditions and circumstances that both enable and constrain them to make the transformation from childhood to adulthood. While adolescence a more rapid period of development than any other phase of life, except for infancy (Carnegie Council 1989), there emerges particular needs through the reciprocal and dynamic interactions that take place among the individual's physical, social, emotional, intellectual, neurological, moral and spiritual developmental characteristics. The manner in which young adolescents navigate their life-worlds, in order to have their needs met in these challenging conditions and circumstances is largely a function of interactions, both positive and negative, with the world around them and in particular, with family and schools (Crawford & Rossiter 2006).

Figure 3.2 Young person's life-worlds

The young persons' life-worlds (Habermas 1987, 1998) consist of making choices and taking opportunities within a culture that is complex and continually evolving. This culture is reconstituted by the nature of the times in which it exists and informs the way we come to know and understand young people. The conditions that shape the lives of contemporary young people, which are diverse and highly individualized is presented in Table 3.2. In elaborating on the young persons' life-worlds it becomes clear that there exists a two-way interaction between the intrinsic and extrinsic world, though there is a growing disconnection between the two worlds (Carnegie Council 1989, 1995; Cormack 1992; Cumming 1996; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Luke et al. 2002; NMSA 2003; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Beamon 2005). The manner by which young people navigate these life-worlds will inevitably
shape their lives. The struggles of the adolescent will become the centrality of education as teachers attempt to better understand the needs of early adolescence in this new time. This is the purpose of the middle school reform.

Table 3.2 The intrinsic and extrinsic life-worlds of young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrinsic (inner) Life-worlds</th>
<th>Extrinsic (outer) Life-worlds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Adjusting to profound changes; physical, social, emotional, intellectual and neurological (Barratt 1998, Manning &amp; Butcher 2005);</td>
<td>• Social acceptance, friendliness from peers of the same and opposite gender (Carnegie Council 1995; Bahr 2005);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Striving to develop positive self-esteem and self-confidence through participating and achieving success in a range of activities and celebrated (Braggett et al. 1999; Latham et al. 2006);</td>
<td>• Globalization and an awareness of the social and political world; and to gain skills in dealing with its stresses (Latham et al. 2006; Jackson &amp; Davis 2000);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exploring progressively a sense of ‘Who am I?’ and of personal, social and cultural values and beliefs which form the basis of a young person’s life (Carr-Gregg 2002);</td>
<td>• Influence of the ‘popular consumer culture’ with its values and beliefs and sophisticated technologies and mass media (Hargreaves 2003; Bearmon 2005; Crawford &amp; Rossiter 2006; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Growth toward independence, while still needing security in many personal relationships (Latham et al. 2006; Carr-Gregg 2002);</td>
<td>• Relationships with family and significant adults (eg. Teachers) who can provide support and act as role models (Carnegie Council 1995; Wyn &amp; White 1997; Carr-Gregg 2002;);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empowerment through the experience in decision making, and in accepting responsibility for these decisions (Pendergast 2005);</td>
<td>• Awareness and an understanding of the implications of global and national issues of terrorism, war, HIV/AIDS, environmental pollution (Luke et al. 2002);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Viewing the world more critically and acting independently, thinking in ways which become progressively more abstract and reflective (Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast 2007; Hargreaves 2003);</td>
<td>• The changing nature and structure of work, the economy and employment (Hargreaves 1994; Beare 2001; Hart et al. 2003;);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social locations: circumstances of social difference such as social status, race, gender and ethnic origin (Beane 2001; Gilding 2001).</td>
<td>• The prevailing understanding of adolescence as an ideology (Lesko 2001; Lingard &amp; Carrington 2003; Pendergast &amp; Bahr 2005; Johnstone &amp; Lowrie 2007; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Habermas (1987), “life-worlds are a set of pre-suppositions that have to be satisfied if [life] is to be meaningful” (1987:131). In the young person’s life-world these presuppositions and assumptions are embedded in the language and culture and drawn upon by individuals in everyday processes of interaction and communication. The tensions, intrinsic and extrinsic, underpin the young persons’ life-worlds, providing a framework of ideas, values, meaning and a language that gives the life-world validity (Habermas 1987). Critical to this life-
world is a commitment to change and the transformation of the young persons’ life-world. Therefore, central to understanding the tensions of the young persons’ life-world is a recognition that “a book based cultural experience that was formulated to suit the context of their parents and earlier generations” (Pendergast 2007a:38) is inappropriate today given the issues surrounding learning diversity and the changing social and cultural contexts (Lingard et al. 2001; Carrington 2006). Hence, transforming the life-world of young people, in light of social, cultural, economic and educational change where young people are constructing their own life-worlds and future pathways differently, recognised by educational researcher as important in preparing young people for these new times. These new conditions of “reflexive modernity” where cultures of risk, uncertainty and change flourish are shaping individual identities (Beck 1992). According to a Commonwealth of Australia Report (1995) these conditions have a profound impact on the enterprising skills, technical expertise and entrepreneurial capacities demanded by the learning society as young people advance their lives. Furthermore, these new conditions have generated a new relationship between the individual and the society where individuals “develop their own do-it-yourself biography” (de Vaus 2004: xv). Recognising the adolescent life-worlds with all their contradictions, tensions and multiple identities, together with the complexities of relationships with the adult world, draws attention to the impact these issues have for the education of young people. In light of this, research associated with the middle years reform illustrates the importance of new learning, the importance of the responsiveness of educators in meeting the needs of young people (Carrington 2006).

3.2.1 Learners in new times

The new learning society in Australia, as elsewhere, has given birth to a generation of young people who share a common bond of being born into the information age. Young people of this new time are fluent users of digital technology, such as computer games, email, the internet, mobile phones, instant text messaging and social networking via the internet using MySpace and FaceBook, which are an integral part of their day-to-day lives (Prensky 2001; Pendergast 2007a). This new cohort of young people are distinctly different to previous generations of young people and among the names most commonly used to describe them are: Generation D, Net Gen, Millennial Generation, Generation Y, Newmills, Nexters, Thatcher’s Children, Generation Next, iGeneration (information), cGeneration (consumer), Echco Boomers (Sweeney 2005), Digital Natives, Digital Generation (Prensky 2001) and
Previous generations include the Baby Boomers and Generation X. The current generation known as Generation Y are also labelled ‘Millennials’, ‘Digital Natives’ or ‘Net Gen’ according to Sweeny (2005) and are born in the period 1982 to 2002 (Howe & Strauss 2000). Therefore, from a teaching and learning perspective the Millennial Generation students make up the bulk of the student population of schools with the last born of the generation leaving school in approximately 2020 (Pendergast 2007a; Shih & Allen 2007). Commencing 2008-2010 is a new Generation Z, who will commence school bringing their own generational characteristics to bear (McCrindle 2003; Pendergast 2007a).

A summary of the generations past and present with their distinctive characteristics is presented in Table 3.3. The table illustrates the context of diversity, and the unique social and generational factors which impact upon educational considerations of young people in the middle years of schooling. Many of the characteristics of Generation Y and Generation Z (still to be determined) correspond to the birth of the internet. Unlike previous generations, the awareness of global issues and the ability to network through the World Wide Web is a way of life for this current digital generation of young people. According to Bahr and Pendergast (2006), adolescence continues to be an important concept underpinning education, but the concept needs to be reconfigured in the context of new times.
### Table 3.3  Summary of generations’ distinctive characteristics

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Events</strong></td>
<td>Globalisation, September 11, Bali bombings, terrorism, Digital Age, prosperity, consumerism, role of media</td>
<td>Rise of mass media, consumerism, technology boom, man on the moon, pop music, end of cold war—fall of the Berlin wall, refugees, AIDS</td>
<td>Prosperity, Vietnam War, television, civil rights movement</td>
<td>Great depression, world war, silver screen, golden age of radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socialisation</strong></td>
<td>Strong social pressure, live at home, non-traditional families, multiculturalism</td>
<td>Latchkey kids (child left home alone)</td>
<td>Anything is possible</td>
<td>Scarcity, hardship, parent at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities</strong></td>
<td>Loyal, skilled, social conscious, collectively optimistic, responds well to pressure, quest for excellence</td>
<td>Risk takers, family oriented, self reliance, pragmatism,</td>
<td>Optimistic, competitive</td>
<td>Self sacrifice, dedication, loyal, conformist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value</strong></td>
<td>Patriotism, civic duty, family, diversity, informality</td>
<td>Work, independence, work-life balance, informality, autonomy</td>
<td>Success, reform, equity, teamwork, work, youth,</td>
<td>Family, patriotism, past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assets</strong></td>
<td>Education, sociable, multi-task, technology savvy</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial, individualistic</td>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Perseverance, wisdom, experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prefer</strong></td>
<td>Self improvement, frankness, fun, immediate reward</td>
<td>Freedom, room to grow, short term rewards</td>
<td>Consensus, egalitarian</td>
<td>Consistency, traditional training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td>Blend work and play, negotiate, fast paced, collective action, tenacious, impatient, sceptical, non-linear, plans ahead</td>
<td>Outcomes focused, sceptical, bend rules if needed</td>
<td>Love hate relationship with authority, work hard, proactive</td>
<td>Respect for authority, obey the rules, law abiding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Howe & Strauss (2007); Sheahan (2006); Mayer (2006); Pendergast (2007a, d)
It is becoming clear to middle school teachers that this generation of young people is different and not at all like previous generation of learners (Howe & Strauss 2000; Pendergast 2007a). The contemporary adolescent is a digital learner. Teachers of students, such as those described above, are either Baby Boomers or Generation X, labelled by Prensky (2001) as ‘digital immigrants’. According to Prensky (2001), contemporary teachers pre-date the digital age and struggle to teach a new generation that speaks an entirely different language - a digital language. Prensky (2001) argues that the Millennial Generation is seemingly more at home with the frequent and rapid change associated with technological progress than their teaching counterparts. Generation X or the Baby Boomers who are teachers, are much less comfortable with the sudden upheavals that the contemporary world environment brings. According to McCrindle (2003) and Wyn (2004b), the biggest divide facing teachers is the “growing generational differences” which are becoming increasingly more difficult to bridge.

Prensky (2001) asserts young people today no longer characterise the type of students the present schooling system was designed to teach. Furthermore, findings of the research (Hayes et al. 2006), suggest there is limited use of information and communication technologies (ICT) by teachers in their repertoires of practice. Within classrooms, according to Hayes et al. (2006), quality learning environments, the use of ICT and the integration of digital pedagogies are critical to improving achievement and engagement in the middle years, particularly, given the importance of digital cultures and technologies in the learning and life-worlds of young people. Carrington (2006) argues “understanding the implications and potential of the learning that takes place around digital communications technologies is crucial for educators working in the middle years” (Carrington 2006:51). Therefore, teachers are required to connect their pedagogies to digital cultures of young people if they are to be effective (Pendergast 2007a). Moreover, there is a consensus of opinion, according to Caldwell and Harris (2008), for a need to redesign, rebuild and replace school learning spaces as they are “ill suited to the curriculum and pedagogies of twenty-first century” (Caldwell & Harris 2008:170). There is an urgent need to be conducive to the integration of digital pedagogies. The use of digital technologies is the defining feature of this present generation of young people that separates them from other generations that have gone before them (Carrington 2006; Pendergast 2007a).
The distinctive generational characteristics provide an opportunity to reconceptualise adolescence away from the developmental ideological paradigm and toward the societal paradigm, where geography and time are identified as the key factors in the social reconstruction of adolescence in this new time. According to Bahr and Pendergast (2006), geography and time are no longer fixed, "made so by the digital innovations typified in this generation" (2006:72). Moreover, through these distinctive generational characteristics young people cannot be knowable, pre-named or predicted (Patel-Stevens 2007). For this generation of young people the need to reconceptualise adolescence and reconfigure learning away from how it has been constructed is a particular challenge educators cannot ignore (Bahr & Pendergast 2006).

While the economic, technological, social and cultural world of the twenty-first century has shifted in profound ways (Hargreaves 2003; Carrington 2006), the schooling of a new generation of young people has shifted much less (Hargreaves 2003; Lynch & Smith 2006; Prensky 2006; Pendergast 2007a; Caldwell & Harris 2008). Schooling in Australia remains, for the most part, a pencil and paper learning experience within a psychology that stresses developmental stages. As a result curriculum is linked to a series of age-staged groupings of students. The current reshaping of the national curriculum is no different. The present system of schooling values the learning of basic skills, uniformity of curriculum and conformity of pedagogy that reflects a context more familiar to a former generation of learners and in keeping with a nineteenth century view of education (Pendergast 2007a; Lynch & Smith 2006; Prensky 2001). The new learning society of the twenty-first century, in contrast, values initiative, creativity, participation, success, and lifelong learning (Beane 2001; OECD 2001; Pendergast et al. 2005; Prensky 2006; Pendergast 2007a). It is evident that teachers are required to reconstitute the ways of working with a new type of learner, in a context of rapid technological, social and cultural change.

In considering how teachers may reconstitute their work it is important to consider alternative views of contemporary learners. Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) identify seven characteristics that differentiate Millennial Generation learners from their predecessors. The characteristics are listed by Howe and Strauss (2007) as special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) argue, that for teachers to be successful in enhancing the learning outcomes and ‘life chances’ of young
people, they must find ways to respond to these differences. The seven characteristics of the Millennial Generation are outlined in Table 3.4, with suggested strategies which might assist teachers to change their pedagogical practices which are attuned to the young persons’ life-worlds.

**Table 3.4** Seven characteristics of the Millennial Generation and implications for teaching and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven Characteristics</th>
<th>Implications for school reform and curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special</strong></td>
<td>Encourage parental involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage the public and media to support efforts to improve education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sheltered</strong></td>
<td>Emphasise school safety and accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take a fresh look at class and school sizes - smaller is perceived as better at providing “structured (learning) communities that let no one fall through the cracks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confident</strong></td>
<td>Stress positive outcomes for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use contextual and project-based environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Craft personal progress plans to guide students’ learning and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team orientation</strong></td>
<td>Teach team skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build community service into the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide opportunities for students to help other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional</strong></td>
<td>Create core curricula that every student is expected to master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure every task is achievable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrate progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuously monitor, assess and redirect learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressured</strong></td>
<td>Stress long-term life planning and guarantees over short-term opportunities and risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structure learning around goal mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reverse engineer curricula—starting with where you want students to be at the end of the semester/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achieving</strong></td>
<td>Build a challenging and relevant curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasise achievement over aptitude and effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporate cutting edge computer technology into the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage teachers to set an example themselves of professional achievement and lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Howe & Strauss (2007); Howe (2006)

At the heart of the middle years of schooling agenda is the recognition that a change in the philosophy of education, teaching practices, and curriculum development are required if the needs of the Millennial Generation and future generations of learners are to be met. Teacher change remains the basis of any reform and improvement in education (Lingard et al. 2001;
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Carrington 2006; Hayes et al. 2006; Barber & Mourshed 2007; Caldwell & Harris 2008; Douglas & Harris 2008; Nayler 2009). The middle years of schooling agenda proposes an important shift in teacher philosophy and beliefs about adolescence, pedagogy, curriculum design and assessment. Change of this nature requires time and considerable effort. Furthermore, it mandates, motivation and professional learning on the part of teachers. It also requires the support and empowerment from school leadership to provide the conditions under which new programs that are responsive to the needs of the millennial, middle school learner can be implemented. However, what is yet to be determined, in this context of rapid change, is in what way teachers are to change.

While the middle school teacher position is an evolving one, employing authorities throughout the western world, are actively reconstituting the shape of education in a myriad of ways. In Australia, for example, one state jurisdiction, Education Queensland (2003) has identified strategies to assist the middle school teacher to become more effective with its emphasis on pedagogy, professional learning and pre-service and graduate education. New directions of this type, according to Education Queensland (2003), will create the conditions needed to enhance student learning outcomes and ‘life chances’. Whether this is the case, or whether such an argument has a solid foundation, is yet to be proved.

3.3 Schooling for early adolescence

The middle years of schooling reform is based on the premise that a need exists to revitalise the curriculum through being responsive to the changing nature of adolescence and the unprecedented rapidly changing society, where new technologies and global communication are having a profound effect on youth identities (Latham et al. 2006). The idea of middle schooling or schooling for young adolescents was evident over a century ago in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) (Manning & Butcher 2005). Therefore, the overall concept is not new. As detailed in Chapter 2, the development of secondary schools and the beginning of the divide between primary/elementary and secondary schools had its origins in the United Kingdom and the United States. The concept of middle schooling or schooling for young adolescents was first evident in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and much later in Australia.

Furthermore, the increasing amount of empirical evidence about the life-worlds of young people (Eyers et al. 1992; Schools Council 1993; Hargreaves et al. 1996; Cumming 1996, 1998; Barratt 1998; Smyth et al. 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast et al. 2005; Bahr & Pendergast 2007) has increased calls for middle school reform to be taken up in Australia; to make the middle years of schooling experience more meaningful and engaging for these “forgotten years” of schooling (Lipsitz et al. 1997). Not to recognize this alienation among young people, according to Eyers et al. (1992), puts young people seriously at risk of not being able to participate fully in the community given the global economic conditions and limited employment prospects.

Problems surrounding adolescent alienation became the focal point for the study by Cormack and Cumming (1996) which focused on the “hidden alienation” in Years 5-8. The report found that while young people were not seen to be problematic, they nevertheless “appeared to be ‘switched off’, ‘tuned out’ or simply not achieving” (1996 Vol 3:2). This research also highlighted that the highest incidence of youth alienation occurred in the first year of secondary school (Hill & Rowe 1996). Chadbourne (2001) asserted that rather than the biological and social factors being the pivotal influencing factor on adolescent behaviour, it was more this sense of social alienation and underachievement which caused disengagement and increased the risk of young people ‘dropping out’ of school. This resulted in high levels of depression and young people engaging in at-risk behaviours such as self-harm (Withers &
Russell; 1998 Carr-Gregg 2001). Reporting on PISA 2000, the Australian Education Union (AEU) commented that Australia’s students on average, were more negative about school (AEU 2002:). Luke et al. (2002) commenting that this same report asserted that there is clear evidence to indicate that 15 year olds performance in more reflective pieces requiring higher order thinking was “poorer than many other English-speaking countries” (Luke et al. 2002:12). The PISA 2006 Report concludes that 15 year old students are seriously at risk of not “achieving levels sufficient for them to participate fully in the twenty-first century work force and to contribute to Australia as productive citizens” (OECD 2006:15).

Rowe (2002) notes that among the reasons for young people’s alienation in the middle years, particularly among boys, is a curriculum “that has become increasingly ‘contextualised’, and (in their words) ‘feminised’” (2002:7). This picture of young people’s disengagement and disenchantment is echoed in a separate report by Hill et al. (2001) who states that there is a decline in enjoyment and learning engagement amongst middle school students. These results suggest a strong correlation between disengaged learning and early school leaving or students dropping out of school altogether (Smyth et al. 2000). The costs associated with students dropping out of school are not trivial according to Hill et al. (2001): “The direct monetary and social costs to individuals, governments and the wider society of early school leaving has been estimated to be $2.6 billion a year” (2001:2). Beamon (2005) and Grandin (2008) argue that students have become not only disengaged but “disenfranchised” because of the dominant teacher pedagogy of one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning which does not take account of student diversity.

The many proponents of the middle schooling reform (Barratt 1998; Chadbourne 2001; Carrington 2002; Luke et al. 2002; Howard & Fogarty 2004; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Kemmis & Johnstone 2007; Bahr & Pendergast 2008) are calling for the creation of a new space for conceptualising adolescence. This emerging new space in education dedicated to early adolescence is only a relatively new development in Australia emerging out of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Barratt 1998; Hill & Russell 1999; Chadbourne 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Carrington 2002; Prosser 2006). Though the concept of middle schools has been popular in the USA and the UK since the early 1900s (Beane 2001; Prosser 2006) the concept of middle years of schooling is only a recent development in Australia.
Middle schooling in the USA has responded more to the issues of the low socio-economic profile of disadvantaged communities focusing on “students at risk”. Middle schools in the US were established to focus on improving retention rates, self esteem and dealing with school violence and behaviour problems (Beane 2001; Dickinson 2001; Carrington 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Prosser 2006). These innovations were recognised as an alternative tier of schooling in an already existing three-tiered system (Luke et al. 2002; Carrington 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). Therefore, middle schooling initiatives tended to be directed toward particular students who were largely socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged (Prosser 2006); and middle schooling reform seen more as an “experiment in the provision of alternative education for at risk students” (Carrington 2002:12).

While strongly influenced by the research in America, the context of change in Australia has been quite different. Firstly, Australia operates within a two-tiered model of primary and secondary schooling, which is quite different to that of the US and UK (Angus et al. 2002). Part of the attraction of the middle years’ reform in Australia is the notion of a seamless transition from primary school, with its child-centred teaching approach, to the secondary school and its commitment to subject-centred (content-centred) teaching approach (Braggett et al. 1999; Carrington 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). Secondly, reform in Australia has tended to focus on curriculum pedagogy as opposed to structural changes leading to the construction of dedicated middle schools (Chadbourne 2001; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Bahr & Pendergast 2007); though in some sectors this is beginning to occur. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the middle years of schooling reform in Australia is for all students (Carrington 2002). The literature surrounding alienation (Eyers et al. 1992; Cumming & Cormack 1996; Barratt 1998; Hill & Russell 1999; Smyth et al. 2000; Prosser 2006), pointing to the developmental challenges facing young people and the extent to which this places them at risk of disengagement, underachievement and of leaving school early, confirms the need to provide developmentally responsive middle schools to meet better the needs of these young people (Carrington 2002; Chadbourne 2002). In Australia, there has been a long history of meeting the needs of students who are most vulnerable within our education system, particularly students in rural and remote communities, Indigenous students and students ascertained with learning difficulties (Groome & Hamilton 1995; Carrington 2002; Luke et al. 2002). The middle years reform acknowledges such marginalised groups, but is inclusive of all students in its educational rhetoric.
3.4 Philosophy of the middle years of schooling

The philosophy of middle schooling and its underlying rationale are similar across the USA, UK and Australia. Each calls for changes in education to be more specifically directed to meet the developmental needs of adolescents (Barratt 1998; Beane 1999; Pendergast 2005; Manning & Butcher 2005). Furthermore, the call for alternative pedagogical approaches for the Middle Years of Schooling is strong. This call includes the centrality the integrated curriculum (Beane 1991, 1993, 1996; Barratt 1998; Hackmann & Valentine 1998; Brennan & Sachs 1998; Lingard et al. 2001; Luke et al. 2002; NMSA 1995, 2003; Lingard & Mills 2007) and authentic achievement (Newmann 1996). The authors of *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council 1989) and *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis 2000), expressed the first real sense of what high quality “whole school” education for young adolescents might look like, “offering more powerful learning environments that focused squarely on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents” (Carnegie Council 1989:36) compared to what already existed.

The middle years of schooling philosophy, within the Australian context, was also directed towards meeting the needs of early adolescents. The report by *The National Middle Schooling Project* (Barratt 1998), was an important publication in this country, because it was the first in Australia to put forward a shared vision of middle schooling.

Therefore, the emerging middle years of schooling philosophy as proposed by Barratt (1998), Jackson and Davis (2000), Smyth (2006) and others, suggest a fundamental rethink of the purposes of schooling for young adolescents which are different to the traditional forms of schooling as we know them. The middle years philosophy paints a different vision of young adolescents as ‘subjects’, engaged in popular youth culture where it becomes a site of youth advocacy, rather than being portrayed as “victims” or “trouble” (Cormack 1998). Therefore, alternative constructs of adolescence need to be articulated in order to address the decline in student achievement, engagement and well-being. The middle schooling philosophy with its clear vision and set of identifiable principles is instrumental in shaping a way forward in which to reconceptualise schooling for adolescence. A summary, drawing on both American and Australian literature, of the key principles and characteristics of the middle years of schooling philosophy, is presented in Table 3.5.
Table 3.5 An overview of the philosophy and principles of the middle years of schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Key Literature</th>
<th>US key Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Middle School Project</td>
<td>Teachers for the Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner-centred:</strong> Curriculum focused on the identified needs, interests and concerns of students with an emphasis on self directed and co-constructed learning</td>
<td>A shift toward inquiry-based learning as the modal operation for classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboratively organised:</strong> Teams of teachers who know and understand their students and deploy pedagogical strategies that challenge and extend students within a supportive learning environment</td>
<td><strong>Critical reflection</strong> on existing knowledge and customary practice including students’ own beliefs and practices The use of <strong>formally constituted subject-matter</strong> as a resource for student-focused discovery learning, testing and application Deployment of a wide variety of teaching-learning strategies in recognition of individual and cultural differences and the principle of inclusiveness Emphasis less on a ‘covering the ground’ (predetermined) syllabus and more on <strong>depth of understanding</strong> and capacity to use knowledge and skills in identifying issues, solving problems, making and doing A progressive shift away from detailed syllabus prescriptions (inputs) and toward <strong>specified learning outcomes</strong> and supporting strategies of teaching and processes of learning (‘output-process’) The rediscovery of the fundamental importance of teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome-based:</strong> Progress and achievement are recorded continuously in relation to explicit statements of what each student is expected to know and do</td>
<td><strong>Time, space, and materials</strong> are resourced to support meaningful relationships and learning <strong>School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness and safety</strong> Multifaceted guidance and support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexibly-constructed:</strong> Arrangements are responsive to local needs and circumstances, and reflect creative uses of time, space and resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethically-aware:</strong> Justice, equity, care, respect and a concern for the needs of others reflected in everyday practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community-oriented:</strong> Partnerships with parents and representatives from other community institutions and organisations beyond the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adequately-resourced:</strong> Experienced teachers and support staff are supported by high quality facilities, technology, equipment and materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategically-linked:</strong> Middle years implemented as a phase of schooling within the P-12 seamless continuum and connected to the early and senior years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Barratt (1998); Skilbeck & Connell (2004); Carnegie Council (1989); Jackson & Davis (2000); NMSA (2003)
The philosophy and principles of middle schooling (refer Table 3.5) characterise the complexities inherent in improving the achievement, engagement and well-being for young adolescents. Reconceptualising schooling for young adolescents requires change which is inherently a complex process but requires educators to respond effectively to ensure improvement in educational outcomes for young people.

The middle years of schooling, with its emphasis on a reformist political agenda, embraces social change. According to Gates (1994), successful implementation of the middle years of schooling philosophy by schools will require a recognition of not only the characteristics of adolescence but also “a critical understanding of how socio-economic status shapes and constructs experience and meaning for young people” (Gates 1994:49). Furthermore, to improve achievement, motivation and engagement of young people in schooling will first require addressing the equity and social justice issues of social difference and diversity, to ensure socially just middle schooling (Gates 1994; Cormack 1998). Not to do so will perpetuate the continued decline in achievement levels in schooling from the most vulnerable groups of young people (Gates 1994; Luke et al. 2002).

In the US, according to Beane (1993), middle schooling has become more “rhetoric than reality”. Moreover, Beane (2001), describes the middle schools movement in the USA as a “wasteland” which is on its “last legs” and that middle schooling in the US has reached a stage of “arrested development” where the middle schooling philosophy has not been fully implemented and as a consequence, is vulnerable to criticism from neoconservative forces who view adolescence as an ideology. Beane (2005) argues strongly that this is a key factor in explaining why middle schooling in the US is in a state of “arrested development”. Furthermore, not bringing the socio-cultural construct to bear is to ignore the significant social locations of young people and the social injustice they suffered at the hands of neoconservative politics (Beane 2001).

According to Whitehead (2006), this does not reflect the Australian experience, but she warns against complacency because education in this country is in the hands of neoconservative politics (Carrington 2002; Pendergast 2005; Whitehead 2006; Prosser 2006). In light of this increasing criticism, the decreasing investment by government in the middle years of schooling reform (Prosser 2006) and the vigorous reinstatement of the traditional curriculum
by the neoconservatives (Whitehead 2006; Prosser 2006) as evidence in the present national curriculum debate (Reid 2009), may pose a threat to the sustainability of the middle years of schooling ethos and vision. In addition, the leadership that has been taken to improve the educational life chances of young people, by implementing the middle years of schooling philosophy, is also at risk. As middle schooling philosophy continues to be a contested discourse thereby making it a productive educational space where critical reflection and conversation are ripe, this might go some way to ensuring that Australia transcends this “arrested development” that has plagued the US middle schooling reform movement.

The development of the philosophy surrounding the middle years of schooling is challenging the dominant two-tier system of primary and secondary education in an effort to provide a seamless transition from primary (which is child-centred) to secondary schooling (which is subject or discipline-centred). Furthermore, the middle schooling reform proposes changes to teaching practice leading to more effective student learning that is life-long and allows schools the opportunity to be more responsive to adolescents’ developmental needs and their particular social locations (Beane 1993; Braggett 1997; Barratt 1998; Jackson & Davis 2000; Dickinson 2001; Carrington 2002; Whitehead 2006; Hunter 2006; Bah & Pendergast 2007; Nayler 2006, 2009). In addition, it is shifting the teaching and learning focus to a constructivist child-centred pedagogy where all students have the opportunity to succeed (Beane 1991; Cumming 1996; Cormack1998; Barratt 1998; Chadbourne 2001; Carrington 2002). However, most of all, middle schooling is proposing a new education space of hope and optimism for socially equitable middle schooling (Brennan & Sachs 1998; Cormack 1998; Beane 2001, 2005; McInerney & Smyth 2004; Russell 2006; Hunter 2006; Carrington 2002, 2006). A commitment to this will facilitate Beane’s “large and compelling social vision” for the middle years of schooling (Chadbourne 2001; Luke et al. 2002, Whitehead 2006).

3.4.1 Locating the middle years of schooling

Much of the early middle years of schooling philosophy portray middle years’ reform as a project designed to build bridges between primary and secondary school; between the two-tiered approaches to teaching and learning practice, and between the school and community (Williamson & Johnston 1998; Barratt 1998; Leckey 2000; Knipe & Johnstone 2007). *The Middle Years of Schooling Forum* (Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) 2000) commenced their report by describing middle schooling as “the phase of schooling bridging
primary and secondary education” (2000: vi). The National Middle Schooling Project (Barratt 1998) also uses this metaphor of a bridge to describe the middle years’ reform:

Middle schooling is a term describing a phase of schooling which bridges the conventional primary/secondary divide with a view to responding more effectively to the specific developmental needs of young adolescents (Barratt 1998:5).

The purpose of this bridge is designed to smooth over those transitional disruptions brought on by the developmental changes taking place in the young person. It is also argued as important in alleviating some of the problems of structural changes associated with the movement from one tier, primary school, to the second tier, that of secondary school.

At the time of writing the Federal Government, eight State and Territory Government education authorities, except for the West Australian government, all share a common Labor Party (left wing rather than conservative) political ideology. However, each state and territory has not been able to reach consensus on what constitutes the middle years of schooling phases in this country. Carrington (2006) asserts that reform of the middle years in Australia “is as much a political issue as it is an educational one” (2006:86). Chadbourne (2001) draws attention to this factor of the middle schooling reform occurring at the time of restructuring of education as an economic rather than a social rationale for reform (Finn 1991; Mayer 1992; Carmichael 1992). According to Whitehead (2006), Western countries, including Australia, have been strongly influenced by neoconservative politics with the return to basics characterised by a “curriculum of skills and drills” and basic skills testing (Williamson & Johnston 1999; Beane 2001; Dickinson 2001). Educational reform, like the middle years, with its learner-centred pedagogy, integrated curriculum, team teaching and, block scheduling has been criticised by politicians, the business community and some education commentators as “dumbing down” the curriculum and letting standards slip, resulting in, what the general community perceives to be failing to prepare students for the workforce (Whitehead 2006). Moreover, political pressure of this type has seen schools return to the “3Rs at the primary level and the standardised narrow academic curriculum of the secondary school” (Whitehead 2006:62). At the heart of this “back to basics” movement is a conceptualisation of adolescence as a time of uncertainty with regard to physical, social and emotional development that perpetuates the notion that young people need to be controlled and under constant surveillance.
There is evidence that there are different models of middle schooling being developed in each state and territory of Australia. There is, at the same time, an inability by government and the private sector to reach a consensus concerning the educational needs of early adolescence and appropriate approaches to the middle years of schooling (Bahr & Pendergast 2007). Furthermore, this is qualified in The Future of Schooling in Australia: Report by the States and Territories (Council for the Australian Federation (CAF) 2007), where the issue of the learning needs of early adolescence is not identified as a priority. While, early childhood and transitions to work were identified as key priorities for federal funding, the plight of the adolescent was not. Therefore, what is evident in Australia at this historical moment (Reid 2009) is a lack of commitment by government to adolescent learning in new times; a unique array of perspectives and understandings of the middle years of schooling across sectors, states and territories; and a reshaping of national curriculum that has little or no regard for the middle years of schooling. The difference between the states and territories and the lack of unison that exists is demonstrated in Figure 3.3. The variations that exists between states and territories in the definitions and implementation of the middle years of schooling philosophy is demonstrated in Figure 3.3 and is expanded below by detailing the positioning of middle schooling in each state and territory, in turn.
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Figure 3.3 Perspectives of middle years of schooling in Australian States and Territories

Victoria (Vic)

In Victoria the term used to describe this phase of learning is the ‘middle years of schooling’ and includes Years 5 to 8. It is a period of schooling for young adolescents with particular reference to ensure a smooth transition from primary school to secondary school. Middle schooling in Victoria has been particularly informed by research through The Middle Years Pedagogy Research and Development Project (MYPRAD) of the early 2000s. The MYPRAD project developed a three year strategy for planning and implementing change in the Middle Years of Schooling across all schooling sectors in Victoria. It is particularly committed to improving learning outcomes for all students in the middle years, in particular literacy and numeracy and, regards student engagement and well-being as fundamental elements of middle years reform. The strategy endorses most of the National Middle Schooling Project (Barratt 1998) values underpinning middle schooling practices: learner-centred, collaboratively...
organised, outcomes based, flexibly constructed, ethically aware, community oriented and adequately resourced (Adapted from DEECD 2007).

**Western Australia (WA)**
In Western Australia the term adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is ‘middle schooling’ and includes Years 7 to 10. Early adolescence is described as spanning the age range from 11-15 years. The middle years’ strategy has been informed by the Ministerial Committee on Middle Schooling (MCMS), Planning for Middle Schooling in Western Australia (Jackson 1999). A number of schools across different sectors have adopted middle schooling principles and practices. The Department of Education and Training (DET) stipulate three bands of education in the compulsory years, that is, Years K to 10: Early Childhood – Years K to 3, Middle Childhood – Years 4 to 7, Early Adolescence – Years 8 to 10. The aim of the middle schooling strategy is to improve the relevance of schooling to adolescents and to ensure adolescent needs are better met to improve learning engagement (Adapted from Jackson 1999, DET 2009)

**Tasmania (Tas)**
In Tasmania the term adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is the ‘middle years of schooling’ flexibly defined as Years 5 and 6 to Years 8 or 9. Curriculum reform in secondary education is the dominant theme of all middle schooling efforts. Middle schooling concept is not widespread in Tasmania (Adapted from DET 2005, 2008).

**South Australia (SA)**
In South Australia the term adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is the ‘middle years of schooling’ and is defined as a band Years 6 to 9. The middle years concept has been informed by the Junior Secondary Review: The education of young adolescents (Eyers 1992) and became a milestone document in exploring middle schooling philosophies and practices, not only in South Australia but in other States and Territories as well. From the early 1990s South Australia has been strongly involved in middle years’ reform focusing on improving literacy, numeracy, engagement and mental health outcomes for young people. There exists a strong network of school teachers and academics involved in teaching and researching the principles underpinning the Middle Years of Schooling concept. Recently, the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework was adopted for all
bands: Early Years Reception (R) to 2, Primary Years 3 to 5, Middle Years 6 to 9 and Senior Years 10 to 12 to assist schools to shape curriculum delivery appropriate to the needs of learners (Adapted from DECS 2007; SACSA 2009)

**New South Wales (NSW)**
In New South Wales the term adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is ‘middle years’ and is defined as Years 5 to 8, that is, the last two years of primary, Stage 3, and the first two years of secondary education Stage 4. The middle years’ concept has been informed by the Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training: One size doesn’t fit all (DET 2005). However, given the NSW Board of Studies legislative requirements and existing school structure, middle years initiatives need to be accounted for in Years K-6 and Years 7-10 syllabus development activities. Schools have been encouraged to establish middle school projects to raise awareness of the learning needs of middle years’ students. These projects have involved:

- Transition programs across primary and secondary school;
- Establishing home rooms in Year 7 for core subjects;
- Focusing on teacher student relationships;
- Addressing the fragmentation of the secondary curriculum;
- Teacher professional development;
- Focusing on improvements in literacy and numeracy levels through subject specific literacy and numeracy (Adapted from DET 2005, 2006).

**Northern Territory (NT)**
In the Northern Territory the adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is the ‘middle years of schooling’ and is defined as Years 7 to 9. Adolescence is describes as spanning the age range from 11 to 14 years. The middle years of schooling concept has been informed by the report *Framework for the principles and policies for the middle years in the Northern Territory* (DEET 2006). The strategy endorses the National Middle Schooling Project (Barratt 1998) values underpinning middle schooling practices: learner-centred, collaboratively organised, outcomes based, flexibly constructed, ethically aware, community oriented, adequately resourced and strategically linked. The middle years strategy is concerned with improving transitions from primary school to secondary school, developing an integrated
curriculum, improving literacy and numeracy levels and prioritising gender issues, especially to improve learning outcomes for boys. The NT Government in 2008 opened its first dedicated, purpose built middle school, the Darwin Middle School. This represents a new era in education in the NT, with the development of dedicated middle schools designed to meet the distinctive learning needs of young adolescents (Adapted from DEET 2006, DET 2009).

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

In the Australian Capital Territory the term adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is the ‘middle years’ and is defined as Years 6 to 8. Early adolescence is described as spanning the age range from 11 to 15 years. The middle years of schooling concept has been informed by Teaching and learning in the middle years in the ACT (DET 2005). The study provides a framework centred on good teaching and learning that is responsive to the characteristics and needs of young adolescent learners. The study identifies issues surrounding transition from primary school to secondary school, continuity of teacher teams over two years and advocates a reorganisation of learning time into long blocks of time (Adapted from DET 2005).

Queensland (Qld)

In Queensland the term adopted by government to describe this phase of learning is the middle phase of learning and is defined as Years 4 to 9. It identifies two stages: Year 4 to 5 and Years 6 to 9. The middle years of schooling concept has been informed by See the future: The middle phase of learning state school action plan (Education Queensland 2003) and The middle phase of learning (MACER 2003). The Action Plan sets direction, clarifies expectations and accountabilities and commits systemic support for the middle phase of learning in every Queensland state school. It calls for greater alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to ensure a rigorous middle years learning experience. The action plan is organised into five key action areas:

- Accountability - which recognises the middle phase as a legitimate organisational structure to support improvement in learning outcomes in this phase of learning;
- Curriculum, teaching and assessment – improving engagement and connecting the curriculum for deeper understanding and high expectations;
- Achievement - with particular focus on improving literacy and numeracy;
• Transition - through providing a seamless education between primary and secondary schooling;
• Teachers - through prioritising support for professional learning (Adapted from Education Queensland 2003)

This national profile (refer Figure 3.3) reflects considerable interest from all State and Territory jurisdictions in the middle years of schooling, affirming that early adolescence implicitly/explicitly is creating a new space dedicated to the education of early adolescence around Australia. Pendergast (2007c) suggests that even with the plurality of models, what emerges is one consistent theme: “middle years learners are recognised as having unique developmental attributes” (2007c:216) and each education authority recognises this.

With considerable investment in the middle years of schooling from governments around the country, even though there is no commonly agreed model of middle schooling, this investment is considered a strength of the reform (Pendergast 2005), as it enables a “plurality” of approaches that can be applied in specific contexts. Alternatively, the lack of a national consensus is also a weakness that presents difficulties in measuring and comparing differences between the diversity of approaches to the middle schooling concept. To offset this, Matters & Masters (2007), propose a model of commonality across Key Learning Areas (KLA’s) at Year 12 as a pathway towards a national curriculum which could be applied to the middle years of schooling approaches in all jurisdictions.

3.4.2 Middle years of schooling philosophy and practice

From a reading of the literature on adolescence one could be forgiven for thinking that the middle years of schooling reform is a form of risk management, a form of containment to protect society from the descriptions implicit in this problematic age of adolescence and adolescents (McLean 2001). The proponents (Barratt 1998; Chadbourne 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Carrington 2006; Nayler 2009) of the middle years of schooling reform in Australia are proposing to chart a new course which aims to manage adolescents through this period of uncertainty, by providing direction regarding the teaching and learning needs of adolescents. This focus will offer improved life chances for these young people who are “disengaged”, “disruptive”, “bored”, “disaffected” “alienated” and “disenfranchised” in their current experience of schooling (Hargreaves et al. 1996; Cumming &
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Cormack 1996; Hill & Rowe 1996; Smyth et al. 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Beamon 2005; Patel-Stevens et al. 2007; Grandin 2008). The report, Beyond the Middle (Luke et al. 2002) drew attention to the following issues and concerns facing the education of middle years learners in arguing the need for reform of the Middle Years of Schooling. Luke et al. (2002) highlight the following concerns with traditional curricula constructs:

- A mismatch between learning outcomes, assessment and reporting practices, in particular, a tendency to ‘dumb-down’ curriculum by teaching to the test;
- An over emphasis on subject content and less attention to productive pedagogies, multi-literacies and a deeper understanding of curriculum issues;
- A lack of high expectations and intellectual rigour and relevance in the choice of curriculum themes and topics; and
- A tendency to view middle schooling as a separate phase of learning as opposed to a more general developmental phase in the education of young adolescents (Adapted from Luke et al. 2002).

Similarly, Lingard et al. (2001) claim that there has been too much emphasis placed on structural change rather than on changing pedagogical practices. Lingard et al. (2001) recommend that schools need to be engaged more in ‘capacity building’ where teacher professional development programs become the cornerstone in changing pedagogical practices which will result in improved social and academic outcomes” (2001:xxi). Luke et al. (2002) argues there needs to be a “fresh approach to middle years’ philosophy” that enables all young Australians to “successfully move from schooling into the workplace and to gain their independence by moving successfully from adolescence to adulthood” (Luke et al. 2002:10).

Moreover, change in the middle years will require going beyond the present emphases on engagement, alienation, curriculum integration and ethos of care. A “fresh approach” to the middle years’ philosophy will require taking into account the changing social and economic conditions that reflect the present and future contextualised notion of young people in the middle years. As noted earlier, the middle years’ reform has a clear mandate for all adolescents to succeed in schooling. Therefore, to achieve this social justice vision, young people need to be given opportunities to understand their social world and youth identities in the context of transition, developing a set of practices that inform their learning and education that enhances their participation in society (Luke et al. 2002; Hunter 2006).
3.5 Society’s expectations of young adolescents

The challenge of establishing new forms of teaching and/or schooling attuned to young peoples’ distinctive needs challenges the existing two-tier system of governance in education. Primary and secondary schooling in Australia represents a cultural divide between primary school, with its strong pastoral and learner-centred approach and secondary school with its strong academic, individualist and fragmented subject centred approach needs to be reformed (Chadbourne 2001; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Nayler 2009). How to bridge this education divide, on the one hand, with structural changes leading to dedicated middle schools, and on the other, to incorporate pedagogical changes, is a much contested area (Carrington 2006; Hayes et al. 2006). The early literature in Australia (Eyers et al. 1992) suggests that structural changes are not the solution, rather it is pedagogical change that is required. However, in the most recent literature, Smyth et al. (2003) and Caldwell & Harris (2008), suggest both structural and pedagogical change is necessary. What is of great importance to the middle years of schooling reform is the centrality of the teacher as the key to educational reform and innovation.

In attempts to address the ongoing bifurcation of schooling, a set of guiding principles for developmentally responsive middle schools have been proposed by authors of a wide range of Australian and international literature. According to Hill and Russell (1999), the most commonly agreed middle school principles for guiding curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are:

- Provide education based on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents;
- Design a holistic, integrated approach to change, involving all aspects of schooling including curriculum design, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, school organisation and school culture;
- Establish sound philosophical base and a shared set of theoretical constructs and beliefs concerning middle years reform;
- Partner students in the development of the curriculum, the way learning is organised and monitored and in other aspects of the life of the school community;
- Foster close relationships between students and teachers, so that teachers know and understand each student and students feel supported and connected to the school;
• Encourage collaborative work by teachers in the planning and teaching of groups of young adolescents;

• Provide flexible use of time, space and other resources, replacing traditional timetables and room allocations which run counter to the learning needs of young adolescents;

• Use an outcomes based approach, with ongoing recording of progress and achievement in relation to explicit expectations of students;

• Provide continuity between the three phases of schooling: the early, middle and senior years, while giving recognition to the different needs of each phase;

• Involve parents and the community in productive partnerships in relation to the education of young adolescents;

• Insist on fair and adequate share of resources, especially in terms of staff, facilities, technology, equipment and materials; and

• Implement new approaches to change based on strategies and theories that help organisations to learn (Adapted from Hill & Russell 1999:6).

There is evidence (Luke et al. 2002; Hargreaves 2003; Trifonas 2003; Smyth et al. 2003; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Beamon 2005; Hayes et al. 2006; Lynch & Smith 2006; Lingard & Mills 2007; Fullan 2007; Grandin 2008) that schooling which ignores these principles is fast becoming “redundant” and “irrelevant” and lack the “intellectual capital” to re-engineer systems to fit the characteristics and needs of the learning society (Hammer 1996; Cumming & Owen 2001; Beare 2001; Keamy et al. 2003; Hargreaves 2003; Lynch & Smith 2006; Fullan 2007; Hunter 2007). While there are many proponents of the middle years reform, their calls for pedagogical and teacher change have not been widely accepted. Some analysts (Donnelly 2004, 2007) consider the middle years’ philosophy as a fad, left wing and not legitimate reform and argue for the consolidation of the discipline/subject based approach within a high stakes testing regime to measure student performance. The middle years’ philosophy is complex and therefore, the difficulty of implementing the Middle Years of Schooling philosophy in Australia should not be ignored. Equally, difficulty should not be an excuse for opposing this reform. The proponents of reform in the middle years need to objectively and thoroughly consider why, in certain jurisdictions, it is not working the way it was intended. Despite this, the middle years of schooling reform is increasingly being recognised as a new space in the educational landscape of Australia, which this study informs.
3.6 The teacher of early adolescence

The world events of the twenty-first century, including 9/11, the Bali bombing, and the current war in Iraq, together with the local and national impacts of economic and cultural globalisation, have posed some major challenges for Australian education. Some of these challenges raise fundamental questions about how teachers educate young people and how they might learn to place the needs of young people at the centre of education. In a society that is characterised by its emphasis on the rights of the individual, a significant challenge for teachers according to the literature (Hargreaves 2003) for teachers in these unprecedented “new times” (Hall 1996:224), is how to educate young people to live together with difference and celebrate that difference (Lipsitz 1984; Withers & Russell 1998; Lingard et al. 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Hayes et al. 2006; Crawford & Rossiter 2006; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007; Freeman & Watson 2008).

What is becoming apparent in this new technological age with its learning-based technologies is that educational approaches of “one size doesn’t fit all” (NSW DET 2005:1) can no longer accommodate the diversity of abilities, interests, and experiences of learners. Globalisation characterises the “learning society” (Hargreaves 2003), as the knowledge society, henceforth learning society. Globalisation is redefining what it means to work and live in these “new times” (Hall 1996:224) and what schools and teachers must acquire in order to grasp this new information rich world (Beare & Slaughter 1993; Edgar 1999; Beare 2001; Drucker 2002; Hargreaves 2003; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; US Department of Education 2004). The need for schools and teachers to be responsive to students in the learning society requires systemic reform of education, as is evidenced in the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) (Lingard et al. 2001), 2010 Queensland State Education (Education Queensland 2000); New Basics (Education Queensland 2001), Beyond the Middle (Luke et al. 2002); Developing Lifelong Learners in the Middle Years of Schooling (Pendergast et al. 2005), and Professional Standards for Teachers (Education Queensland 2005). This does mandate educators to respond more creatively to the needs generated by the learning society.

The middle schooling initiative in Australia challenges many of the traditional roles, functions and attributes of teachers by questioning current schooling practices. These practices reflect a nineteenth century origin which valued the attribute of a teacher-centred transmission of knowledge, a passive learning environment and a one size fits all approach within established
traditions. According to the literature these practices are no longer viable (Hargreaves 1997; Beare 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Smyth et al. 2003; Lynch & Smith 2006, 2007; Pendergast & Bahr 2005, 2007; Caldwell & Harris 2008). Such a schooling system is vulnerable to the rapid changes, both historical and cultural in a globalised world with its hallmark knowledge economy (Edgar 1999; Cumming & Owen 2001; Lynch & Smith 2006; Skilbeck & Connell 2004) and the marketisation of education (Edgar 1999; Lingard et al. 2001; Beare 2001; Hargreaves 2003; McInerney & Smyth 2004; Crawford & Rossiter 2007). Peter Senge (1990), believes that business is the “locus of innovation” while “non-profit organisations” like schools are less able to “experiment” and therefore “innovate” because school education reflects the “controlling organisation” associated with the industrial age. He argues “just as the machine metaphor shaped the thinking that created schools in the industrial age, the emerging understanding of living systems can guide thinking for the future” (Senge et al. 2000:52). Critical to Senge’s thesis is the creation of a learning organisation where innovative ideas can flourish. Therefore, the function and requirement of the teacher in the learning society has fundamentally changed and is now focused more on the teacher as a learner; a lifelong learner who is creative and innovative.

With many of today’s young people “bored”, “disinterested”, “disengaged” and “disenfranchised” from their learning, schools have tended to respond to this phenomenon of intrinsic lack of interest with an over-compensating practice of extrinsic rewards, rather than change teaching practice (Lynch & Smith 2006). According to some of the literature (Beamon 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Hargreaves 2003; Trifonas 2003; Smyth et al. 2003; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Hayes et al. 2006; Lynch & Smith 2006; Lingard & Mills 2007; Grandin 2008) schooling as it is currently enacted is fast becoming “redundant” and “irrelevant”. Furthermore, it is argued teachers and the leaders of schools lack the “intellectual capital” to re-engineer themselves to become more relevant to the young people this reform is directed toward (Hammer 1996). Currently, school systems lack the capacity to fulfil the needs of the learning society (Hammer 1996; Senge et al. 2000; Cumming & Owen 2001; Beare 2001; Keamy et al. 2003; Hargreaves 2003; Lynch & Smith 2006; Hunter 2007), and more specifically, in their existing form are unable to satisfy the needs of young people.
3.6.1 A creative and innovative teacher

The report *Innovation: Unlocking the Future* (Innovation Summit Implementation Group (ISIG) 2000) argues innovation involves a culture that nurtures new ideas which lead to effective learning and teaching. Furthermore, Beare (2001), asserts that educators need to free themselves from the old paradigm of the industrial age and see learning in schools as an enterprise of creative ideas. The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration paper on *Teachers Working with Young Adolescents* (1996) and the Commonwealth Government’s *Review of Teaching and Teacher Education: A Discussion Paper* (Commonwealth of Australia 2003) argued that innovation is a process by which schools and teachers can develop in “all students” the capacity to be creative in order to live productive lives. However, the teacher first needs to be creative and innovative, modelling such practices that engage and motivate students, leading to improved learning outcomes (Skilbeck & Connell 2004). Cumming and Owen (2001) stress the interactive nature of innovation and identify a set of eleven principles which underpin innovative learning and teaching practices. They state that learning and teaching of this type:

- Requires a vision;
- Is customer driven and bottom line focused;
- Requires a foundation of ethics;
- Begins with a clean slate;
- Looks at the whole system;
- Requires a diverse, information and interaction rich environment;
- Requires a risk tolerant environment;
- Involves and rewards every member of the organisation;
- Is an ongoing process;
- Requires a continuous scan of future trends;
- Requires a learning orientation (2001:8).

The middle years of schooling initiative is seen as innovation stemming from a “coalition of diverse reformers”, promising fundamental changes in “school organisation, curriculum, instruction and student outcomes” (Cuban 1992:230). In Queensland, innovation is seen as the catalyst to “reshape” and “rebuild” school organisational structures, curriculum, pedagogy, ultimately changing the way teachers’ work with young people (Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) 2005). Other educationalists suggest that “innovation is an activity that utilises knowledge” (Commonwealth of Australia 2003:15); “is a process by which ideas are transformed” (Commonwealth of Australia 2003:9); “is one dimension of teacher
professionalism” (Cumming & Owen 2001); and, according to Ted Robinson (2006); “is an original idea that is valid.”

The creative and innovative teacher is often described as passionate, an attribute so often named, presupposes a love of learning and a love of teaching (Killen 2007). The passionate teacher brings a contagious energy to the learning environment by propelling the subject, not the teacher, into the centre of the learning process, enabling students to draw from this energy for their own learning and life (Marsh 2008). An Australian study (Lingard et al. 2002) provided insights into young adolescents concerning their perceptions of what makes an effective middle school teacher. The study found an effective middle school teacher will have the following characteristics:

- A caring attitude;
- Committed to teaching;
- A sense of responsibility to students;
- Makes learning interesting and relevant;
- Builds a relationship of mutual respect;
- Interested in students' life outside the classroom;
- Supports student diversity;
- Has a sense of social justice and equity; and
- Has a broad knowledge base (Adapted from Lingard et al. 2002: 65).

Therefore, the notion of a middle school teacher with its own unique set of attributes is shedding new light on the importance of the teacher in this reform. So much so, that it is questioning the default position that the attributes of the teacher are generic to the profession and not usually differentiated across sectors.

The concept ‘teacher’ and ‘teaching’ cover a wide and diverse range of interpretations and functions. Similarly, there is a range of teacher functions that specifically caters to particular target groups: early years, junior years, primary years, middle years, secondary years, senior years. These functions vary due to location: Catholic Systemic, Independent, Christian and Public. Teaching has been described as “diffuse” (Beare 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Hargreaves 2003; Prosser 2006) suggesting a degree of ambiguity. This ambiguity in terms of
The role and function of the teacher has tended to identify the teacher attributes as generic not differentiated from other teachers (Cumming & Owen 2001; Hargreaves 2003; Skilbeck & Connell 2004). Qualifying this point, Skilbeck and Connell (2004), attempt to identify the complexity of roles and functions of teachers in these “new times” (Hall 1996:224). They include the teacher as:

- Classroom organiser of students’ learning and assessor of learning;
- Curriculum planner/adaptor;
- Behaviour manager;
- Image or role model, if not paragon;
- Values educator;
- Religious educator;
- Social worker;
- Health worker;
- Emotional support person;
- School-home liaison;
- Risk-manager;
- Administrator;
- Active, responsible member of school community with a variety of duties beyond the classroom; and
- Community presence notably in provincial towns, rural and remote school (Skilbeck & Connell 2004:34-35).

When attempting to describe more specifically the learning and teaching roles of the teacher, it becomes clear that the roles and functions are portrayed as generic across the different boundaries of schooling, that is, primary and secondary schools. Teachers in Australian primary schools are described as “generalists” (Cumming & Owen 2001; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Pendergast 2005), who teach the one class each day across the whole curriculum of eight Key Learning Areas (KLA’s). Secondary school teachers in Australia are described as “specialists” (Cumming & Owen 2001; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Pendergast & Bahr 2005), who teach in at least two subject areas and have allocated release time for preparation. The emerging middle years’ teacher, with dual identity of being ‘in between’ primary and secondary is striving to forge its own new and unique identity, an identity which is quite different to the traditional primary and secondary school. As noted earlier, the middle years is bridging a traditional cultural divide in education (Braggett 1997; Chadbourne 2001; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Pendergast 2005; Bryer & Main 2005). Young people who are already experiencing the challenges of adolescence are also required to deal simultaneously with the discontinuities and anxieties associated with moving from a primary school culture and adapting to a different
secondary school culture (Eyres et al 1992; Hargreaves et al. 1996; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Skilbect & Connell 2004; Braggett 1997). To further bridge this cultural divide the literature recommends teachers work much more collaboratively and in teams, with trans-disciplinary approaches to curriculum, in small learning communities within a dedicated middle school structure (Beane 1991, 1996; Barratt, 1998; Cumming, 1998; Chadbourne 2001, 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005, Prosser 2006; Bahr & Pendergast 2007). This is in contrast to traditional views to locate the teacher in one sector. The lack of role differentiation points to some specific challenges for the middle school teacher as she tries to attune herself to young peoples’ needs and characteristics. Hargreaves (2003) argues, “Teachers must learn to teach in ways they have not been taught” (2003:16) and to regularly up-grade themselves. Teaching in new ways necessitates a review the teacher’s own professional learning and incorporate evidence-based learning into their repertoire of practice.

Teachers and schools “can make a difference” (Lingard 1998; Cutterance & Stokes 2001; Rowe 2002; Hattie 2003; Dinham & Rowe 2008). Despite claims by Hayes et al. (2006), teachers do not make all the difference. Cumming and Owen (2001) state categorically that effective teachers can achieve “extraordinary things” through creative and innovative practices (Cumming & Owen 2001:2, 5, 7). The middle years of schooling reform is an innovation in the delivery of the learning and teaching for young adolescents, leading to whole school improvement (Barratt 1998; Cumming 1998; Hill et al. 2001; Chadbourne 2001; Bryer & Main 2005; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Prosser 2006; Nayler 2006). As such it requires teachers who are “innovative and creative” and are prepared to learn from each other if, as a result of reform they are to make a difference (Cumming & Owen 2001). If the teacher is to be creative and innovative, this can be quite challenging and daunting, as it requires the teacher to take risks in trialling new ideas and sometimes this means “[sticking] putting your neck out” (Cumming & Owen 2001:15). However, to date, the qualities of such a teacher remain ill-defined in the empirical literature.

3.6.2 Pedagogical practices and the middle school teacher

Pedagogical practices are defined as developing curriculum intent to provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in intellectually challenging and real-world learning experiences (Queensland Studies Authority 2008). For the teacher of the middle years, learning and teaching methods used to generate new ways of diffusing and using knowledge
within the learning society are transforming the approaches to learning and therefore to teaching. According to the literature (Jackson & Davis 2000; Carrington 2002; Hattie 2003; Manning & Butcher 2005; Pendergast et al. 2007), teachers need to be responsive to this new environment of the learning society which demands creativity and the ability to communicate and adapt to discontinuous change. Lovat (2003) believes that any reform, like the middle years reform, must go hand-in-hand with “pedagogical reform”. According to the U.S. National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), there is a clear expectation that “teachers have a pedagogical content knowledge to expand their repertoire of instructional methods and strategies” (NBPTS 2002: 21) that take account of particular contexts to ensure improved learning and teaching outcomes.

Pendergast et al. (2007), argue that one of the main barriers to effective and successful education reform in the middle years is the lack of a wide repertoire of teaching strategies to engage students and that ultimately improve student learning outcomes. Jackson and Davis (2000), found that student performance improved as a result of substantial changes in teacher pedagogical practices. Building on the Carnegie Council (1989) report, Jackson and Davis (2000), stated that the purpose of “middle grades” education is for every student “to think creatively, to identify and solve meaningful problems, to communicate, work well with others, develop a base of factual knowledge and skills as the essential foundation for higher order capacities” (2000:10-11). The implication for the teacher, therefore, is to create effective learning environments conducive to new ways of teaching and learning.

As Rowe (2002), identifies: “effective schools are only effective to the extent that they have effective teachers” (2002:9). An effective middle years teacher needs to be “innovative and creative” and to possess a “wide repertoire of teaching strategies” (NMSA 1995, 2001, Jackson & Davis 2000; Lingard et al. 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Commonwealth of Australia 2003; Smyth et al. 2003; Hayes et al. 2006).

While this study is identifying the teacher as the key to making a significant difference in terms of student learning outcomes, the focus of the empirical research highlights a range of alternative influences effecting student learning outcomes. These include home, school, principals and peers (Hattie 2003). According to Hattie (2003), the “greatest” influence on student learning outcomes is the teacher, that is:
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In emphasising the quality of the teacher as the most important variable on student learning performance, Hattie (2003), identified six variables that influence student performance: students, teachers, home, principals, peers and school. Hattie (2003) concluded that much more attention and resources are required to be directed to enhancing teacher quality so as to raise the expectations of students to meet appropriate challenges. It is clear from Figure 3.4 that the greatest cause of variance that can make all the difference is the teacher.

**Figure 3.4** Sources of variance in student’s performance (Adapted from Hattie 2003)

The Schools Council (1990) in Australia reported that “teaching is an intensely human activity” (1990:46). In addition, the Schools Council (1990) identified that it was the teachers’ capacities, attributes and beliefs that will ultimately influence student achievement, engagement and well-being. Other educationalists (Carrington 2002) have argued that pedagogical practice must match the diverse learning, interests, and developmental needs of young adolescents.

A focus on changing pedagogical practices has been a driving force behind the middle years reform as student performance developed patterns of decline, with a corresponding trend in the decline of student achievement and engagement (Barratt 1998; Chadbourne 2001; Lingard et al. 2001; Carrington 2002, 2006; Education Queensland 2003; Pendergast et al. 2005). In Queensland, Lingard et al. (2001) reported relatively low levels of intellectual
challenge, connectedness and recognition of difference in classrooms across Queensland schools. Some educationalists (Education Queensland 2003) contribute this pattern of declining performance to the change from subject-centred pedagogy to a learner-centred pedagogy. However, according to Lingard et al. (2001), high quality teaching and learning is grounded in a pedagogy that values high order thinking and connects with students' backgrounds and worlds beyond the classroom; and is conducted in learning environments that recognise and values difference (Lingard et al. 2001; Hayes et al. 2006). Hence, Lingard et al. (2001) recommend a range of ‘productive’ pedagogies, assessment and performance, to arrest this decline in student performance. The ‘productive’ pedagogies framework form the basis of ‘signature practices’ of middle schooling and embrace a learner-centred focus, integrated and constructivist teaching and learning; creative and critical thinking, problem solving; co-operative and collaborative learning (Beane 1991; Chadbourne 2001; Lingard et al. 2001; Pendergast et al. 2005; Carrington 2006). However, creating such conditions to optimise learning has some way to go before it is achieved. The research (Hayes et al. 2006; Carrington 2006), reveals limited use of productive pedagogies in classrooms, with continued low levels of engaging students in stimulating intellectual activities, a curriculum design that is not aligned with student life-worlds and with little recognition of difference. Furthermore, as writers explore student responses to learning, motivation and engagement (Pendergast et al. 2005; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Groundwater-Smith 2007) it becomes clear that students want an element of choice and independence in pursuing their own learning. Students are looking for more ‘hands-on’ real world problem solving activities that are engaging and intellectually challenging (Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast et al. 2005). Therefore, students are expecting much more involvement in and partnering with the teacher in the learning process. However, these ways of working with young people are not widespread in the middle years’ classroom, the implications of which seriously constrain the construction of quality learning environments. Moreover, in an environment where there is clear evidence of continued decline in middle years' achievement, the need to improve pedagogies and curriculum design in this sector of schooling has never been more urgent (Hayes et al. 2006).

Over the past two decades there has been a burgeoning of support for integrated constructivist approaches to curriculum design within authentic learning environments for young adolescents (Beane 1991, 1993, 1996; Mayer 1992; QBTR 1996; Neumann 1996; Jackson & Davis 2000; Lingard et al. 2001; Luke et al. 2002; NMSA 2003a; Carrington 2002,
2006; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Nayler 2009). This research strongly recommends authentic achievement, productive pedagogy, making meaning, relevance and connectedness of education with the real world of the learner to ensure improvement in student learning outcomes. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008) identified one of its goals as “enhancing middle years’ development” (2008:12). The declaration explained:

The middle years are an important period of learning, in which knowledge of fundamental disciplines is developed, yet this is also a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning. Student motivation and engagement in these years is critical, and can be influenced by tailoring approaches to teaching, with learning activities and learning environments that specifically consider the needs of middle years students (MCEETYA 2008:12).

This puts middle years of schooling squarely on the national education agenda, following a decade of isolated policy formation by state and territory governments in this area. As Garrick et al. (2008) note, “the literature concerning schooling suggests that education systems, both internationally and here in Australia, are increasingly recognising the need for middle schooling initiatives” (2008: 254).

Barratt (1998) and Cumming (1998) identified specific needs of young adolescents as identity, relationships, purpose, empowerment, success, rigour and safety needing to be addressed in the middle years of schooling curriculum. It is argued, the curriculum of the middle years is underpinned by the principles of a learning environment that is learner-centred, collaboratively organised, outcomes-based, flexibly constructed, ethically aware, community oriented, adequately resourced and strategically linked (Barratt 1998). The National Middle Schooling Association (NMSA 1995, 2001) and the Carnegie Council (1989) emphasised a middle school curriculum that is rigorous, integrated, exploratory and connected to the real world, therefore, affirming the crucial need to redefine the middle school curriculum into forms that are intellectually challenging and exploratory. The Middle Years of Schooling Association Position Paper (MYSA 2008) states that productive engagement of young adolescents in their learning is a central priority for educators. The paper proposes a model demonstrating the interconnectedness between the three concepts of *people, practices and places* which it argues is critical for middle schooling success. The authors highlight the need for teachers to optimise opportunities for student learning through differentiated learning and innovative
teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, the model encourages the adoption of interdependent and aligned practices through the development of a wide repertoire of teacher pedagogies, curriculum design, an ethos of care, assessment and organisational initiatives that build a sense of belonging and community. Moreover, this literature reaffirms the centrality of the teacher in this reform and the need for the reconceptualisation of teachers work to be reconstituted.

The empirical research reported here indicates the need and importance of effective teaching and learning environments for all students, in particular, the middle years' learner. Table 3.6 highlights the critical part the teacher plays in making a difference to student learning outcomes by providing a summary of key reports in the literature that describe the features of effective pedagogy when working with young adolescents. The literature, both international and Australian, highlights quality pedagogy, curriculum and social support as the critical factors to improving student achievement, engagement, motivation and well-being in the middle years. In addition Table 3.6 provides a focus on these areas by drawing attention to the new ways of working with young adolescents by the middle school teacher.
In search of the middle school teacher - Chapter 3

### Table 3.6 Features of effective pedagogy when working with young adolescents

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<td>Altruism: Concerns for the lives and futures of young people, 'socially aware'</td>
<td>Intellectual Quality: Higher order thinking, Depth of knowledge, Depth of understanding, Substantive conversation, Knowledge as problematic meta-language, Connectedness: Link to background knowledge, Knowledge integration, Connection to the world beyond the classroom, Problem based curriculum, Supportive classroom environment: Students' direction of activities, Social support for student achievement, Academic engagement, Explicit quality performance criteria, Student self regulation, Recognition of difference: Cultural knowledge, Inclusive participation, Narrative, Group identities, Active citizenship</td>
<td>Collecting, analysing and organising information: the capacity to locate information, sift and sort information in order to select what is required and present it in a useful way, and to evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it. Communicating ideas and information: Communicate effectively with others using spoken, written, graphic, and other non-verbal communication, Planning and organizing: Capacity to plan and organize one’s own activities, making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring one’s performance, Working in teams: Capacity to integrate effectively with other people on a one-to-one basis and in groups and working effectively as a member of a team to achieve a shared goal, Using mathematical ideas and techniques: Capacity to use mathematical ideas for practical purposes, Solving problems: Capacity to apply problem solving strategies in purposeful ways, requiring critical thinking, and creative approaches to achieve an outcome, Using technology: Capacity to apply technology operationally with an understanding of scientific and technological principles.</td>
<td>Adolescence specific (cultural social, psychological, physical, intellectual, spiritual, emotional) emphasising a holistic approach, Learning and Teaching to young adolescents: Group facilitation, counselling, collaborative planning, team work, negotiated, interdisciplinary approaches and orientations which are not solely subject centred, Teacher Education Programs: A valuing of adolescence: seeing it as a rich pathway to maturity rather than a problem period to be survived, An understanding of the widely varying life experiences of young adolescents: Appropriate beliefs about and attitudes toward adolescents: reflection on students teachers' own experiences as adolescents, ability to teach across a range of learning areas and to develop integrated learning as well as maintaining in-depth studies, An understanding of working with other professions and agencies with an interest in the needs of young adolescents.</td>
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<td>Confidence: Positive and enthusiastic - 'self starters'</td>
<td>Modesty: Humble about achievements; readily admit mistakes, Skills: Manage Change: Focusing disparate energies; promoting teamwork and leadership, Human relations: Establishing and maintaining quality relationships; communication, Applied learning: Creating practical projects that enable 'connections' to be made, Curriculum integration: embedding KLA concepts into broader contexts, Outcomes based approaches: ensuring all students experience success, Standards setting: defining parameters/expectations; negotiating, Teaching techniques: drawing on a wide repertoire of strategies.</td>
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Adapted from Cumming and Owen (2001); Lingard et al. 2001; Mayer 1992 and QBTR 1996
3.7 Building a new identity for the middle school teacher

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD), *Teachers for Tomorrow’s Schools* (1998 & 2001) argues, if teaching practices do not change, schools run the risk of becoming “irrelevant, especially among young people” (OECD 2001:25). Barratt (1998), Lingard et al. (2001), Hargreaves (2003), Pendergast (2005), and others warn that the short sightedness of government policy towards school reform places teachers at risk of becoming casualties of change rather than change-makers. The OECD (2001) report, calls for a radical redefining of teacher professionalism that better responds to societal changes and a commitment to lifelong learning. According to Hargreaves (2003), teacher professionalism in the twenty-first century must be redefined to forge a new identity for teachers (Fullan 2007). Forging a new teacher identity will require: a focus on expertise and continual professional learning; a preparedness to work with parents and other non-teachers; use of technology and an understanding of its pedagogical implications for learning; and the capacity to continuously adapt and collaborate within school and networks that are learning organisations (OECD 1998; Senge et al. 2000; Hargreaves 2003). If teachers are to be better prepared in these “new times” (Hall 1996:224), policy makers will need to reengineer the teacher as a well-qualified, well resourced and committed teaching professional (Cumming & Owen 2001; Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2005; Prosser 2006; Caldwell & Harris 2008).

Discussion surrounding what it means to be a teacher and how teachers might individually and collectively build a new identity for themselves in keeping with a learning society is an identified theme in the literature (Hargreaves 1994, 2003; Drucker 1999; Beare 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Lovat 2003; Skilbeck & Connell 2004, Whitehead 2006; Prosser 2006; Caldwell & Harris 2008). The research argues that to cast a new teacher identity will only be achieved through the generational change of teaching practice. According to Fullan (2007), this change needs to be transformational through the teacher being less the “guardian of the past” (Skilbeck & Connell 2004). What is needed, according to Skilbeck and Connell (2004), are teachers who can craft a curriculum and pedagogy that is conducive to innovation and creativity. They argue that teachers need support from school and system leadership if they are to “foster creativity and innovativeness in students and to display these attributes in teaching” (Skilbeck & Connell 2004:39).
Therefore, with the increasing calls for educational “change” (Schools Council 1989, 1990; Fullan 1995, 2007) “reform” (Cumming & Cormack 1996; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005) “reinvigoration” (Prosser 2006), “reinvention” (Dickinson 2001b), “reconceptualisation” (Dinham et al. 2000; Sellar & Cormack 2001), “transformation” (Fullan 2007; Caldwell & Harris 2008) and “generational change” (Luke et al. 2002; Skilbeck & Connell 2004) is a mandate to produce high quality and productive schooling environments. Teacher professionalism is identified as the pathway for teachers to forge a new identity and improve quality teaching. This requires a new image of teachers, one that is characterised by teachers sharing vision and goals of learning through reflection and conversation (Fullan 1991); through valuing “creativity, risk taking and trust” (Hargreaves 2003:19) that is “activist” (Sachs 1998) and “principled” (Goodson 1999), and by schools becoming “learning organisations” (Senge 1990). When developing new models of teacher education to support creative and innovative practices demanded by the middle years of schooling reform, there is a need to include “teacher empowerment, collaborative action, and strategic partnerships with groups beyond the learning/teaching institution” (Cumming & Owen 2001:7). Hence, there is considerable agreement amongst educationalists and system authorities that the professional learning of the teacher is critical to the innovative agenda of the learning society and therefore of the middle years of schooling reform (Board of Teacher Education 1996; OECD 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Beare 2001; Rowe 2002; Hargreaves 2003; Pendergast 2005, 2007c). The Commonwealth of Australia Report (2003) urges schools to establish a culture of innovation sustained over the long term to ensure teaching outcomes are enhanced.

3.7.1 Quality teacher education in the middle years of schooling

An innovation agenda requires both teachers and pre-service providers to re-consider their core functions, notions of professionalism and future directions. For the new ways of working with young adolescents to be realised, middle years teacher education programs need to reflect: the middle schooling philosophy and practices of cooperative learning; collaborative and team teaching; ‘productive’ pedagogies; the use of ICT as a learning tool; and interdisciplinary and integrative approaches to curriculum (Beane 1991; Treston 1992; Cummings & Cormack 1996; Barratt 1998; Hill & Russell 1999; Chadbourne 2001; Dickinson 2001a; Pendergast & Bahr 2005). As Aspland and Cresswell (2002) ask the question of teacher educators: “What is missing in teacher education: A middle school perspective” (2002:13).
Innovative and reconceptualised teacher pre-service education and graduate programs are necessary if the reform of the middle years is to be implemented effectively (Luke et al. 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Whitehead 2000; Pendergast 2005; Pendergast et al. 2007). At Flinders University, in 1982, the first pre-service teacher education program focusing on upper primary and lower secondary education was offered (Pendergast et al. 2007). By the early 1990s, it remained the only pre-service teacher education program designed specifically for the middle years of schooling in Australia (Pendergast et al. 2007). Since 2000 there has been a steady focus by universities on the middle years offering specialised or elective programs in pre-service and graduate education courses (Pendergast 2005). In 2003 the first specialised middle school teacher graduated from the University of Queensland (Pendergast 2005). Programs such as this one are forging a new identity for teachers, thus legitimising this new educational space called Middle Years of Schooling (Pendergast 2005).

Pre-service teacher education and continual professional learning is the key to reform and as such pose many challenges to ensure success and sustained implementation (Lingard et al. 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Skilbeck & Connell 2004; Bryer & Main 2005; Pendergast 2005; Pendergast et al. 2007; Caldwell & Harris 2008, Pendergast et al. 2009). According to The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (Reising 2002), the success of middle schools will require specialised education of middle school teachers. The middle years of schooling reform has been maintained and sustained by teacher and teacher educators’ enthusiasm and a strong belief and commitment to learner-centred values which have driven the initial establishment of the middle years in Australia (Hill et al. 2001; Pendergast 2005). Teacher acceptance of this innovation is integral to its being sustained over the longer term (Whitehead 2000). Gayle Davis (2001) calls these education reformers “missionaries” who have been “devoted” and “devout” in their commitment in bringing about change in the middle years, with little qualitative or quantitative research to support them. The question of whether educational sector employers are of the same view is a real concern within the community of middle years’ information.

While there is limited focus in the professional development research identifying the priority of specialised professional preparation for the middle years teacher (Luke et al. 2000; Pendergast et al. 2009), there is growing evidence from the literature that with a sustained focus on pre-service teacher education and targeted continual professional development,
schools and teachers can and will make a difference to student learning outcomes (Rowe 2002; Caldwell & Harris 2008; Dinham & Rowe 2008; Pendergast et al. 2009). According to Rowe (2002) the ball is firmly in the court of the policy makers. He asserts that:

There are strong empirical grounds for believing that schools and teachers can and do make a difference and that consistent high-quality teaching, supported by on-going teacher professional development can and does deliver dramatic improvements in student learning (2002:11).

Needless to say, if reform of the middle years of schooling to be sustained, commitment is required by all stakeholders who are seeking significant improvements if not “transformational” changes in learning outcomes for young people. This will require a commitment by all stakeholders to share vision and philosophy of learning in the middle years, a focus on curriculum, and transforming teacher pedagogy which will lead to reconceptualised teacher engagement and student learning behaviours in the middle years classroom (Lingard et al. 2001; Skilbeck & Connell 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Lovat 2003; Smyth et al. 2003; Hayes et al 2006; Cumming & Owen 2004; Caldwell & Harris 2008). According to Hill and Russell (1999), what is needed in the implementation of the middle years of schooling reform is “a renewed emphasis on the instructional leadership and change management roles of principals and others in leadership positions in schools” (1999: 21).

The many proponents of the middle years’ reform advocate the reconstitution of the teacher by recognising the centrality of the teacher in this reform of the Middle Years of Schooling. Middle school teachers are seen as agents of social change (Fullan 1993) with particular emphasis on social justice that represents both equality of outcomes and equity of opportunities for all students (Pendergast & Bahr 2005). The middle years is a new field in the education landscape of Australia presenting new challenges for teachers that require new ways of working with young adolescents. This is the focus of this study.

3.8 Conclusion

The Victorian Quality Schools Project (VQSP), a longitudinal study conducted by Hill and Russell (1999), makes the claim that at best middle years’ reforms have been “piecemeal” with limited evidence of their efficacy. This reform of the middle years can no longer just depend on the enthusiasm of the “devoted” and “devout” teacher but rather must be driven by
strong teacher professionalism (Chadbourne 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Whitehead 2006; Prosser 2006; Carrington 2006; Caldwell & Harris 2008; Nayler 2009). According to Luke et al. (2002) this will require a “new wave, another generation of middle years’ research, policy and development” (2002:134). Without this “new wave” the middle years reform will remain “stuck in the middle” (Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005) or will fall victim to “reform fatigue” (Brennan & Sachs 1998:5), which suggests there is a long way to go before the fruits of this reform are realised (Pendergast et al. 2005). The increasing calls for research data by educationalists (Hargreaves 1994, 2001; Chadbourne 2001; Cumming & Owen 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Prosser 2006; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Caldwell & Harris 2008) continues. Research data is needed to "support changes [and to] have evidence of the benefits for students of the things we do" (Linke 1999:1). According to Luke et al. (2002), moving forward beyond the “piecemeal” approaches requires that:

The next move must be driven by new theory, a much stronger research base, and by policy that uses middle years’ reforms as a means of consolidating and concentrating efforts to meet the needs and aspirations of target groups. It will require main-streaming the middle – making the improvement of pedagogy in the middle years a core focus of all schools (2002:138).

The literature review presented here highlights that many young people are at risk in the early adolescent years of becoming “alienated”, “disengaged”, “disenfranchised” and “dropping out” of school. However, the accompanying research demonstrates that disengagement of this type can be turned around. What is needed in schools is a clear focus on the developmental needs of the middle years’ learner by providing positive experiences in adolescence, rather than on adopting the deficit, negative ideologies of young people. The challenge is to draw on their ‘virtual school-bags’ to re-conceptualise, re-culture and re-invigorate the middle years experience which engages students and promotes middle schooling as a legitimate setting, so allowing for what Cormack (1998) calls “adolescent advocacy”.

In the literature reported here, it has been noted that the teacher is the key to the middle years of schooling reform. If this reform is to be sustained into the future then substantial investment into pre-service teacher education and teacher professionalism is required alongside “critical action research” that is “multi-partnered” (Barratt 1998; Rowe 2002; Luke et al. 2002; Main & Bryer 2005; Prosser 2006) and which investigates teachers’ experience of pedagogy.
Learning and teaching in this learning society is futures-driven, and in schools, it is teachers who are responsible for preparing young people to take their place in this future and to be able to fully contribute to a society characterised by unprecedented social, cultural and educational change. Beare (2001) argues that “schools should be anticipatory communities modelling conditions in the emergent world which young people are about to enter as adults” (2001:4).

Enhancing the achievement, engagement, motivation and well-being of young people in the middle years necessitates a special type of teacher who is able to reconcile the shifts required in ideological and theoretical paradigms which facilitates the successful transition from adolescence to adulthood for all students in schooling. Moreover, a fresh approach to the middle years needs to address directly these new conditions and contexts in which young people are situated so that meaning, authenticity of achievement, relevance and power is restored not lost (Chadbourne 2002). What emerged from the literature is the importance of the teacher and their capacity to contextualise the social locations of young people. This contextualisation highlights the distinctive identity of the middle years of schooling and therefore, the ability to differentiate between the needs of older and younger students. The contextualisation of the middle years of schooling and the centrality of the teacher in this reform is symbolised diagrammatically in Figure 3.5.
The call by Luke et al. (2002) and others for a second generation of middle school reform in Australia, suggests there is still much more required in the investigation and research of the middle school teacher. This study has elicited perspectives from middle school teachers, Heads of Middle Schools, Principals and students to generate theory regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher. The following chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the study; a study that holds the key to the reconceptualisation of the teacher as central to reform in the middle years of schooling.
Chapter 4

Research Methodology

*Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and, thus, broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it. Through our methods we first aim to see this world as research participants do—from the inside. Seeing research participants’ lives from the inside often gives an inquirer otherwise unobtainable views. You might learn that what outsiders assume about the world of your study may be limited, imprecise, mistaken, or egregiously wrong* (Charmaz 2006:14).

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theory of qualitative inquiry selected for this study is Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). According to Charmaz (2003a), this methodology reflects a “qualitative revolution” (Charmaz 2003a:249) in social science research. The Grounded Theory methodology is a systematic inductive inquiry for gathering and analysing data to discover theories, concepts and propositions that are grounded in the data. In adopting grounded research methodology for this study, the dilemmas posed in utilising this approach are made over the criticism it attracts with its emphasis on ‘discovery’ and ‘creativity’ (Charmaz 2006). Grounded Theory is often accused (Limerick et al. 1998) of inventing new terms and concepts on the run, or being accused of jargon, or of merely using everyday language and misusing the English language (Limerick et al. 1998). In addition, researchers from differing schools of thought, such as Positivism (Crotty 1998), claim that this new experimental research is “fiction not science” and lacks appropriate verification schemes (Taylor & Bogdan 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 2005). This chapter is proposing a methodology that enhances an ‘action’ perspective as opposed to a structural ‘design’ that is stable and unchanging (Nohria & Berkley 1994; Bowers 2009). That is, Grounded Theory methodology has a clear focus on the participants and the ways they construct social reality. Therefore, in order to develop concepts, language and categories that assist in understanding the subtleties, complexities and behaviours of middle school teachers, the development of a process oriented theory rather than structure is required.

A Grounded Theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998) was adopted as being the most suitable to achieve the research aims as it provides an established process for
developing a substantive model by comparatively analysing key stakeholders' perspectives. Grounded Theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998), with its set of technical procedures and verification processes aimed at representing key stakeholders as accurately as possible by giving them a voice. Therefore, Grounded Theory methodology met the aims of the research study and provide the flexibility required to research within a diverse range of school organisations across schooling sectors.

Therefore, this chapter is framed to:

- rationalise the selecting of qualitative research for this study (4.2);
- argue the selection of qualitative methodology for this research study (4.3);
- outline the Grounded Theory methodology adopted for the study (4.4);
- outline the philosophical understandings of Grounded Theory methodology (4.5);
- discuss the place of human experience and perspectives as central to this particular research methodology (4.6);
- analyse the shortcomings (4.7) and strengths of Grounded Theory methodology (4.8);
- argue the significance of Grounded Theory methodology adopted for this study (4.9);
- and
- provide a conclusion to the chapter (4.10).

4.2 Rationalisation for selecting qualitative research

Thomas Groome (1998) has identified the impact of anthropology and sociology on educational research and a range of perspectives that emanated from the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. These influences resulting in re-evaluating the notion of human freedom and social responsibility, or as Paulo Freire (1970) would attest from his own perspective, speak of the need to “reinvent the meaning of power” (Freire 1970:75). What emerged is a positive anthropology proposing to “engage the whole person as an active participant” (Groome 1998:103). Paulo Freire (1970), called for an anthropology that engages people as “active participants” (Groome 1998:103), and as such, social research has become an empowering process by being participant-focused (Groome 1998; Limerick et al.1998; Charmaz 2005). Social research starts with eliciting the perspectives of participants’ understandings, interpretations and explanations of phenomena which generates interpretative theories making the participant a collaborator of the research. According to
Limerick et al. (1998), the participant is not only a collaborator but a "co-researcher and co-theorist", and the inquirer a "co-learner" (1998:250). This implies the drawing of theory from practice, building on social research and its constructivist elements rather than on its objective notions (Charmaz 2005). This drawing on theory from practice is termed praxis by Habermas (1987) and Groome (1998), that is, "reflection on action" (Groome 1998:161). According to Groome (1998) by having participants focus on their actions is an aspect of praxis requiring the individual to look at the world around them to notice what is “there in the created order and in the order created by humankind – culture, society, and human history; noticing what they themselves are doing” (1998:161). Praxis requires both action and reflection on the part of individuals so as to be aware of what is going on in the social and political world as it affects their lives.

In search of the middle school teacher examines the experiences of teachers, their perspectives, thought processes and feelings of what it is like to be a middle school teacher. The qualitative approach was chosen due to its strategy of generating interpretative, constructionist inquiry. In more recent years, researchers (O’Donoghue 2007; Morse et al. 2009) involved in educational research have been encouraged to look at approaches that better attempt to understand and make meaning of human activity, which in the case of this study comprises the dynamic educational work of middle school teachers. Utilising this qualitative approach invites the study to draw on the strong philosophical foundations of education and of human anthropology (Groome 1998). The research literature of Denzin and Lincoln (1994) republished in an extended edition by Denzin and Lincoln (1998a,b,c; 2003a,b,c; 2008a,b,c), is comprehensively documented along with critiques of qualitative research approaches. Denzin and Lincoln (2008a) argue that qualitative research of this type interconnects the range of social sciences and:

...embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories, constant tension, and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the form its findings and interpretations take (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:10).

Educational research in the past has tended to be dominated substantially by positivist models of quantitative design approaches, whereby the eliciting of responses to survey questions, measuring data and conducting experiments provided the only form of social inquiry (Krathwohl 1998; Charmaz 2006; Corbin & Strauss 2008; Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). However,
among other social sciences, educational research has increasingly engaged in interpretative methodologies. Education research has been enriched by well-collected data that focuses on peoples’ lived experiences, which portray the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures in their lives (Miles & Huberman 1994; Merriam 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 2005). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2008a), Grounded Theory is an important influence on contemporary educational research. Habermas (1987) suggests it had the effect of “unmasking” the social sciences. With the increasing emphasis on social sciences and parallel developments in educational theory, Habermas (1987) applied unmasking to the way in which “social research is an interactive rather than a controlling process” (Hamilton 1994:67). Therefore, emphasising the socially constructed nature of reality in its multiple forms, searching for the answers of the social experience, interpreting it and giving meaning to it.

The development and use of qualitative research has led to the growing application of other approaches such as phenomenology, ethnography, hermeneutics, feminism, postmodernism and grounded theory, all of which “provide important insights and knowledge” (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a: 9) about social phenomena. The literature of social science and educational research (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a) identifies the different approaches, thereby acknowledging the different assumptions surrounding the nature of reality that inevitably leads to different strategies for collecting data. Despite these emerging differences, field oriented-research is embracing new methods and approaches, but there remains ambivalence by some (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a) towards these new approaches and methods of research. These critics suggest qualitative research is “experimental, is not science and have no way of verifying their truth statements” (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:11). Alternatively, the strong emphasis on theory “discovered from data” without any “preconceived” ideas requires a strong sense of “theoretical sensitivity” in order to generate appropriate theories from the data collected. In Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued, “initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:45). Hence, a methodology that bases itself on “interpretation”, where there is no single, correct interpretation, but a plurality of interpretations and meanings, poses many challenges and implications of how to conduct research (Krathwohl 1998; Dey 1999; O’Donoghue 2007). Despite these emerging differences, educational research continues to value “multi-dimensional” methods of
research, especially in its challenge to continually apply theory to practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a).

The study, *In search of the middle school teacher* aims to develop knowledge that will generate theory to guide practice. As such it requires an in-depth understanding of meaning centred on life praxis. Therefore, this project adopts the qualitative approach to research because of its “fluid and ever changing dynamic nature” (Lichtman 2009:13), which stands to serve the study better than the more statistical procedures of quantitative methods. (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Corbin & Strauss 2008). Qualitative research methodologies of the type here gained more respectability in recent decades with their emphasis on a holistic, participatory approach. This has given rise to new educational theories that emerged as the result of research inquiry should be qualitatively grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2005; Corbin & Strauss 2008). Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the inquirer in the real world (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) of practice recognising the impact of the human, through the consideration of phenomena such as experiences, feelings, thought processes and emotions (Strauss and Corbin 1998:11). Qualitative research, while difficult to define, is “inherently multi-method in focus” (Flick 2002:226). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2005):

> Qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative inquirers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005:3).

By adopting the qualitative approach for this research study, an attempt to understand the meaning behind a range of human experiences attributed, in this case, is made, to the attributes relating to the middle school teacher.

Qualitative research necessarily confronts the credibility given to generalisations drawn from data in the conventional method as it enables ambiguities between the general and the specific to be addressed and acknowledged (Dey 1999). The qualitative methodology has enabled the study to address, explore and discover the multi-dimensional and multi-faceted nature of the work of the Middle School Teacher.
In contrast, the positivist deductive approach to research involving the verification or falsification of hypotheses is built on the “independence of theoretical and observational languages” (Guba & Lincoln 1994:107). The deductive approach to empirical research with its emphasis on “big narratives and theories” (Flick 2002:2) is increasingly becoming irrelevant to social research because of the “pluralisation of life-worlds requiring new sensitivity to the empirical study of issues” (Flick 2002:2). The rapid social change with the resulting diversification of life-worlds is creating new social contexts requiring more inductive approaches to research where more local, temporal, smaller situational narratives are required (Flick 2002). Therefore, this research study is making use of inductive strategies instead of beginning from theories and testing them which is the positivist deductive approach. This study through “sensitizing concepts” studies knowledge and practice “as local knowledge and practice” (Flick 2002:2).

Likewise, the dominant positivist research paradigm offering a value-free perspective is vigorously contested by the emerging connections between theory and values, no more so than by Goffman (1971):

> I claim as a defence that the traditional research designs thus far employed in this area have considerable limitations of their own... The variables that emerge tend to be creatures of research designs that have no existence outside the room in which the subjects are located, except perhaps briefly when a replication or a 'continuity' has been performed under sympathetic auspices and a full moon ... Concepts have not emerged that re-order our view of social activity. Frameworks have not been established into which a continuously large number of facts can be placed. Understanding of ordinary behaviour has not accumulated; distance has (Goffman 1971:xvii).

In adopting the positivist paradigm (Crotty 1998) the inquirer is seen as distant from the process, in an attempt to ensure objectivity in relation to the research process, while observing phenomena and recording data. This notion is fundamentally challenged by the social sciences, which assert that findings are created through interaction between the inquirer and the participants, the phenomenon and the context in which the research is being conducted (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). Qualitative inquirers want to explore endless possibilities and learn as much as they can about the people involved in the study. Qualitative researchers do not want to distance themselves from their participants, but rather want the opportunity to connect with them at the human level (Corbin & Strauss 2008).
In the context of a study in education, such as this one, positivism is less suitable for studies of human action, mainly because it rigidly deals with statistics. On the other hand, qualitative data deals with meanings that are expressed through language and actions. Therefore, the qualitative methodology that forms the platform of this investigation into the middle school teacher seeks the participants' perspectives and as such, is a catalyst for “critical consciousness raising” (Freire 1970:54) concerning the complex work of the middle school teacher. Furthermore, the qualitative methodology is adopted here not only for its appropriateness but for its authenticity as an effective research method. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), effective qualitative research is characterised by:

- a humanistic bent;
- curiosity;
- creativity and imagination;
- a sense of logic;
- the ability to recognise diversity as well as regularity;
- a willingness to take risks;
- the ability to live with ambiguity;
- the ability to work through problems in the field;
- an acceptance of the self as a research instrument; and
- trust in the self and the ability to see value in the work that is produced (2008:13).

Qualitative inquirers are drawn to worlds that interest them and are not timid when it comes to using their own experience when analysing data. They clearly reject the notion of “objectivity” and are comfortable using personal experience and develop a self-reflective discipline that is highly valued in interpreting what reality “is” and its role in “knowing” it (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Lichtman 2009).

### 4.3 Selection of a qualitative methodology

Guba and Lincoln (2008) suggest the selection of a methodology is determined by the nature of the research issues in terms of the ontology and epistemology that can best serve the research question(s). The key research question for this study is:

- What are the key stakeholders’ perspectives of the attributes of the middle school teacher?
Qualitative inquirers (Denzin and Lincoln 2003a, 2008a; Corbin and Strauss 2008) are “philosophers” who are guided by abstract principles. These principles provide a conceptual framework by combining:

Beliefs about ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?) , epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? , and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?) (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:31).

Beliefs relating to ontology, epistemology and methodology are embedded within a paradigm of research methodology, “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba 1990:17). Therefore the relationship between the “inquirer and the known” is interpretivist as the aim of the study is to gain an understanding of the perspectives of those engaged in middle schooling. The ontology or “nature of the reality of the situation” (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:31) in this study is “constructivist-interpretivist” (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:31) as the aim of the study is also to understand the “multiple realities” of people engaged in middle schooling. Unlike a positivist approach, which would find the ‘real’ world through preconceived ideas by beginning with a theory, then testing and proving it (Strauss & Corbin 1990) this study’s approach is different. The methodology of this study values the role and importance of the participants’ perspectives and their social context. Constructivist-interpretivist research perspectives do not preclude determining the characteristics or ‘facts’ of the situation. However, there is acknowledgement of the place of the social context in understanding what is happening and the meaning that individuals associate with their work in schools.

The qualitative inquirer, therefore, responds to this environment by focusing on individuals and on the ways in which they understand and construct meaning. Guba and Lincoln (1998) describe this as “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (1998:195). The way forward is for the research methodology to become more process oriented, which allows the study to explore “the inner experience of participants and to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture” (Corbin & Strauss 2008:12). The emphasis is on gaining an understanding of the phenomenon rather than testing or explaining the results (O’Donoghue 2007). Qualitative research methodologies are by their very nature process oriented. Grounded Theory, searches for the ‘core social processes’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967)
that contribute to the development of empirical knowledge, necessary in making the emergent, substantive theory “good” science: “significance, theory observation compatibility, generalisability, reproducibility, precision, rigor and verification” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:27).

4.4 Grounded Theory methodology

Glaser and Strauss (1967) confronted the great dominance of quantitative research of the time with their milestone work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The work stimulated a “qualitative revolution” (Charmaz 2003a:249) that has had a profound influence on the social sciences and educational research which contributed towards “closing the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:vii). According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), Grounded Theory had a three-way purpose: to offer a *raison d'être* for a theory that was grounded in the data gathered, to propose a logic and guidelines for grounded theories, and, to legitimise qualitative research that is carefully executed in a rigorous manner as scientific inquiry (1994:275).

This qualitative revolution of Glaser and Strauss (1967), characterised by theory generation research, involves ending with a theory rather than commencing with one. Theory, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) is:

> a set of well developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated frame-work that can be used to explain or predict phenomena (1990:15).

Thereby, theories rather than being complex and cumbersome, are statements outlining how things are connected. According to O’Donoghue (2007), theory consists of two parts: the things to be connected and the connection itself. That is to say, “things to be connected are the concepts and the connections or relationships show how concepts, categories, or constructs can be linked together once they have been identified” (2007:51).

Therefore, Grounded Theory is a methodology that is useful developing theory that is grounded in data which is systematically gathered and analysed (Strauss & Corbin 1994). This allows for the generation of theory during the actual research through the interaction of data gathering and analysis. A distinctive feature of this methodology is “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 101) which leads to the gradual development and
refinement of theory grounded in the data. This strategy of constant comparative analysis involves systematic questioning, ‘cracking’ or coding and analysis of the data gathered. The data gathering and data analysis occurs simultaneously and is constant, rather than consecutively as a step-by-step collection of activities (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The outcomes of this analyses guide the ensuing data collection on the basis of the evolving substantive theory. This process involves selecting participants for interview and varying the type of people interviewed until a range of perspectives has been uncovered. This progressively more focused data collection is called theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Grounded Theory is applicable to both quantitative and qualitative studies and it introduced, for the first time, a set of guidelines to shape rigorous inductive inquiry. First, it provides explicit, sequential guidelines for conducting qualitative research; second, it provides specific strategies for the analytic phases of inquiry; third, it streamlines and integrates data collection and analysis; fourth, it advances a conceptual analysis of qualitative data; and fifth, it legitimises the research methods as scientific inquiry (Charmaz 2004). It was the original intention of grounded theorists that guidelines and procedures would evolve over time from the experience of inquirers. Methodology would then be built in light of insights gained regarding theory development, thereby enhancing credibility and effectiveness of a Grounded Theory research methodology (Strauss & Corbin 1994). Hence, Grounded Theory continues to evolve from its original template, attracting much interest, particularly, within the health care environment (Dey 1999) and increasingly in education and social justice studies (Charmaz 2005). However, popularity can bring its own set of problems: fears and disputes have arisen in the process of diffusion of the methodology and its application.

The development of Grounded Theory represents a fundamental shift in the field from methodologies that emphasise strongly ‘theory-laden’ propositions to methodologies where theoretical propositions could be generated from the data gathered (Charmaz 2006). According to Limerick et al. (1998), it is a rejection of the structural, functionalist paradigm, in favour of a more participatory approach to research that examines individuals’ understandings, perspectives and meanings within particular contexts.

Since the publication of The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967) there has been further development of the theory by Glaser has occurred (1978; 1992) Strauss (1987), Strauss &
Corbin (1990; 1998), Clarke (2005, 2009), Charmaz (2006, 2009); Corbin and Strauss (2008); Corbin (2009), Bowers and Shatzman (2009), Morse (2009) and Stern (2009). The principles of Grounded Theory resemble the key concepts of phenomenology with its emphasis on meaning and experience, though the intent of Grounded Theory is to generate theory, rather than to impose one. This makes Grounded Theory “epistemologically unique” (Creswell 2007:63). Grounded Theory methodology does not begin with a theory and then set out to prove it, rather it begins with an area of study (for example the middle school teacher) and allows the relevance of the study to emerge (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

While there is general acceptance of most of the re-formulations of Grounded Theory, its history is a short one. What emerged from the debates surrounding the diffusion of the methodology are two different but related models of Grounded Theory: the objectivist and constructivist model (Charmaz 2000, 2009). Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser (1992), disagreed between themselves about the meaning and procedures of Grounded Theory. Glaser asserted that Strauss and Corbin’s approach of introducing ‘codified’ procedures and analysis make Grounded Theory too prescribed and structured. Glaser (1992) contended that Strauss and Corbin (1990) had deviated from the original tenets of Grounded Theory. According to Charmaz (2005), Glaser’s objectivist position of assuming that data collected represents “objective facts” about the known world as separate from the inquirer’s interpretations, undervalues the inquirer’s grasp of the empirical realities and his or her ability to discern variations in the phenomenon being studied. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) moved Grounded Theory methodology to align with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, drawing on the Chicago tradition of symbolic interactionism and pragmatism with its emphasis on interpretation, meaning, action and process (O’Donoghue 2007; Corbin & Strauss 2008). Despite this, the newly re-formulated version of Grounded Theory espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) has replaced the original formulations of Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967) and has become the “standard introduction to Grounded Theory” (Dey 1999:14).

Since its introduction, Grounded Theory has increasingly been used in sociological, psychological and anthropological research, including, a wide range of practicum fields, such as health care, education and social work (Strauss & Corbin 1994:277). For instance, from the original concept of interpreting and analysing participants’ meanings in order to develop theory
Glaser and Strauss (1967) also proposed systematic, logical, qualitative analysis, with its own capacity to generate theory, called “substantive theory”. In doing so, they argued that data collection and social research were integral parts of the same study. Grounded Theory, combining both functions, was presented as the systematic analysis of data, that is, of documents, notes and interviews, by the continual coding and comparing of data to generate “a well constructed theory” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:22). Therefore, Grounded Theory is an analytic method inductively derived from the phenomenon it represents (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

A most powerful feature of Grounded Theory is the development of theory derived from data systematically gathered and analysed throughout the research process. Hence, the main focus of the methodology is the development of substantive theory, rather than beginning with a theory and later attempting to verify it. The purpose of Grounded Theory “is to generate theory, not to verify it” (Charmaz 2003a:255). Thus, research of this type commences with a topic for study that follows procedures enabling constructs to emerge from the analysis, reaching across substantive areas of formal theory, generating abstract concepts and specifying relationships between them to understand practical problems in multiple substantive areas (Charmaz 2006:8). Grounded Theory methodology has been embraced, applied and adapted to a range of research fields and used across analytical studies of many diverse groups. As a research methodology, Grounded Theory has received increasing affirmation due to the tools it uses for understanding the empirical world, chief of which is that it stresses open and flexible methods that can make responses as needed with changes in time and circumstances (Charmaz 2006). Furthermore, if the growing international literature on Grounded Theory is to be any guide, its diffusion and high level of acceptance is apparent and demonstrates that the methodology has evolved beyond those early fears and debates that characterised its beginnings. In addition, the emerging supplicated computer software, such as NVivo for qualitative data analysis, is further evidence of its acceptance as a research methodology (Dey 1999; Charmaz 2003a).
Fundamentally, Grounded Theory is an inductive method of data gathering and analysis. Data gathering, analysis, and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Theories are generated as data are increasingly analysed. Theories continue to be generated until propositions are theoretically 'saturated'. According to O'Donoghue (2007), this kind of theorising is described as "emergent analysis" that is creative and intuitive as opposed to being mechanical. The goal, "is to make sure the theory fits the data and not vice versa" (O'Donoghue 2007:58).

Engagement with Grounded Theory is always a social process that subsists in the lives of the participants; it tells a story about people, their social processes, and their situations. Hence, the *leitmotif* in Grounded Theory methodology is one of *bricoleur*: “a maker of quilts" (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:4), meaning that research is an interactive, multi-method process formed by one’s personal story, biography, gender, social status, race and ethnicity, as well as those of the participants of the research (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:9). The theories are subsequently developed, as a complex, reflexive creation constituting a *mélange* of the inquirer’s images, understandings and interpretations of the phenomenon studied (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:9). The challenge for the inquirer is to put all these pieces of the *quilt* together to develop a sequence or a whole picture of representations connecting the individual parts to the whole (Strauss & Corbin 1994; Charmaz 2005). This multi-methodological strategy, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), adds “rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:5).

Hence, while Grounded Theory bears resemblance to other qualitative methods of social research, its distinctive characteristics are unique and effective. Grounded Theory provides a systematic, yet flexible, guideline for collecting and analysing data to construct theories *grounded* in a set of real world data. Using the constant comparative method, its distinctive features include:

… the systematic asking of generative and concept-related questions, theoretical sampling, systematic coding procedures, and suggested guidelines for attaining conceptual [not merely descriptive] "density," variation, and conceptual integration (Strauss & Corbin 1994:274-275).
For the purpose of this study the methodology has sufficient structure to get to the heart of the research question and yet is sufficiently flexible for research to continue, supported by its procedures and processes (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

4.5 Philosophical understandings of Grounded Theory

The basic beliefs that define this inquiry are contextualised in an ontology of a set of ideas, a framework for understanding people’s multiple contextual realities, and an epistemology that generates a set of questions which are in-turn examined in specific ways, inform the methodological paradigm adopted for this study (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:28). It is recognised that the ontological reality, as a teacher employed within the school system, any biases, interest in and work-related responsibilities surrounding the middle school teacher could influence participants in interviews to be reticent or non-participative regarding disclosing their ‘real’ perspectives of the work of the middle school teacher (Guba & Lincoln 1994:110). The research interest and set of questions, the epistemology, are fundamentally that of the inquirer, in collaboration with the participants. The inquirer hoped for findings from the research that would fit with “pre-existing knowledge” and perspectives in the “critical community” (Guba & Lincoln 1994:110), in this case, the wider educational community.

In considering the politics, ideology and ethics of the study, a methodology is developed that would highlight the meanings that participants bring to their educational life and to the experiences they have as middle school teachers in both government and non-government schools (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). The use of such an analytical framework locates this study in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a; O'Donoghue 2007). The emphasis on the participant requires a methodology that is focused on process. That is to say, there will need to be a focus on individuals and the way they understand and construct social action. Hence, constructivism represents a shift away from the more objectivist deductive approach by rejecting the notion of reality based on a dichotomy between description and prescription, between theory and action (Dey 1999, Charmaz 2005). Objectivism, places an emphasis on the assumptions that the data represent objective facts about the known world that the “data already exist (sic) in the world, and the researcher finds them” (Charmaz 2003b:313). Rather, the constructivist-interpretivist recognises that “reality is never fully apprehended only approximated” (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a:14). Therefore, this study places
priority on the phenomena being studied in order to “establish intimate familiarity with the setting(s) and the events occurring within it – as well as the research participants” (Charmaz 2008:222).

If the purpose of research, the purpose of theory, is to generate a perspective(s) on the issues about which we feel passionate (for example the middle school teacher) and to learn from that perspective, then a rigorous methodology incorporating inductive strategies that develop “concepts, insights and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to access preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories” (O’Donoghue 2007:58) is required. Hence, a methodology that allows for theoretical imagination will generate theory that is reliable and responsive to the particular context and vision of the individual (Groome 1998; Limerick et al. 1998; O’Donoghue 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). Furthermore, the constructivist-interpretivist viewpoint argues that concepts and theories are constructed by the inquirer out of the data/stories that are portrayed by the research participants who are trying to make sense of their experiences, both to the inquirer and themselves. From these multiple constructions, a new pane of knowledge emerges, that may guide practice, in this case the important work of the middle school teacher. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008):

We are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge. Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive—a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind—but active; mind does something with these impressions, at the very least forms abstractions and concepts. In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it (2008:10).

Based on this argument, Grounded Theory is deemed the most suitable methodology of research for the study because it offers a conceptual framework that meets all the epistemological requirements of an inductive inquiry (Sayer 1992). Furthermore, Grounded Theory methodology offers the opportunity to explore participants’ experiences and their perspectives of the educational reality surrounding the emerging profile of the middle school teacher within its diverse contexts. It provides a dialectical tool for a ‘conversation between people’ known to one another in the context of their teacher-work through the interview process.
While Grounded Theory is the chosen methodology for this study, choosing between the Glaserian or Straussian approaches Grounded Theory proved to be a dilemma. The Glaserian approach emphasises objectivist understandings of reality within a positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). In contrast, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) reclaimed the Chicago school foundations in Grounded Theory with its emphasis on a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. The Chicago school foundations move Grounded Theory more into “constructivist social science” (Charmaz 2006:10). This approach “fosters an openness to the world and curiosity about it” (Charmaz 2005:521) and upholds a belief that knowledge is constantly changing in light of new experience. Such dynamic thinking necessitates a conceptual framework or language to speak about the findings. Advancing Grounded Theory as a constructivist, interpretive inquiry will minimise its positivist leanings (Charmaz 2005) and its focus on knowledge as objective. Straussian Grounded Theory, called for the generation of concepts, models and schema to make sense of the lived experience. Furthermore, it asserts that, in light of new experience, we modify constructions through reflexive analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998; Corbin & Strauss 2008). For a comparison of the distinctive features between the Glaserian and Straussian approaches refer Table 4.1.
### Table 4.1 Comparison of Glaserian and Straussian approaches to Grounded Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Glaserian Approach</th>
<th>Straussian Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td>• Columbia school with its emphasis on quantitative methods</td>
<td>• Chicago school with its emphasis on field methods (observation, interviewing and documentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Objectivist positivist paradigm</td>
<td>• Constructivist-interpretivist paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory</strong></td>
<td>• Generates substantive theory grounded in the data</td>
<td>• Generates substantive theory grounded in the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Theory generation</td>
<td>• Theory verification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
<td>• Inductive Inquiry</td>
<td>• Inductive Inquiry an action-interactional oriented method of theory building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sets aside any preconceived theoretical ideas</td>
<td>• Sets aside any preconceived theoretical ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>• Theoretical coding: with over 18 coding families</td>
<td>• Coding Paradigm: a theoretical framework that looks systematically for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Constant comparison analysis</td>
<td>• Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Two types of coding:</td>
<td>• Interacting among the actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- open coding</td>
<td>• Strategies and tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- selective coding</td>
<td>• Consequences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analysing through memoing</td>
<td>• Constant comparison analysis using three levels of data fracturing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Theoretical sampling</td>
<td>• Three types of coding:</td>
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<td>- open coding</td>
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<td>- axial coding</td>
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<td>- selective coding.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Analysing through memoing.</td>
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<td>• Theoretical sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophical orientation</strong></td>
<td>Ontologically neutral Pure methodology</td>
<td>Ontologically pragmatist Pragmatist methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literature Review</strong></td>
<td>Delayed until after data collection and ongoing from first category identification</td>
<td>When categories emerge - at the discretion of the inquirer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria for evaluating research</strong></td>
<td>• Fit • Work • Relevance • Modifiability</td>
<td>Two sets of criteria:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Research process by using seven criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Empirical grounding of the study by using seven criteria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Other forms of qualitative research, such as ethnography and phenomenology, were considered, like Grounded Theory, to provide an interpretivist perspective of the world where reality is seen as both socially and culturally constructed (Limerick et al. 1998; Grbich 2007; O'Donoghue 2007). Ethnography, with its strong anthropological design and phenomenology, with its objectifying approach of exploring in-depth, people’s experiences and Grounded
Theory, with its capacity to generate substantiative theory of small-scale situations within a particular micro context of schools, like South-East Queensland, was seen as the most suitable approach. Grounded Theory is considered suitable because of its rigour and provides a systematic way of constructing theories that illuminate human behaviour (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). In addition, Grounded Theory has been chosen for its flexibility and creativity, in generating new theoretical explanations where little previous research has occurred (Charmaz 2006; Grbich 2007). Therefore, in cases where they diverge, the study is based on Straussian rather than Glaserian methods.

4.6 Place of human experience and perspectives in Grounded Theory methodology

Much of the educational research into the lived experience of teachers and, more particularly, middle school teachers has tended to de-personalise the most subjective of social events, the art and craft of teaching (Janesick 1998; Limerick et al. 1998; Corbin & Strauss 2008). Grounded Theory offers the means of exploring insights, realities and meanings through which to capture a sense of the participants’ “passion for people, passion for communication and passion for understanding people” (Janesick 1998:51).

Qualitative research of this type requires discipline ‘to search again and again’ in an effort to bring into clearer focus the relationship and connections between theory and practice (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Miles & Huberman 1994; Tuettemann 2003). Through the participatory process, Grounded Theory explores how people (principals, teachers and students) have determined and developed an understanding of the middle school teacher in all its facets. It enables the participants to become philosophy-makers rather than philosophy-takers, “to some degree actually, and to a greater degree potentially” (Reason 1998:264).

The philosophical base underpinning Grounded Theory is its capacity to focus on human knowledge and experience as explored in the lived context of the reality being studied. It is a research strategy whose purpose is to generate theory from data. According to Charmaz (2003b), this strategy consists of four guidelines that assist the inquirer in the following ways:
(a) to study social and social psychological processes;
(b) to direct data collection,
(c) to manage data analysis, and
(d) to develop and abstract theoretical frameworks that explain the

Studying the ‘experience of phenomena’ can only be accessed through the discourse or
document in which it is expressed. The discourses are many and each is uniquely determined
by the different social contexts in which they take place.

The important challenge implicit in exploring the experiences and perspectives of participants
is the interpretation and understanding given to these phenomena. Therefore, gathering data
about participants' perspectives of the middle school teacher recognises “that human
consciousness actively constitutes the objects of experience” and that each participant’s

By drawing on participants' knowledge and perspectives of reality, factors such as
preconceptions, projections and stereotypes are potential distortions needing to be recognised
during the interpretative analysis (Sayer, 1992). Hence, while the methodology must deal with
epistemological concerns about ‘perspectives’, recognising that the participants’ accounts are
perspectives of their own lived experience over time and played out in many different social
contexts. The study suggests that the perspectives of the participants' present a reliable
source of information about the attributes and uniqueness of the middle school teacher. In
addition, data collected regarding the different participants’ sets of meanings, as well as the
ways in which they interpret reality, provide the framework through which the analysis is
undertaken and substantive theories are generated concerning the middle school teacher
(Holstein & Gubrium 1998:147).

4.7 Shortcomings of Grounded Theory methodology

Qualitative and quantitative inquirers boast that they both know something of the world that is
worth telling others about. However, they are both surrounded by a series of tensions and
contradictions as to the validity, reliability and authenticity of the methodology. This too, is the
case for Grounded Theory. Resistance to qualitative research, and in particular Grounded
Theory, exposes the politics embedded in this field of endeavour. As noted earlier, in the mid
1960s qualitative research in sociology was losing ground and was not viewed with any
authority or legitimacy (Creswell 2007). Any research that analysed and interpreted research
participants’ perspectives, understandings and meanings created tensions and disputes about
its scientific value. Qualitative research was seen as “impressionistic, anecdotal,
unsystematic, and biased” (Charmaz 2006:5). More recently, critiques include a fear that the
diffusion of the method has led to a breakdown of the essential elements that were present in
the original inquiry process (Dey 1999). Critiques surrounding Grounded Theory since the
‘qualitative revolution’ of Glaser and Strauss (1967) have been concerned with the
methodological elaborations, particularly of co-author Strauss. Glaser (1992) has criticized
Strauss and Corbin (1990) for "forcing" data and analysis into preconceived categories which
contradict fundamental tenets of Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006:8). Glaser, has
consistently maintained his original perspective on Grounded Theory regarding the
elaborations by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Thus, “diffusion has brought
dissension, and dissension (rightly or wrongly) has brought disrepute” (Dey 1999:14). These
dissensions of the method potentially place its credibility at risk in some research circles.

Guba and Lincoln (2008) have outlined concerns that relate to the assumptions and essential
nature of research. In addition, discussion regarding competing paradigms which highlight the
differences in perspective concerning notions of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology)
and methodology (how issues are to be researched and understood) is a source of significant
criticism from Annells (1996). She suggests paradigms are distinguished by their answers to
the following questions:

[T]he way we answer the ontological question then shapes our
answer to the epistemological question and that the way we answer
the epistemological question then shapes our answer to the

In addition, she states a difficulty in placing Grounded Theory methodology in any particular
paradigm.

This is in contrast to Glaser’s claim of Grounded Theory that ‘reality’ exists in the data, with
Strauss and Corbin (1990) stressing that reality “cannot actually be known, but is always
interpreted” (1990:22). Glaser and Strauss ultimately disagreed about this understanding of
procedures of Grounded Theory. According to Charmaz (2006) and O’Donoghue (2007), Grounded Theory is often criticised for its objectivist inclinations of “prediction and control” and therefore, lacks an interpretivist, constructionist inquiry with its emphasis on social interaction as the basis for knowledge, thereby adding another perspective to the debate over procedures.

Another critique of Grounded Theory emerges in respect to the problems in coding or fracturing the data. It has been argued that there is the potential for the inquirer to be “forcing” the data into the development of the theory through their preconceived notions about the codes and categories and thereby not moving beyond the initial In Vivo coding (Dey 1999; Charmaz 2006). This suggests that Grounded Theory in “fracturing the data”, is glossing over meanings within participants’ stories, attending to the analysis only, rather than to the fullness of the participants’ experiences. From a Grounded Theory perspective, “fracturing the data” does quite the opposite allowing for themes to emerge, “creating codes and categories as the inquirer defines themes within the data” (Charmaz 2003a:269).

On another level, Grounded Theory has been criticized for ignoring existing research and propositions until the theory is sufficiently grounded and developed (Gall et al. 2007). According to Silverman (2001), Grounded Theory methods can also “degenerate into a fairly empty building of categories or into a mere smokescreen used to legitimize purely empiricist research” (2001:71). This criticism can be countered given the general responsiveness of social research to be influenced by the norms, understandings and values of society. The initial purpose of Grounded Theory as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was to enable inquirers to generate theory by using information collected from data elicited from individuals’ real situations being researched. In this way, inquirers become theorists in their own right.

Furthermore, the method is questioned because of the general differences that exist between qualitative and quantitative discussion. These include the way that context and relevance are seen to reduce objectivity. There is criticism that the application of general data to an individual situation can be easily distorted. Given that Grounded Theory develops through the process of the research, there are some who are critical of the way the ‘discovery’ and ‘creative’ dimension can influence the research, in contrast to the perspectives that view valid research as that which receives objective data (Strauss & Corbin 1994). Glaser and Strauss
(1967) note, that Grounded Theory “must correspond closely to the data if it is to be applied to
daily situations” (1967:238).

In acknowledging the uncertainty expressed in some circles concerning Grounded Theory, it is
important that researchers ensure qualitative research and Grounded Theory are able to
reconcile the objectivists' assumptions and critiques. By continuing to emphasise the
interactive nature of both, data collection and analysis, nurtures qualitative traditions through
studying the live experienced of individuals, resolves many of the criticisms of the
methodology (Charmaz 2003a). The methodology sets out to use existing ideas and not
prejudge the data. By grounded theorists sharing the craft, improvements in methodology will
be achieved and on this note there might be reason to be confident:

[I]n the past decade, we’ve found that refining and developing
analysis methods on new projects had clear payoff; our confidence in
findings was greater; and credibility for our own research, practice,
and policy audiences was enhanced (Miles and Huberman 1994:4).

While there continue to be questions regarding how the central features of Grounded Theory
are to be applied, this can be considered a source of strength. According to Charmaz (2005),
many critics of Grounded Theory have overlooked its basic premise: that theorizing is an
authentic activity and Grounded Theory methodology offers a way to advance this activity.
Furthermore, it is the developing interest in the research problem that informs the content, not
the method, and the product of this activity generates the theory. Charmaz (2005) and Corbin
and Strauss (2008), believe that inquirers involved in building theory, while representing the
most systematic way of building, synthesizing and integrating scientific knowledge, assert that
the potential for developing theory remains untapped. Grounded Theory by its very nature is
about generating theory; discovering new ideas, it takes risks to generate theory that is
grounded in the data, theory that makes new significant contributions to knowledge. It could
be argued that the unease about Grounded Theory is its ‘crown and glory’ because of its
commitment to theory through self-reflection and deep understanding. This orientation can
often force us to confront basic issues about the nature of social research (Dey 1999; Denzin
& Lincoln 1994, 2005). Therefore, on this basis, and given the nature of the research problem,
Grounded Theory has the potential to offer much more too social research and is the
appropriate method for this study.
4.8 Strengths of Grounded Theory methodology

The strength of Grounded Theory rests in its capacity for detailed study of a micro issue reflecting a much larger reality within a particular context (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The study has the potential to develop detailed research about a particular phenomenon and to be influenced by the context in which the study is being undertaken. Grounded Theory places much value on ‘real world’ contextual settings where the emphasis is on the participants’ lived experience. Through making sense of that experience “the inquirer is also able to make analytic sense of their [participants] meanings and actions” (Charmaz 2006:11).

Important to Grounded Theory is the development of detailed knowledge in an area of study, and how that knowledge, through the influences of the ‘local context’, gives ‘voice’ to the participants, representing them as accurately as possible. Thus, one of Grounded Theory’s most persistent research claims relates to accuracy rather than proximity and generalisability. These dimensions are taken into account within the study rather than excluded from it. Hence, the potential for understanding and ‘discovering’ underlying issues is a strong feature of Grounded Theory (Miles & Huberman 1994). According to Strauss and Corbin (1994):

Grounded theories…..call for exploration of each new situation to see if they fit, how they might fit, and how they might not fit. They demand an openness of the inquirer, based on the ‘forever’ provisional character of every teacher. Grounded theories are not just another set of phrases; rather, they are systematic statements of plausible relationships (1994:279).

Grounded Theory is privileged as a progressive theory within the domain of qualitative research. The perceived relevance of the topic is incorporated into a research discourse through theoretical sampling. This progressive influence has brought openness to the process in which participants are seen as “active agents in their lives and in their worlds, rather than as passive recipients” (Charmaz 2006:7) of the research process. The participants and the inquirer collaboratively gather the data together and generate the theory (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). It is this ability of Grounded Theory to understand the empirical world that makes it so distinctive and effective, thereby, assisting in its own refinement for future possible use as a research methodology to resolve and illuminate educational and other problems (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The positive affects and shortfalls relating to this process will be assessed at the conclusion of this thesis.
A further strength of Grounded Theory as a research methodology is its capacity to be judged ultimately by the research publication. Judgments are made about the data and its reliability, credibility and validity. The reader judges the research processes through which theory is generated and elaborated; and judgments are made about the empirical grounding of the research findings (Strauss & Corbin 1990:252). While Grounded Theory initially came to prominence as a research methodology in the field of healthcare, inquirers have been able to adapt it to a range of other disciplines due its flexibility and legitimacy (Charmaz 2006). This appeal of Grounded Theory has seen it move extensively into other fields such as education, psychology and anthropology (Dey 1999). This thesis is one of an increasing number of doctoral works that are turning to Grounded Theory based on the reasons outlined above.

4.9 Significance of Grounded Theory methodology adopted for this study

To improve the quality of teaching and learning for young people, which is an under-lining assumption of the middle years of schooling reform, it is necessary to understand the contextual realities of the people involved, in this case, the middle school teacher. School reform or improvement has a lamentable history of “failure” and “disaster” and an inability to sustain the change (Hargreaves 1993). According to Fullan (1982) and Hargreaves (1993), to bring about improvement in education, one must understand the contextual reality. Fullan (1982) asserts:

> “In order to effect improvement, that is, to effect an introduced change which has the promise of increasing success and decreasing failure, the world of the people most closely involved must be understood” (1982:149).

This lack of success in bringing about school improvement, according to Hargreaves (1993), is due to a lack of knowledge about the nature of the everyday life of teachers, students and schools. In addition, the resistance of policy makers to interpretivist and symbolic interactionist studies, what he calls the “immunological capacity” (1993:149), limits the gathering of detailed knowledge and quality research. Therefore, before any reform can be implemented it is first important to understand the contextual reality, thereby moving forward with some confidence that the new changes will be acceptable.
Therefore, Grounded Theory with its rich interpretivist descriptive narrative, can inform policy makers, and at the same time generate research that invites educators to better understand the plight of the middle school teacher as the reform is implemented (O’Donogheue 2007). Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Hargreaves (1993), stress the importance of generating themes, concepts, categories, frameworks, propositions and typologies which help understand the world of the middle school teacher and provide a language in which to speak about it. It is a particularly suitable method because it allows for new theoretical explanations to explain changes that have taken place in the field of education, in particular, middle schooling (Grbich 2007).

This research methodology is particularly suited to the complex sets of human activity embedded within the work of the middle school teacher. Therefore, this study provides the means of exploring participants’ different experiences and perspectives of the middle school teacher within the rigorous process of constant comparative analysis. It provides a tool for a ‘meeting of persons’ through the process of interview, where a conversation takes place between those who are known to each other in the activity of the middle school teaching. It was also chosen to bring sharper attention to the art and craft of teaching, which has been depersonalized and objectified in earlier research works (Janesick 1994; Treston 2001).

Grounded Theory provides a strong theoretical conceptualization of the data by explaining the phenomena under review through the different actions and interactions of the participants and the changes in conditions that may impact on the process itself. This is particularly relevant in this study because Grounded Theory provides a methodology that takes account of changing conditions or variations, and, is flexible enough for the inquirer to modify analyses as the conditions dictate, or new data is gathered (Charmaz 2003a:252). It is anticipated with this research that accountability of this type will take the form of judgments about the reliability of the data, about the adequacy of the research design and about empirical grounding of the findings.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the process of selecting a research approach that would satisfy the research aims to provide both empirical and theoretical outcomes for the study. Therefore,
Grounded Theory methodology was deemed particularly appropriate for this study, *In search of the middle school teacher* because it allows access to a diverse range of perspectives regarding the topic and enables ‘multiple voices’ to be heard and interpreted conceptually. In this study, the participant perspectives reflect the evolving experience of the middle school teacher, coupled with the more recent developments since the evolution of middle school teaching in the early 1990s.

The middle school teacher, across all sectors of education, is cause for much comment from amongst employers, school leaders, parents, student learners and teachers. The inquirer is an educator and former administrator within the Catholic School sector and has been involved in developing processes of employment of middle school teachers in recent times. The particular responsibility for induction programs for new and beginning teachers within the middle-school structure, therefore, appears to justify Grounded Theory as a critical mechanism to refine ongoing work in teacher development.

While the inquirer deliberately brings much experience to the study, the concern is that this study has credibility, applicability and relevance for the diverse political, ideological and educational contexts that impact on the middle school teacher. In addition, there is an intended contribution to policy, as it reflects on the development and support of middle school teacher expertise, and in grounded research practice and application for the overall benefit, enhancement and excellence of the middle school educational setting.

The selection of Grounded Theory is intended to develop theory about the middle-school teacher that informs all participants in this study, including the inquirer, about what has been learned in the study and why the data is interpreted and privileged. Through such an amalgamative, interactive, discursive, deconstructive process, the study will provide an additional lens through which to view this evolving phenomenon of the middle school teacher and, influence policy makers involved in the practice of middle school teaching and learning and in middle school educational leadership more generally.

The next chapter provides an in-depth description of the design process, the participants and how they were engaged, the data collection process, the issues of validity and reliability, the structure and method of the analysis describing the stages that emerged through the study.
Chapter 5

Research Methods

In our teaching and publications we tend to sell to students a smooth, almost idealised, model of the research of the process as neat, tidy and unproblematic...Perhaps we should be honest about the actual pains and perils of conducting research in order to prepare and forewarn aspiring inquirers (Punch 1986:13-14)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methods of the study are described and how, in particular, Grounded Theory was enacted at the level of practice. As stated in the previous chapter, Grounded Theory, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978) and reconceptualised by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) provides the research methodological framework for this study. The chapter commences by outlining the design of the research process. Issues surrounding reliability and trustworthiness are then discussed. The structure and method of the analysis is presented, with interpretative comments describing the phases that emerged throughout the research.

Therefore, this chapter is framed as such:

- the design of the research process is outlined (5.2);
- the validity and reliability issues are discussed (5.3);
- the participant sample of the study is described and the ethical issues in conducting research are discussed (5.4);
- the use of interview adopted for this study is outlined (5.5);
- the methods of data analysis are detailed (5.6);
- reflections on the design and analysis are presented (5.7); and
- a conclusion to the chapter is provided (5.8).

5.2 Design of the research process

The research reported here aims to explore perspectives regarding the experiences of middle school teachers in Education Queensland, Independent and Catholic systemic schools in
South-East Queensland. Qualitative data that captures participant perspectives deals with meanings and these meanings, according to Sayer (1992), are mediated through language and action. Grounded Theory provides an interactive, interpretative approach to data collection and analysis that examines participants’ understandings and meanings within the respective site contexts. It allows for “the minutiae of interaction in the understanding of social processes…emphasising change, action and interaction in social settings and the construction of meaning within these settings” (Grbich 2007:71,189). This provides the focus for a study, such as this where the processes of meaning and construction are important. Grounded Theory enables the inquirer to investigate the perspectives regarding the middle years of schooling teacher, by gathering information concerning participants’ actions, assumptions, definitions, values, adaptions and understandings of what constitutes a middle school teacher and what differentiates middle school teachers from primary and secondary school teachers. Grounded Theory is adopted in this study to generate theory rather than test preconceived theories and ideas.

5.3 Issues of validity and reliability

This qualitative study adopts an inductive approach to data gathering and analysis. As reported in Chapter 2, adopting an inductive interpretivist approach, rather than the more conventional deductive ‘scientific’ approach requires a shift in thinking regarding validity and reliability (Corbin & Strauss 2008). The study is framed by an epistemology that deals with human behaviour and how people make sense of the world. It concerns the importance of people’s actions: their perspectives and the meanings they attach to situations (Habermas 1987), in this case the participants’ individual school setting. The aim of Grounded Theory is to generate theory “discovered in the data” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:3). The validity and reliability of the findings in Grounded Theory are based on the “constant comparative method” of analysis by comparing data from diverse sources through systematic coding and analytic procedures (Glasser & Strauss 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) developed this method to not only compare data but in addition, to make “theoretical comparisons” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). This method is an essential instrument in discovering “properties and dimensions” through increasing “theoretical sensitivity, the ability to ‘see’ with analytic depth what is there” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:76). As a result, theoretical categories begin to emerge, which enables the generation of a substantive theory. While this experience of the inquirer
represents an important creative aspect of Grounded Theory by giving it a richer knowledge base and insight, it can also “block you from seeing things that have become routine or obvious” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:42). Making theoretical comparisons, the inquirer’s sensitivity to concepts is enhanced by listening more to what people are saying and grasping the meaning of what is said, thus initiating an inductive process of analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). Therefore, the challenge for the inquirer is to see the research situation and the data collected in new ways, allowing discovery and the development of theory that is grounded, “conceptually dense and well integrated” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:42). Being creative and scientific and at the same time being free of biases and unexplored assumptions will produce a valid and reliable theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Therefore, the principles and methods of Grounded Theory approach provide a systematic analytic approach that fulfils the requirements of validity and reliability that characterise rigorous research.

Grounded Theory methods demand the systematic comparison of data and theoretical concepts and the recording of deliberations drawn from this comparison in memos. In maintaining the reliability of the study, a process is established whereby all data collected, transcripts, notes, observations, codes and code memos were stored in a database. Therefore, the reliability of the study is enhanced by maintaining this database of data collection and analysis which results in an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:316).

The study is built on the understandings and perspectives of the participants. While these perspectives might be ambiguous, Grounded Theory stresses the importance of the way they are interpreted and defined. The way in which the procedures of the methods are implemented determines the quality of the research and how well it meets the criteria for engaging in ‘good’ science (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan 1998; Chamaz 2003a; Yates 2004; O’Donoghue 2007). The soundness and quality of qualitative research depends on the attention given to hermeneutics (Herda 1999; Patton 2002). In-depth interviews are designed to develop concepts, categories, insights and understandings from patterns in the data, they are not designed to assess preconceived ideas or theories (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). At the completion of each interview a transcript of the interview is made available to each individual participant, who is invited to make additions, amendments or deletions, with any changes being transferred to the original. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this is a strategy that establishes the credibility of qualitative studies. Consistent with
In search of the middle school teacher – Chapter 5

the principles of Grounded Theory the inquirer “maintains analytical distance” ensuring “theoretical and social sensitivity” while drawing upon past experience and theoretical knowledge of the area of study (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Throughout the process of interviews every attempt is made to focus on the purpose of the interview, namely to gain perspectives from the experiences of the participants regarding the attributes of the middle years of schooling teacher. Each interview concludes with the opportunity for each participant to confirm that their ideas had been accurately captured by the inquirer.

In this type of research the issue of reliability of the interviews is addressed by following the guidelines for semi-structured interviews (Silverman 2001; Patton 2002; Fontana & Frey 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009) to ensure consistency and to constrain the variability between interviews (Charmaz 2003b). The potential issues surrounding intimidation and passive responses (Holstein & Gubrium 2003) to the questions being asked at the interview are defused by having the participants well briefed before the interview. In addition, each of the participants is provided with a copy of the interview questions prior to interview. This invites participants to take time to reflect and prepare for the interview.

This study adopts a multi-method approach to data collection which provided a platform to address concerns of bias and trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln 2005). It is appropriate to evaluate the study in terms of its trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln 2005) because of the multiple methods for the interpretation of data, given the study lies within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

According to Denzin (1994), interpretation of the data collection and analysis is built into the research design and “rest[s] on triangulated empirical materials that are trustworthy” (1994:508). Trustworthiness can be assessed through four criteria: “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:300). The use of multiple methods and procedures will ensure that the study’s credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are enhanced.

In a qualitative inquiry, such as this one, the research process and data gathering may be conducted in a variety of ways. In this case interviews are the most common and preferred method of gathering data. The interview has become the “most widely used technique for
conducting systematic social inquiry” (Holstein & Gubrium 2003:3). In these new times, has been tagged “the interview society” (Fontana & Frey 2008:695) in that interviews have become central to the way people make sense of their lives. The details of such a process are discussed later in this chapter. Therefore, the trustworthiness of Grounded Theory is based on the capacity of the inquirer to make judgements surrounding the validity and reliability of the data, the adequacy of the research and the empirical grounding of the findings (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). To achieve this, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria of research trustworthiness will underpin the design of the study, to ensure that it is undertaken systematically and effectively.

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the data. The credibility is increased when research activities are designed to make it more likely that “credible findings and interpretations will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:301). The credibility of this study is greatly increased by the flexible period of data collection, the timely engagement with the participants, the multi-method approach to data gathering and the opportunity given to participants to comment on their transcript of interview.

Transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is impossible in qualitative inquiry. However, in Grounded Theory methodology, the aim is to generate theory which incorporates working hypotheses and the emerging analysis provides a telling explanation of the studied phenomena. This can result in ‘thick description’ on which judgements are made about the possibility of transfer to other contexts outside of this study. In this study, judgements about the middle school teacher attributes and the transferability of the findings to other contexts are based on purposeful sampling, the use of memos and documents, the detailed analysis of the interview transcripts by comparing data with data, category with category, which demonstrates that the emerging theoretical framework is grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998).

The Dependability criterion refers to the ‘rigour’ related to the consistency of the findings. This is achieved, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), through the development of an ‘audit trail’ to determine from the written account the point at which the various stages of analysis have occurred. In this study the audit trail will allow readers to ‘walk through’ the study from
beginning to end, thereby, enabling an understanding of the path taken and the trustworthiness of the results.

Confirmability criterion refers to the “extent to which the data and interpretations of the study are grounded in events rather than the [inquirer’s] personal constructions” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:324). In this study the ‘audit trail’ serves as the key strategy used to ensure that confirmability is achieved. Reflective questioning of the audit trail offers the opportunity for the study to be evaluated. For example, questions such as the following will be exposed: are the findings grounded in the data? Are the conclusions based on the data logical? Is the category structure meaningful and relevant and does it fit the data (Strauss & Corbin 1994)? Moreover, throughout the research process, in particular the writing phase, Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) evaluative criteria, formulated into seven questions, are used to determine the extent to which Grounded Theory studies are empirically grounded:

- Criterion # 1: Are concepts generated?
- Criterion # 2: Are the concepts systematically related?
- Criterion # 3: Are there many conceptual linkages and are the categories well developed? Do they have conceptual density?
- Criterion # 4: Is there much variation built into the theory?
- Criterion # 5: Are the broader conditions that affect the phenomenon under study built into its explanation?
- Criterion # 6: Has the process been taken into account?
- Criterion # 7: Do the theoretical findings seem significant and to what extent (1990:254-256)?

Finally, the real trustworthiness and reliability of the research study rests upon its capacity to bring something ‘telling’ to the attention of the readers, particularly those who participated in the study and from those schools and school systems that participated. Furthermore, trustworthiness of this project will rest with other teachers, administrators, university academics and others who have an expressed interest in the attributes of middle school teachers.

5.4 Participants

There are many reasons for choosing to do qualitative research; foremost among these is the desire to step into the unknown and to ‘walk in the shoes’ of the participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so “make discoveries that will contribute to the
development of empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss 2008:16). In this study it is the concerns and shared circumstances, as middle school teachers, shared patterns of meanings and behaviour that will be investigated. Strauss and Corbin (2008) argue:

“It is not distance that qualitative inquirers want between themselves and their participants, but the opportunity to connect with them on a human level...A challenge that brings the whole self into the process (2008:13).”

Participants for the study are drawn from South-East Queensland (SEQ). This is Australia’s fastest growing region with approximately half of the Queensland population residing in SEQ corner. The region covers 22,420 square kilometres, stretching from Noosa on the Sunshine Coast in the north, to Coolangatta on the Gold Coast to the south, and 140 kilometres west to Toowoomba. The study consists of six schools drawn from the Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast and Brisbane City. Three schools represent the Independent sector, two represent Education Queensland and one selected from the Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese Systemic schools. Included in the sample are three P-12 schools, two secondary schools (Year 8-12) and one central school (Year 1-10) with individual school populations ranging from approximately 144 students to 1600 students. The research sample is summarised in Table 5.1

Table 5.1 Profile of the research sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>EDUCATION QUEENSLAND SCHOOLS x 2</th>
<th>CATHOLIC SYSTEMIC SCHOOLS x 1</th>
<th>INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS x 3</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Year 6-9 teachers</td>
<td>Year 6-9 teachers</td>
<td>Year 6-9 teachers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy/Assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal/ Head of Middle School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Focus Groups</td>
<td>Year 7, 9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>Year 7, 9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>Year 7, 9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 focus group per cohort group</td>
<td>1 focus group per cohort group</td>
<td>1 focus group per cohort group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selection of the sample as profiled above also serves to complement the central research question and harness a much clearer understanding of the phenomenon of the middle school teacher. This is achieved through observing the differences and similarities across the three education contexts selected, which provide considerations in identifying the emergent categories during the research process (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Although contrasting the
features and characteristics of the three sectors within a contextual framework is not the principal focus of this study, it nonetheless did allow for some observations to be made which are detailed later in the thesis. The selection is designed to generate a differentiated sample, included a most diverse range of schools, teachers and students.

5.4.1 Gaininng access to participants - The ‘Gatekeepers’

According to Glesne (1999) gaining access to participants in qualitative research is a strategic process:

It refers to your acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whoever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research purposes. If you received full and unqualified consent, then you have obtained total access (1999:39).

Gaining ‘acquisition of consent’ for this study requires formal approval from a number of ‘gatekeepers’ prior to commencing data collection. Yates (2004) describes ‘gatekeepers’ as those people “who control or have power” (2004:160) within the research context being explored. The ‘gatekeepers’ in this research project fit into two broad categories; ‘system gatekeepers’ and ‘individual gatekeepers’. The ‘system gatekeepers’ include the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Sunshine Coast and the school systems governing authority, principals and teachers. The ‘individual gatekeepers’ are the teachers, the students, and parents/carers of the students and, in some instances, principals of schools as well. The relationship between the research ‘gatekeepers’, is symbolised in Figure 5.1.
5.4.2 ‘System Gatekeepers’

To gain access to the participants for the study, and for data collection to be approved, a series of procedures are required. In the first instance, ethics approval is sought and received from the inquirer’s governing university (refer Appendix A). USC maintains strict guidelines for research ethics approval, especially where young people are involved. Following ethics approval, both Education Queensland and Brisbane Catholic Education are required to give consent to conduct research in their sector (refer Appendix B). This requires written application to the Strategic Policy and Education Futures Division of Education Queensland (refer Appendix C). Approval to conduct research in Catholic Systemic schools of the Archdiocese of Brisbane is granted after receiving written permission from the Director and
processed by the Brisbane Catholic Education Research Office (refer Appendices D.1; D.2). To gain approval from schools within the Independent sector, school principals are contacted directly. Both Education Queensland and Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) nominate the schools that can be contacted as potential participants in the research study.

Obtaining consent is a critical ethical component for nurturing a trusting and empowering relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Taylor & Bogan 1998; Yates 2004; Glesne 2006; Fontana & Frey 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). According to Glesne (2006), informed consent leads to the empowering of research participants. This was done by providing specific letters of invitation, consent and information statements (refer Appendices E; F; G). Parents/carers were provided with a similar invitation letter, information statements and consent form (refer Appendices E; H; I). To establish a base for informed consent this provided the opportunity for all participants, in particular, between parent and child, to discuss the research project. (Taylor & Bogdan 1998; Glesne 1999; Silverman 2001; Yates 2004; Fontana & Frey 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). In addition, copies of the interview format and questions were provided to all participants (refer Appendix J, K; L).

Given the importance of this ethical principle, participants in this study provided their informed consent through being made aware:

- that participation in this research project was entirely voluntary;
- that participants/schools/systems were able to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or prejudice;
- that student participation was a joint consent between student and parent/carer;
- of the anonymity of each participant and school


The process of facilitating informed consent is best achieved through documentation. For this study the following documents are critical to the process of obtaining informed consent: Participants’ information statement (refer Appendix E), teacher and student participant data information form (refer Appendix G and H), teacher and student consent form (refer Appendix F and I). Preliminary briefings are held with each school Principal and Heads of Middle School
who act as the liaison between the inquirer and the school. Briefings and the provision of documents invite all of the gatekeepers the opportunity to consider the research project and to make informed decisions concerning participation in the study. Anonymity is ensured for all schools and individual participants in the study by allocating each a code number and a pseudonym.

5.4.3 The selection of the participants
An initial list of possible participating schools was drafted based on current or future engagement with the middle years of schooling philosophy and innovative practices in learning and teaching. The Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA) Queensland identified those schools that were acknowledged in the education community as implementing middle years of schooling philosophy and practice. Of the fifteen schools approached, six agreed to participate. The participants were grouped into three categories: (i) Leaders: Principals, Deputy Principals, Assistant Principals and Heads of Middle School, (ii) Teachers of Middle School, and (iii) Students. The profiles of the participants, including the code number and the pseudonym used in the research are outlined in Table 5.2 to Table 5.5.

Table 5.2 A profile of the Principals in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N of School enrolments</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code name used in the study</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N of Years experience</th>
<th>N of Years in current school</th>
<th>Pre-service Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>Secondary Principal</td>
<td>F24</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1251</td>
<td>Secondary Principal</td>
<td>F10</td>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>1-10 Principal</td>
<td>F25</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>470</td>
<td>P-12 Principal</td>
<td>F19</td>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>P-12 Principal</td>
<td>F26</td>
<td>Clint</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>P-12 Principal</td>
<td>F03</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.3 A profile of the Heads of Middle School/Deputy/Assistant Principals in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code name used in the study</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N of years experience</th>
<th>Years in current school</th>
<th>Pre-service Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Middle School Secondary</td>
<td>F12</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of middle school P-12</td>
<td>F06</td>
<td>Rosemary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of middle school P-12</td>
<td>F01</td>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of middle school Secondary</td>
<td>F05</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal P-12</td>
<td>F14</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Principal P-12</td>
<td>F19</td>
<td>Humphrey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Principal Secondary</td>
<td>F23</td>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Principal Secondary</td>
<td>F09</td>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.4 A profile of the Middle School Teachers in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code name used in the study</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N of Years in current position</th>
<th>Pre-service Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FAN21</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FAN02</td>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FAN04</td>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Upper primary/Junior secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FSI20</td>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FSI18</td>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FSI17</td>
<td>Peggy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FMA15</td>
<td>Cher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FMA27</td>
<td>Meryl</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FMA13</td>
<td>Dixie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FMR08</td>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FMR07</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FAS16</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Upper primary/Junior secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FAS28</td>
<td>Gregory</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>FAS11</td>
<td>Mae</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5 A profile of Student Focus Groups in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code name used in the study</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N in each group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7 P-12</td>
<td>FG01</td>
<td>Bashful</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7 P-12</td>
<td>FG02</td>
<td>Doc</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8 P-12</td>
<td>FG03</td>
<td>Dopey</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 P-12</td>
<td>FG04</td>
<td>Grumpy</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 P-12</td>
<td>FG05</td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 Secondary</td>
<td>FG06</td>
<td>Sleepy</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 Secondary</td>
<td>FG07</td>
<td>Sneezy</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 P-12</td>
<td>FG08</td>
<td>Aladdin</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 P-12</td>
<td>FG09</td>
<td>Frodo</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 Secondary</td>
<td>FG10</td>
<td>Pippin</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 Secondary</td>
<td>FG11</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Grounded Theory there exists no hard and fast rules regarding which participants will be included or excluded (Stern 2009). The design of Grounded Theory is one of exploration and discovery “not a mapped course” (Stern 2009: 69). In other words the researcher is the map maker. To be faithful to the method participants were selected on the basis of their ability to significantly contribute to the puzzle of what it means to be a middle school teacher for them. Therefore, in selecting the participant sample importance was given to the inclusion of a diverse range of participants including principals, teachers and students of schools who were engaged in implementing middle schooling. Hence, the study used a purposive sample: participants who suited the purpose of putting the different pieces of the puzzle together. Furthermore, the broadest range of participants ensures the depth of data acquisition.

Grounded Theory requires a process for selecting participants from a total volunteer pool. The strategy adapted to access participants included stratified-purposeful random sampling and mixed purposeful random sampling (Patton 2002). Stratified-purposeful random sampling allowed for a cross section of participants from within the different sectors of schools in South-East Queensland. This offered the opportunity to capture major variations as opposed to identifying common core understandings of a single sector. In addition, the methodology of mixed purposeful random sampling was used to enhance credibility (Patton 2002). The inquiry used a rich variety of methods to illuminate the research question: intermixing interviewing, observation and document analysis. This allowed for different types of data to emerge providing cross-data validity checks (Patton 2002). While different types of data may give different results, the inconsistencies can be a source of great discovery and deeper insight into the relationship between the inductive inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study (Patton 2002).

A four point Likert response scale shown in Table 5.6 was designed to provide a discriminator for purposeful random selection. Those who volunteered for the study, except the students, were required to rate their perspective concerning the emergence of the middle school teacher in Australia to provide the inquirer with different perspectives regarding the focus of the study.
Table 5.6  Four point Likert scale

“The emerging position of the middle school teacher is a positive development in education in Australia”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the twenty nine participants selected from the total volunteer group the responses of these participants are indicated in Table 5.6. Grounded Theory methodological framework requires participants with a keen interest in the topic and ideally those who have diverse experiences of the phenomena being studied (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Within these differences participants came from schools with long primary/secondary school traditions, and schools more recently established and in the process of reconfiguring and restructuring to adopt a middle school philosophy. The participants came from both single gender and co-gender schools. Significantly, none of the Principal participants had been a Head of Middle School or had recent direct classroom teaching experience in the middle years. All the participants, except for the two Deputy Principals, had only been in the position for a relatively short time. Experience amongst heads of middle school and teachers of the middle years ranged from 0.5 years to 10 years. In addition, most Principals and Heads of Middle School represented a secondary school pre-service background. Two heads of middle school had a primary background but were deployed in secondary schools. The middle years of schooling teachers in the study tended to come from a secondary school pre-service background and were in their beginning years of teaching. Amongst the P-12 schools, teachers came from a mix of primary, early childhood and secondary pre-service backgrounds. However, the study showed many of the Principals and Heads of Middle School were in their first phase of leadership and, for teachers their first experience of teaching in the middle years as Figure 5.2 illustrates.
5.5 Methods of data collection: Interviews

The focus of qualitative research is contextual, giving emphasis to the ‘lived’ experience of the participants (Fontana & Frey 2008). Grounded Theory studies grow out of questions inquirers ask about people in their specific contexts, as in this study regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher. The data gathered and analysed are always contextual because participants are studied in their natural setting. Interviews in Grounded Theory permit inquirers to discover how a phenomenon is experienced by the interviewee, discovering first hand the world as seen through the eyes of the participants (Charmaz 2003b). According to Seidman (2006), the interview is about the perspectives of the participants, reflecting on their experience, giving meaning to it and coming to a heightened consciousness (Seidman 2006) of that lived experience. However, it is the phenomenon or the process that the grounded theorist is interested in, not the setting itself (Charmaz 2006). The Grounded Theory method requires the inquirer to have “more analytic control over their material” (Charmaz 2006:28). The interview strategy of data collection gives the inquirer this control. This technique of in-depth interviewing, with its emphasis on being open-ended and flexible, complements Grounded Theory methodology.

In-depth interviews were the main research method used to generate data concerning participants’ perspective on the attributes of middle years of schooling teacher. The interviews
gave access to knowledge and interpretations that required thorough and systematic procedures to enable analysis and to build theory concerning participants’ perspectives regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher (Charmaz 2006; O’Donoghue 2007). Based on the epistemological assumptions that there existed multiple realities concerning the phenomena under study, the style of in-depth interviewing became an important consideration. With this in mind, the semi-structured interview style as opposed to the structured or unstructured style was adopted.

5.5.1 Semi-structured interview
Semi-structured interviews are “face to face encounters between the inquirer and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words” (Taylor & Bogan 1998:88). The interviewer, in this particular style, is first, concerned about establishing rapport with the interviewee. A flexible schedule of questions is developed, with less importance placed on the order of questions, providing the interviewer the freedom to probe areas of interest and concern (Yates 2004). Second, it allows for greater depth than is available with the other styles and enables the interviewer to interpret participants’ views (O’Donoghue 2007).

The strength of the semi-structured interview is its potential to create an environment where participants can discuss their lived experiences in free-flowing and open-ended conversations (O’Donoghue 2007). According to Yates (2004), there are three key features of semi-structured interviews. First, the flexibility it offers the inquirer in exploring participants’ concerns and questions that might have been otherwise overlooked at the commencement of the study. Second, its ability to explore complex, ambiguous subtleties of participants’ social situations, that would be restricted in structured interview or survey styles. Third, it allows the inquirer to negotiate potential meanings of questions and responses from the interviewee’s perspective.

5.5.2 The Interview Schedule
When embedded as a study in Grounded Theory, it is important the interview be one of discovery and exploration, allowing the participants’ perspectives/stories to emerge. In-depth interviews are demanding as they require a range of activities to be done at once: following
the schedule, asking questions, allowing the conversation to flow, being conscious of time, listening and maintaining the required ‘face’ (Yates 2004). For this reason interviews can be conducted over two to three days in any one site during the course of a week. This allowed some reflective time to memo the interviews, while maintaining an element of freshness towards each interview (Yates 2004). In-depth interviewing is hard work and according to Yates (2004) can be “quite tiresome” for the interviewer. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of the interview, appropriate attention to the management of the interview process is required.

The design of the questions for the interviews in this study follow Yates (2004) three-tier process: opening and initiating, probing and follow-up. First, the opening and initiating questions are general, open and neutral which assist in opening up the topic. Second, probing and follow-up questions are questions that encourage the interviewees to ‘expand’, ‘give examples’, ‘describe’, ‘feel’, ‘clarify’, ‘explain’. Third, follow-up questions are similar to probing questions, but can sometimes be spontaneous as the interview develops making the interview process flexible and continuous (Yates 2004) and yet, at all times focusing on the key research question. The question design framework is outlined in Table 5.7 giving examples of questions from the interview schedule to reflect the stages put forward by Yates (2004: 165-167) [refer Appendix J; L].
Table 5.7 Question design framework for interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The research questions</th>
<th>Interview questions Principals, Heads of Middle School, Deputy/Assistant Principals</th>
<th>Interview questions Student focus groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What are the attributes of the middle school teacher?</td>
<td>OPENING and INITIATING:</td>
<td>OPENING and INITIATING:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does an understanding of these attributes inform the development of a model?</td>
<td>• Describe the original/ideal vision for the middle school teacher position.</td>
<td>• Tell me about your middle school. What do you like about it? What is the best thing that stands out from all the rest about your Middle School?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What differentiates a middle school teacher from primary and secondary teachers?</td>
<td>• Tell me about your role and function as a middle school teacher in your school. Who determined such a role and function and did you have any say in it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is the nature and philosophy of middle schooling?</td>
<td>PROBING:</td>
<td>PROBING:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do you foster/nurture a middle school identity?</td>
<td>• How successful has this initiative been in contributing to better social and academic student outcomes? What evidence can you point to?</td>
<td>• Is there a difference in the way the middle school teacher does things to what you were used to in the primary or other school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What middle years of schooling signifying practices do you use in your classroom (eg integrated curriculum, teacher teaming, negotiated learning etc)? Explain.</td>
<td>• Do you think of teachers as learners? Can you give examples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What benefits have you seen in terms of student learning as a result of these initiatives? What evidence do you have for this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOLLOW-UP:</td>
<td>FOLLOW-UP:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent has the ideal vision for the middle school been realised?</td>
<td>• Do you think or feel that your teachers enjoy teaching you? What evidence do you have for this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tell me about what factors draw you towards being a teacher of the middle years and especially of young adolescent learners?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.3 Focus Groups

Interviews with the student participants are best conducted through focus groups. A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of between “six to ten participants, but the size can range from as few as four to as many as twelve” (Litosseliti 2003:3). In this study the size of the focus groups varied between four and eight participants (refer Table 5.5). The focus group strategy, as opposed to the use of one-on-one individual interviews, is useful for three reasons. Firstly, while each focus group represents a single cohort group, the age of the
participants varied from between age 11 to 16 years, necessitating the need to create a permissive and non-threatening interview environment (Patton 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This enhances the participants’ comfort and enjoyment as they share their different ideas and perspectives (Krueger & Casey 2000; Patton 2002; Litosseliti 2003; Charmaz 2003b). Secondly, the focus group strategy recognises that a young person depends very much on their social context to explore and exchange ideas. This collective approach provides for multiple interactions and empowers the participants to speak more freely than the one-on-one approach might achieve (Patton 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Thirdly, the use of focus groups provides the young participants, who may find the individual interview intimidating, the opportunity to share ideas in a safe and neutral environment in the company of peers (Litosseliti 2003).

The focus group interviews are well-suited to this study, invites the student participants to explore the topic in a lively collective and spontaneous interaction. The expression of ideas and viewpoints brought forth by the student focus groups may not be accessible in an individual interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The focus group strategy depends strongly on the interaction and stimulation amongst participants, in order to create new viewpoints and pathways to explore and discuss (Litosseliti 2003). Furthermore, involving the students and giving them a voice in the study through focus groups enhances the overall trustworthiness of the study by achieving aspects of pragmatic validity (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). In this study it is the individual and focus group interviews that provide generate data for analysis and interpretation.

The interview process began in March 2007 and was completed in December 2007. Throughout the interview process data analysis was continually emerging and all interviews contributed to the final analysis. Each interview was digitally recorded and following each interview the audio file was transcribed, and field notes and memos were kept. As far as possible each interview was transcribed and the methodological notes completed prior to the commencement of the next interview. The audiotapes, transcriptions, methodological files and field notes for each interview were stored in a lockable filling cabinet, and any electronic files were backed up regularly, reflecting the security and ethical requirements to conduct research at USC.
5.6 Analysis of Data

Integral to the Grounded Theory methodology adopted for this study is informed principally by the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). The aim of the analysis is to generate ‘substantiative theory’ regarding the perspectives of stakeholders concerning the attributes of middle years of schooling teacher. The methods of analysis are consistent with the thinking of symbolic interactionists (Charmaz 2006) based on the premise that reality is a constantly changing entity and that social processes can be changed by interactions among people (Grbich 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). Grounded Theory calls for a general methodology of comparative analysis emphasising that the inquirer must become immersed in the data, being grounded, so that embedded meanings and relationships can emerge (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). The process of building Grounded Theory and the phases of interpretative analysis adapted in this study are summarised in Figure 5.3.

![Diagram of the process of building Grounded Theory and research framework for data analysis](image)

**Figure 5.3** Process of building Grounded Theory and research framework for data analysis

Building theory that ‘fits’ and ‘works’ according to Glaser & Strauss (1967) is to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study. Furthermore:
By “fit” we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by “work” we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behaviour under study (Glaser & Strauss 1967:3).

Grounded Theory enables on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical context. Therefore, by drawing on Grounded Theory methodology and procedures (refer Figure 5.3) “represent the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in a new way. It is the central process by which theories are built from data” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:57). The aim of the analysis is to achieve inductively derived interpretations of the data by identifying concepts and their relationship with emergent propositions. The constant comparative method of analysis forms the coding process that builds the preliminary theory. Furthermore, the development of a substantive theory provides the framework for understanding the social contexts from which theory was generated (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998).

Each interview was transcribed, with a code number and pseudonym, to enhance familiarity with the data. To enhance accuracy each transcript was re-read while the recorded interviews were replayed. Where necessary, the transcribed text was then edited for accuracy. During and following the replay of the interview, codes, categories and memos were prepared.

The inquirer listened to the recorded interviews to gain insight into the emotions and nuances of the recorded conversations. Each transcript was read again for analysis while the interview was replayed, listening for concepts and categories that were emerging from the data. This early attempt at categorisation, as a dimension of coding, began the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the process of sensitising and developing comprehensive familiarity with the interview was seen as a priority before more detailed analysis of the text could take place.

Consideration was given to whether the data would be analysed manually or by utilising qualitative data analysis computing software. The decision was made to use NVivo 8 (QSR 2008) computing software analysis package to complement the manual contextual analysis, given its potential to support the storage and analysis of data and to assist in the generation of theory. According to Bazeley (2007), computer qualitative data analysis assists the rigour of the analysis because it “ensures that the user is working more methodically, more thoroughly and more attentively” (2007:3). However, the effectiveness of the NVivo software in qualitative
analysis is entirely dependent on the competence of the user: “good tools cannot make up for poor workmanship” (2007:3). Furthermore, the advances made in qualitative computer analysis software points more to the uses to which it can be put in furthering analysis (Richards 2005). Having made the decision to use NVivo 8, the project was set up and data records (transcripts, memos, journal notes, audio files, documents) were imported into this micro-computing program. Each text was searched individually for concepts and categories, thus enhancing the manual analysis. In addition, the program was used for further annotations about the data, descriptions of concepts and recording of memos as the analysis progressed. A number of concepts were generated from the texts ensuring that the two processes identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) of first, making comparisons, and second, asking questions, led to genuine “constant comparative analysis” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:104). These two procedures according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) help give the concepts in Grounded Theory their “precision and specificity” (1990:31).

As the analysis progressed, code notes and theoretical notes, were kept. Code notes are a particular type of memo drawing attention to the initial conceptual labels that emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin 1990). In addition, theoretical notes assist in summarising the coding results and point to new inductive thinking of potentially relevant categories (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

5.6.1 Phases of interpretative analysis
With the framework of Grounded Theory, analysis begins, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), with ‘basic description’ moving to ‘conceptual ordering’. That is, organising data into discrete categories “according to their properties and dimensions and then using description to elucidate those categories” (Strauss & Corbin 1998:19). This is followed by ‘theorising’ which is “conceiving or intuiting ideas - concepts - then also formulating them into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme” (1998:21). The coding procedures of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin 1990) were applied flexibly to this study during the period of data gathering, analysis and theory formulation. Theoretical sampling concludes the interpretative analysis. These procedures represent the different phases in the analysis of the data for the study which will now be considered.
5.6.2 Phase One - Microanalysis open and axial coding

Open Coding

Microanalysis involves initial or open coding which is the process of “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:61). This process allows for the identification of concepts, grounded in the data, developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. During open coding, the data is “fractured” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:97) into concepts, so that the inquirer can examine and compare similarities and differences, while questions are being asked “about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:62). Therefore, the conceptualisation of the data is the first phase of the analysis. To do this some constant questioning of the data is required by asking: “what is actually happening in the data? What is the main story here, and why? What category does this incident indicate” (Strauss 2004:206)? Through this process of open coding, one’s own and others’ assumptions about a phenomenon are examined and explored, thereby leading to new discoveries (Strauss & Corbin 1990:62).

As categories are generated each is given a label, an in vivo code (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Strauss 2004). In vivo codes are terms used by the participants in the study. Using ‘in vivo’ labels, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), keep the analysis close to the data. A description of each label is developed and includes material concerning the properties and dimensions of each category. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), an understanding of the properties and dimensions is important because it identifies the relationship between categories and sub-propositions. An example of category development from the study with its properties and dimensions is presented in Table 5.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Dimensional Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specialist in adolescence Middle</td>
<td>adolescence</td>
<td>childhood………………adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teacher Transition</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>tolerance…………………nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle years learner</td>
<td>transition</td>
<td>passive……………………agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>middle years learner</td>
<td>pessimism…………………optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>uncomfortable………comfortable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interview as illustrated in Table 5.9. This is considered as “the most detailed type of analysis, but the most generative” (Strauss & Corbin 1990:72). Doing line-by-line coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), frees the inquirer to move beyond description and into a “conceptual mode of analysis” (1998:66). During the process of open coding a number substantive codes (2007) emerged and these were grouped into categories. As similar concepts emerged from the process of constant comparison, these concepts were grouped together under a ‘higher order’ more abstract concept known as a category (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). By constantly comparing the codes, it was possible to reduce and refine the concepts to reflect the main concerns and their relationships. Open coding comes to an end when a core category (core proposition) emerges from the data (Strauss & Corbin 1998; Dey 1999).

Table 5.9  Example of line-by-line coding of an interview transcript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview statement of a Head of Middle School</th>
<th>Line-by-Line Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the original/ideal vision for the middle school teacher position.</td>
<td>Changed title to Head of Middle School from Director of Middle School, leadership structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My title just recently changed to Head of Middle School from the Director of Middle schooling. The original vision or ideal vision for our version of middle schooling was predominantly based around the idea of core teachers with a core class group. We wanted to pursue that particularly, for the basis of time, to provide time for teachers to get to know the students better as learners, and as people. Time for the teachers to do some more detail planning so the curriculum could become more vigorous for students and within the year levels, to look at how it linked between the year levels. Obviously, there is the strong pastoral side by having provided that basis for relationships between the teachers, the students. Also, between the teachers that have a team of teaching staff as well. The other two aspects that were probably the pillars underneath the middle school approach were to integrate the curriculum. We chose to look at that in the areas of English, SOSE and Science, still keeping the science lab, connected being taught by specialist science teacher. Negotiation of student work will be included, independent individual and/or group projects and x had a bit of a say in how they were going to determine the topics, due dates those aspects that was the starting point and 3 1/2 years have evolved for me into what it currently is. It is about to go into the next phase of its evolution next year.</td>
<td>Original/ideal vision Vision core teacher Vision core class group Time for teachers Students as learners Detailed planning Vigorous curriculum links between year levels Strong ethos of care Relationships Relationships between students and teachers Important, teaching team Pillars of middle school approach Integrated curriculum Integrate English, SOSE, Science Keeping Science lab Science taught by a specialist teacher, Negotiation of student work Independent learning, individual/group projects, Negotiated topics 31/2 years of middle school Evolving process Predicting the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Axial Coding

Axial coding is the process of making connections between the identified categories and sub-propositions according to a particular coding paradigm. This, according to Strauss and Corbin (2004) is central to the coding procedures. The coding paradigm acts as a “reminder to code data for relevance to whatever phenomena are referenced by a given category” (Strauss 2004:204). This is symbolised in Figure 5.4.

![Figure 5.4 Coding paradigm (Adapted from Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998)](image)

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) assert that the analysis is determined by the “conditions, context, action/interaction strategies and consequences.” Therefore, axial coding is focused on:

[S]pecifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the consequences of those strategies [original emphasis] (1990:97).

In this study axial coding takes place around the axis of the category (Strauss & Corbin 1998). It was used by constantly comparing data as an inductive analysis centred on the “axis of one category at a time” (Strauss 2004:207). This provided cumulative knowledge about the relationships between each category and sub-propositions. This led to the building of “dense texture of conceptualisation” (Strauss 2004:2007) around the axis. Hypotheses and linkages were made regarding the relationships with each category and sub-propositions and tested by re-examining the data previously collected or by examining new aspects about the phenomena being studied. To assist the process of axial coding, code notes were written and theoretical
memos were documented to identify the relationships between proposition and sub-propositions, and to shift the study into the analytical realm (Strauss 2004).

5.6.3 Phase Two - Selective coding

Through constant comparison, open coding and axial coding generated categories from the data and identified the relationships between a category and many categories. The task of integrating the categories into a theory reflecting the perspectives of key stakeholders in regard to the middle years of schooling teacher, their attributes and what differentiates them from other teachers, had begun. The process of integrating categories, and thus, generating a central or “core category” (core proposition) is called selective coding (Strauss & Corbin 1990:116). Furthermore, selective coding according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), is the process of systematically and concertedly selecting the core category, as it relates to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.

In this study selective coding was commenced by following what Strauss and Corbin (1990) by formulating “a general descriptive overview of the story” (1990:119). The following example (refer Table 5.10), the emerging theory concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher. This story line was expressed in a theoretical memo (refer Table 5.10):

Table 5.10 Theoretical memo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive overview of the story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The middle years of schooling teacher is a new generation of teacher who is primarily concerned with the well-being of young adolescents. Breaking out of childhood into adolescence, looking forward to doing more “mature” things becoming more adult, wanting to be treated like adults and for their teacher to be a friend, not someone who ‘lauds it over them’. &quot;Teachers have more rights than us&quot; They are strongly social justice oriented and get concerned when certain students are picked on by the teacher or at least that is how they perceive it. The symbolism of becoming mature. The change of uniform, the increased workload. A comment by a student &quot;the teacher shapes you kind of&quot; and ‘I like learning about myself’. The world of the young adolescent is emerging, exciting and they see themselves growing through it. Happy to have ‘escaped’ primary school and they are no longer a child! A metaphor here about middle schooling teacher is the ‘shaper’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The middle school provides a buffer for the ware and tare of early adolescence. Traditionally this would be seen as marking time, the storm and stress of early adolescence. A time of waiting, allowing this phase to pass before reconnecting. Traditionally students were seen as passive during this time of adolescence, not active. Adolescence is different for everyone some start early and some finish later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are &quot;useless to you if they are not socially and emotionally happy&quot; says one teacher. The middle school teacher needs to like adolescents. The changes taking place physically, socially and emotionally, and academically is a rollercoaster ride and unpredictable. How the teacher guides the young adolescent through</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is critical if the student is to come through this in tact and confident within themselves with this new found maturity.

This process of adolescence sees the importance of friends as mentors and less dependence on adults for their social emotional support. To manage this transition of early adolescence the notion of core teacher in Year 6-9 provided consistency of faces with students and helped the management of this rollercoaster ride.

The teacher needs adolescent focused, be open to the unpredictability of young adolescents as opposed to being well behaved children who do as they are told. The middle school stands alone because of this age group, young adolescents do not want to be put in a box. The middle school teacher has to be able run with the punches, the high and lows of young people going through changes that are confronting and life changing. The middle school teacher is a specialist in adolescence.

They don't want to be treated in a condescending way "hormones on feet for example. They want to be understood and challenged and loved unconditionally and valued for who they are. This takes a particular type of teacher dedicated to adolescence. The teacher needs to be able to cope with all the extremes of adolescence, in all their classes, all of the time and be optimistic.

The middle school is a response the needs of early adolescents. Early adolescence is time where they test out their ideas, enthusiastic and seeing the world as something beyond themselves for the first time. The primary reason to establish a middle school is to specialise in early adolescence.

Once committed to the story, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), it is necessary to move beyond description to conceptualisation. The story needs to be told analytically and, as with open and axial coding, the central phenomenon needs to be labelled and identified as a category related to other categories. What emerges is the core category (core proposition). According to Strauss (2004), to be effective a core category must be:

- **Central**: related to many categories and accounts for a large proportion of variation the data.
- **Frequent and Stable**: be seen as recurrent pattern in the data.
- **Relates easily**: relates to other categories, therefore, takes more time to saturate than other categories.
- **Incisive**: clear implication for more general theory.
- **Powerful**: helps the inquirer to move the analysis forward to a successful conclusion.
- **Variance**: to seek variations in terms of conditions, dimension and strategies (2004:208-209)

As with phase one, theoretical memos were kept during the process of selective coding, ensuring the integrity of the theoretical framework of the study and providing the conceptual ‘density’ and ‘specificity’ required by Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Keeping theoretical memos in relation to the concepts, codes and categories ensured substantive theory was generated from the study (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998).
5.6.4 Phase Three - Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), is the “sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory” (1990:176). Furthermore, theoretical sampling maximises opportunities to “compare events, incidents, or happenings to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin 1998:202). Theoretical sampling directs the ongoing process of data collection (Charmaz 2006).

Theoretical sampling is essential to Grounded Theory analysis for its purpose is to “tighten…the corkscrew or the hermeneutic spiral so that you end up with a theory that perfectly matches the data” (Charmaz 2006:101). In addition, theoretical sampling advances the inductive analysis by keeping the analysis process alive and resolving problems integral to the research process (Charmaz 2006). Theoretical sampling improves Grounded Theory analysis through:

- specifying the relevant properties of categories;
- increasing the precision of categories;
- providing the substance to move the study from description to analysis;
- making the analysis more abstract;
- ensuring the categories are grounding in the data;
- explaining the analytic links between or among categories;
- increasing the density and parsimony of theoretical statements

(Adapted from Charmaz 2006:105).

In this study theoretical sampling took place in both early and later stages of the study, to narrow the focus on emerging categories and to refine and confirm relevant categories (propositions). This study reached theoretical saturation without the requirement for subsequent participant interviews, though sub-groups of participants had been identified for this purpose. Having achieved theoretical saturation the data gathering and coding process is concluded. However, further reflection and refinement of categories and their relationships to the theoretical model continued, until key theoretical propositions emerged.
5.7 Reflections on the design and analysis

Grounded Theory research is a methodology that enables theory to be generated from the perspectives and explanations of the participants', in this case, in relation to the attributes of the middle school teacher in South-East Queensland schools. Grounded Theory is methodologically designed for generating theory that is grounded in the data, “systematically gathered and analysed” (Strauss & Corbin 1998:158). At the heart of theorising is the interface of making inductions (identifying concepts, properties and dimensions from the data) and deductions (hypothesising about the relationships between concepts) (Strauss & Corbin 1998:22). Ideas about the middle years of schooling teacher attributes were made apparent in the concepts generated through the interviews. Interviews, according to Fontana and Frey (2008), are like oral reports which allow each participant to critically reflect on deeply held convictions about the middle school teacher attributes. In identifying the middle years of schooling teacher as the focus of this research study, Grounded Theory was considered the most appropriate qualitative method, as it enables the discovery of new ideas. Moreover, Grounded Theory is not bound by preconceived or testing of theories developed from previous studies on the attributes of the teacher.

5.8 Conclusion

Grounded Theory is a rigorous scientific method, originally detailed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and elaborated by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that if Grounded Theory procedures are followed carefully will meet the criteria for conducting “good science” (1990:27). The canons of good science: “significance theory-observation compatibility, generalisability, reproducibility, precision, rigour, and verification” (1990:27) depend on the openness and creativity in which they are interpreted in the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Inherent within the rigour of Grounded Theory, both substantive and formal theory can be generated. In this study substantive theory is generated to provide a framework to interpret the phenomena of the middle years of schooling teachers' attributes.

The next four chapters commence the articulation of the theory generation. Each chapter is built on a key theoretical proposition that has been generated as a result of the data analysis described in this chapter.
Four core propositions will be expanded. These include:

1. It is the perspective of stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to forge a middle school identity;
2. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum;
3. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers be specialists in adolescence; and
4. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to sustain the middle years’ reform.

Each core proposition will be thoroughly analysed in turn in chapters 6, 7, 8 and
6.1 Introduction

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

Perspectives concerning the middle school teacher, which emerged from the research, were generated from educators with broad and diverse experiences in middle school settings. These perspectives are presented, not as individual responses to interview questions, but as a result of analysis of outcomes and themes. These themes were generated from a thorough
analysis of all data transcribed from interview texts, and field observations recorded in memos. From the analysis four core propositions were generated. The four core propositions are:

1. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to forge a middle school identity;
2. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum;
3. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers be specialists in adolescence;
4. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to sustain middle years’ reform.

Each core proposition is presented in a chapter of its own: chapters 6 through to 9. A summation of the core propositions are listed in Figure 6.1.

![Figure 6.1 Summation of core propositions for the middle school teacher](image_url)

The sub-propositions or themes identified in each of the core propositions, provide more focused dimensions for each of the attributes and are presented as the first part in the formation of theory concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher. The core propositions were generated from comprehensive data with emphases reflecting the different perspectives from which the participants were speaking. According to Dey (1999), propositions need to be seen “as many points on a string (or intersections of a web) through
which we strive to develop our interpretation(s)” (1999:256). Hence, the core propositions are presented as theoretical elements reflecting a plurality of both standing alone as well as being emerging sub-propositions and themes/concepts.

Therefore, this chapter is framed to:

- present and analyse the core proposition: It is the perspective of the key stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to forge a middle school identity (6.2);
- identify and analyse the four sub-propositions:
  - a shared vision (6.2.1);
  - middle school teachers as leaders (6.2.2);
  - dedicated middle school (6.2.3)
  - reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher (6.2.4); and
- provide a conclusion to the chapter (6.3).

### 6.2 Core proposition 1:
**It is the perspective of the key stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to forge a middle school identity**

The core proposition *a capacity to forge a middle school identity* and the sub-propositions that emerged were generated from the participants’ understanding of the nature, vision, role and function of the middle school teacher position. This emerging perspective presented itself comprehensively and diversely in each of the interviews and observations. The *Capacity to forge a middle school identity* emerged from the interviews as participants expressed their divergent ideas and perspectives concerning what it was that gave the middle school its particular identity. Importantly, it encompassed perspectives surrounding the original vision of this innovative development within the individual school and ideas about whether the vision had been realised or not. Both teachers and students expressed their ideas through their personal experience of their middle school and what it was that they “liked most” about their middle school. All participants acknowledged the importance of the need to forge a middle school identity and this was reflected in the participants’ comments concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher. The following comment reflects a number of the interviewees’ attitudes, and their desire to be engaged and to be identified with the middle years:
“At the moment I’m kind of enjoying the way it’s running now... I couldn’t imagine having a better first up posting for a middle school position” (Robin Transcript: 5).

What Robin is acknowledging is the importance of the middle school teacher position and the influence it can have in forging a middle school identity. It was as if the participants needed to position themselves by saying more about what they were doing and what they had achieved. A telling comment from one of the principals captures this sentiment quite sharply:

“The other difficulty middle school teachers’ face is that they literally are stuck in the middle, it sounds awful but they are and they need to be greater advocates for what they believe because they get primary school telling them what to do as they go up and senior telling them what to do as they go down and sometimes the middle school teacher sits in the middle and goes, where do I stand...need to stand up for what they actually believe because if they don’t they’ll get howled down by both extremes” (George Transcript:4).

The six schools in the study, implementing the middle years of schooling philosophy, identified strongly the challenges this posed for the staff and parents. The implementation of the middle schooling philosophy signalled to staff, students and parents that a middle school identity was being forged, though the shape of it for many of schools was still a work in progress. The participants of the study were people who were not afraid of change and given the opportunity, were prepared to be engaged in the change process required of forging a middle school identity: “I’m excited about the opportunity for change and to be here when it’s happening rather than just be thrown into something new. It’s a good thing to be involved in the change process” (Jane Transcript: 6). As one principal commented, the success of forging a middle school identity will depend on the process being used to bring about change:

“Anybody who thinks that you can take and transplant a model from anywhere...the important stuff is in the actual process, of everybody going through and researching together...Here’s a range of models, we think that this is a good approach, what do you think, so people have the chance all the way along the staff, even if they’re not on one of the working parties, still have the opportunities to provide input” (Harrison Transcript:5).

The middle years of schooling philosophy has the potential to forge a middle school identity. The change required to grow this identity over time was clearly identified by the participants:
“I hope that the emphasis on middle years doesn’t get lost; I don’t think it will but senior always tends to take precedence I guess because there’s so much at stake by the end of Year 12” (Marilyn Transcript: 6).

It became apparent, particularly from the teachers, that the middle school reform meant a change from what was being practised. Therefore, while expressing a desire to forge a middle school identity, there was some tentativeness about being involved, and a fear that the reform may not be successful:

“I think a really big concern of mine is being told that this is what middle schooling is, as opposed to these are the things that should be a product of middle schooling. I think originally there was such a fear that you would do it wrong that everyone sort of tried to do it in a sort of manner and I think that now people being able to evaluate that have now been able to make minor changes in some places, major in others” (Dorothy Transcript:6).

Data from the interviews highlighted the developing relationship between the different sub-schools, early years, junior years and senior years. This relationship was particularly apparent in the P-12 schools of the study:

“The reason why our staff are more comfortable about teaching or moving outside of traditional subject space is also because of the P-12 nature of the school, they’re mixing with early years, juniors, seniors, our staff meetings are whole school. So it’s that whole [school] identity even though we will have four separate precincts [sub-school] or distinct precincts we’re one” (Julia Transcript:2).

Further data from the participants relating to this proposition are presented in the sub-propositions that follow, which include comprehensive but quite diverse perspectives concerning the middle school teacher and their capacity to forge a middle school identity. The key sub-propositions are identified in Figure 6.2 below.
6.2.1 Sub-proposition 1.1:
A shared vision

Generally, the vision for the middle school was articulated by the principal and the capacity of that leadership to develop a shared vision amongst the staff regarding the middle years of schooling philosophy. A well developed strategy and an understanding of the change process which would empower the teachers emerged from the interviews of principals, and was a factor contributing to the effective implementation of the vision. This depended on the ability of the principal to work within, and to address the pervading issues pertaining to the implementation of the middle years of schooling philosophy through a whole school education program. However, having a vision was necessary, if such a vision was to be shared by all staff, in particular, the middle school teaching staff. The articulation of the middle schooling vision was seen by most principals as a catalyst for whole school reform: “I hope what comes out of this reform is not a senior imposed curriculum down but rather a 7-12 seamless curriculum that every person contributes to in a positive way” (George Transcript: 2).

The perspectives from participant Principals and Heads of Middle School highlighted that these participants were largely people who recognised that “change was necessary” and wanted to take their staff on this middle school “journey”. In speaking of creating a shared
vision of middle schooling one principal noted that, in order to implement a middle schooling philosophy it had to be: “based upon good research. That came after a good year and a half to almost two years of research and planning” (Harrison Transcript: 1). The principal participants tended to see themselves as providing staff with the time and resources to explore, in depth, the middle school philosophy to allow for that shared vision to be developed:

“It see my job in this whole role is to put the strategic boundaries in place but allow them to make the decisions and so my job’s to make sure that I provide the resources for them to hop on planes and trains and have days and have a look. I would hope that they’d go down and have a look and talk to Teachers’ in classrooms as well” (Harrison Transcript: 3).

It was the view of principals that this “journey” opens the door to the forging of new possibilities, to new horizons. This forging of the shared vision, while opening up new possibilities, took some time to be cultivated, in some cases over five years. Some schools in the study visited middle schools in Queensland and interstate to get a first hand view of what a middle school might look like:

“It’s been a plan of our Principal’s for probably 5 years and as part of the vision we did go and investigate other middle schools and we travelled around Queensland and South Australia to have a look at middle schools so that we could make sure that we put in a design that was going to suit where we’d planned to go” (Paris Transcript: 1).

Other schools looked closer to home for insights and inspiration; “I guess the decision to look at middle school was based on looking at the experience of a lot of P-12 schools on the Gold Coast that were looking at different structures” (Julia Transcript: 1). Without any long established traditions, a new school involved in the study saw themselves as having a “blank slate” and used the opportunity to imagine what could be, and developed something uniquely home grown:

“The original vision, because of the blank slate history of the school ...we started at the beginning of the second year [with] P to Yr 8 upwards to that point in time. There was no middle school and no senior school. We were not modelling ourselves directly upon another college of any sort so had that complete blank slate” (Shane Transcript: 7).
In one site, the middle school vision was originally formulated and developed by the Principal. However, what emerged from the data was the importance of a shared vision, that it did not become one persons' vision but a collective and dynamic vision, which allowed for changes in response to new ideas:

“...in away the vision in the very first years was mine. It was important to me that it did not remain that way, because it would burn me out and drive me insane and would prove to be ineffective if it was all about me” (Shane Transcript: 7).

This aspect of the vision being organic and responsive to new ideas was a particular theme articulated by all participants. Therefore, this represented a critical strategy deployed by the leadership to grow the vision, allowing it take time to evolve before it could become a shared vision and their middle school a reality. Some principals saw their initial vision as a guide: “The original vision is still there as sort of a guiding principle. The original vision was not so detailed that it could not sustain changes” (Elizabeth Transcript: 2).

Fundamentally, the vision was not seen as an exclusive domain of one leader but the shared vision of all with a common focus. That common focus involved the young people in their care and to look for ways in which their needs could be better met:

“The original vision was, to focus it on the needs of the young adolescents, to respond to where they're at in their lives rather than making education a matter of following a syllabus or a program that was written and was not going to change, as happens in the senior school” (Elizabeth Transcript: 2).

While the dissemination of the shared vision presented many challenges, such as the repositioning of pedagogical and curricula priorities, the process needed to be open to change and new ideas as people’s understanding of the philosophy grew. One principal described the process as being a “companion on this journey” of middle schooling and allowing it to “quietly” evolve:
“The Head of Middle School and her excellent staff have been able now to articulate a very clear vision which is about predisposing adolescent children to learn. I think that’s the thing that underpins all other aspects of middle school… it’s been a develop-as-they-grow type approach and I still think we’ve got a way to go with middle school but I do feel that we’re definitely on the right track with a clear sense of where we’re heading now” (Clint Transcript: 1).

The vision of the middle school is influenced by diverse experiences and perspectives of the people at the cutting edge of the reform – the teachers. What emerged from the data, though not in all of the schools, was a belief that a shared vision required the creation of a leadership position to take the vision forward and foster it among the teachers in their classroom. The appointment of middle school teachers as leaders emerged as the next sub-proposition.

6.2.2 Sub-proposition 1.2: Middle school teachers as leaders

The development of a middle school identity led to the appointment of a teacher in a leadership position of the middle school. This position took on either a senior leadership or a middle management function and role, depending on the sector in which the school was located. There were three types of positions that went across school sectors (i) Head of Middle School, (ii) Director of Middle Schooling, (iii) Co-ordinator of Middle School, and (iv) Head of Department – Middle School. In some sectors, namely the Catholic Systemic schools and Education Queensland schools, where there was not a position, the responsibilities fell to the Deputy or Assistant Principal. The independent sector of schooling recognised the appointment position a senior position and also appointed middle management positions to help coordinate the implementation of their middle school curriculum and ethos of care priorities. These included Assistant Head of Middle School and Year Level Pastoral Coordinations to help build the middle school identity. In addition, one school was poised to appoint Assistant Year Level Pastoral Coordinators to assist in the implementation of the curriculum. The data also revealed that some schools were moving away from subject/Key Learning Area (KLA) coordinators and being replaced with Curriculum Co-ordinators requiring a broader understanding of curriculum in the middle school.

While all three sectors emphasised the importance of curriculum leadership in the middle school, it was only in the independent sector where it received both senior and middle management status. The Independent sector elevated the position of head of Middle School to
the senior leadership team because it needed to form a conduit to the school’s leadership and teaching staff. In doing so, it provided credibility for the newly formed middle school and provided a voice and a relationship between the executive leadership and the middle school teaching staff. Furthermore, it saw middle school as a whole school reform that was connected to “both ends”, that is, Junior and Senior schools. One principal commented that after having established three sub-schools it became crucial to his role: “to try really hard not to privilege one area [sub-school] over another… the times I’ve got in trouble have always been when I’ve given someone something or given an area something” (Clint Transcript:7).

As the interviews progressed from school to school, sector to sector, it became apparent that the leadership of the middle school was tied to funding, size of school and sector policy constraints, and in some cases the workplace industrial Enterprise Agreement:

“When we have the opportunity to change our middle management structure, which we get every 3 years under the industrial agreement, last year was the year for working out the change.” (Elizabeth Transcript: 5).

Other schools, which were in the early phases of developing their middle school, tended to take a more cautious view and used the fullness of time to consider the best form of leadership in the middle school:

“See we probably have more of a curriculum philosophy here rather than Heads of Department. We have some middle management positions but we’re looking at it much broader than subjects… we’re looking at Curriculum Co-ordinators rather than Department Heads because it means you think much broader than your own subject area but again it’s early days. We keep doing it acting until 2009 when we’ll be all the way through to Year 12 and we’ll look at it again then” (Julia Transcript: 6).

Data from the teacher interviews revealed an increased level of commitment and confidence to the middle school reform, where schools had appointed or were about to appoint a middle school leadership position:

“I think middle schooling is recognised by the leadership of the school and I think the recent position of Head of Department of Middle School has been a bonus and probably highlighted the fact that the area needs to be worked on” (Jane Transcript: 4).
However, not unlike the concept of middle school itself, some schools experienced difficulty in reaching consensus about what to call this the new position, which lead to confusion:

“We had some confusion with certain titles administratively within the school, confusion about jurisdictions and where decision-making lay… the decision has now been taken that the people in charge of sub-schools will be referred to as heads, and it appears that the ‘ING’ might be withdrawn from the middle school and be called Head of Middle School” (Shane Transcript: 1).

The data from the teacher interviews highlighted the positive response staff had to the nomenclative Head of Middle School, especially regarding their role in relation to the implementation of the middle school integrated curriculum; their supportive and affirming influence of teachers and providing appropriate professional development. The Heads of Middle School who had been in the position for some time, generated data that described positive and productive relationships with their middle school teachers. Occasionally, the teacher data cited experiences of confusion and negative influence of the leadership. This tended to be in schools where there was not an established leadership position and where there was not a clearly identified middle school:

“our vision wasn’t for a middle school teaching position, it was for a holistic approach from all teachers. We have a whole school approach. We’re an 8 to 12 school, therefore, the idea of middle schooling was something that we’ve embraced through government initiative rather than having the structures … So middle schooling as such, is an approach not a philosophy and is the responsibility of all teachers” (Kate Transcript: 1).

Teachers form opinions regarding the effectiveness of the leadership from the way they see the reform being implemented. In one site, some teachers were happy with the change to a middle school philosophy, they had concerns on two fronts. Firstly, teachers expressed interest in how the leadership position had evolved:

“I think what happened was a rush of excitement and it’s had very little, if any direction. We have a lot of heads of department in this school and the middle school Head of Department is not getting any support” (Kathryn Transcript: 2).
Secondly, some teachers expressed concerns regarding the lack of consultation by the senior leadership with the middle school teachers, regarding changes to the philosophy and the implementation of the middle school curriculum:

“The context of things here at the moment are such that shortly it’s going to be advertised to our school community that there will be some refinement of the middle schooling program, some restructuring… for me personally I wasn’t very comfortable with the way that process was gone about. I do believe that if a decision’s been made within the system and that decision affects me directly, I feel very strongly that I should be involved in that decision. I think that’s where we could probably do better” (Frank Transcript: 3).

Uncertainty of this type can impact on the credibility of the change process and the capacity to attract teachers within the staff to forge and sustain the middle school identity. It was the practice in some schools, to appoint beginning or new teachers to the middle school, while existing staff were not asked or invited to be involved. This comment by one teacher reflected a key concern of teachers interviewed:

“No. No there’s been, in the time I’ve been here in the last four years, the role of the middle school teacher has not really been clearly identified…in fact I think that the timetable has been one of the driving situations to putting people in front of classes. So, in short, no, I don’t think I’ve had any input; it’s been where I’ve been put. It just so happens that that’s where I wanted to be” (Kathryn Transcript: 1).

According to one teacher, this resulted “in staff turnover so that we’re continually having to start again with staff, moving ahead is really difficult, its almost like you lose the vision”(Paris Transcript: 1).

One school, who was celebrating ten years as a middle school, confidently and proudly reflected back on their experience describing the leadership of the Head of Middle School as positive and the “key” to the success; a leader whose influence pervaded the whole school:
“I see one of the primary parts of my role is to support the teachers. What do they need to do the best job they can with these kids? The middle school team meetings are so interesting and so productive. Everything gets talked about. It’s not just planning, it’s good reflective practice. It’s wonderful professional sharing. It’s an opportunity to appreciate each other’s talents as teachers and to sort of say; well I’d tried this, it didn’t work, anyone got any suggestions and just like the environment we try and create for the kids, which is safe and supportive, I think we create that for the staff as well. We’re a very cohesive group, everybody works together…we have a culture that is so strong or sharing in support, it’s out there being modelled to the students every minute of every day and they can actually feel it, I think” (Rosemary Transcript: 4).

Despite the demands of teaching in the middle years, middle school teachers reported benefiting from what the Head of Middle School enables them to achieve in the classroom curriculum. There is evidence of benefits from leadership that: “empowers teachers to pursue something of interest…to say yes, to feel supported, valued and welcomed’” (Shane Transcript: 8, 9).

Teachers reported that being a middle school teacher is demanding and can lead to “burn out”. Dixie, a beginning middle school teacher, described the unflinching support she had from her Head of Middle School, referring to her as a “mentor”. For Dixie, being involved in the middle school was to experience a very steep learning curve, and she looked to the leadership for encouragement and support. Dixie recalls those early days as follows:

“I nearly had a mental breakdown second term and she’s been really good bolstering me and giving me credit, saying you know ‘IS [Integrated Studies] is hard, nobody else, I know the other teachers don’t understand it, it is really difficult. You’ve probably got the most difficult workload in the school’...I hear other staff disparaging her like ‘How did a primary school teacher become head of Middle School? She’s always really positive and like I said, I think I need my ego stroked a bit” (Dixie Transcript: 6).

Dixie attributes her success, and growing commitment to the middle years, to the leadership of her middle school. The description of her experience demonstrates the importance of leadership and the capacity it has to influence the development of a middle school philosophy and the formation of its teachers. The significance of a leader who can enable change which facilitates the development of a dedicated middle school (sub-school) cannot be overstated. This sentiment is captured in the next sub-proposition that is analysed in the next section.
6.2.3 Sub-proposition 1.3: A dedicated middle school (sub-school)

A dedicated middle school can enhance the realisation of a middle school philosophy. Data from interviews and from sector documentation demonstrates that the notion of a dedicated middle school has been a 'sticking point' as schools try to forge a middle school identity. This sub-proposition is based on divergent perspectives and understandings of the place of a dedicated middle school within the philosophy of middle schooling. Some participants argued that the identification of a dedicated middle school is at odds with the philosophy:

“the one thing that middle school is not about is about structures or organisation. People who think that’s what it is, have got no idea about middle schooling and we see plenty of examples around of where Year 8 and 9 are organised into separate buildings…have a different uniform and call this middle school” (Harrison Transcript: 1).

This comment by Harrison reflects the importance for the need of a shared vision not the identification of a structure before any substantive change in practice can be achieved. This caution concerning the development of a dedicated middle school was shared by others: “I think that sometimes structures just pay lip service to the whole middle phase of learning and it is a very different way of teaching” (Rosemary Transcript: 2). Other factors also weighed in: “unfortunately things like timetabling senior school, access to physical resources, industrial awards…compromises which shape the middle school actually looks like” (Harrison Transcript: 4). It became apparent from some participants that these external factors created a level of “worry” and “fear” about how the middle years reform may or may not be sustained. There was “fear” expressed by some that the middle years curriculum may become as prescriptive as it is for senior and the building of a dedicated space for middle years might need to be delayed: “One of the things that worries me about the future is the impact of the testing regime… the impact of the current testing has been to reduce the curriculum significantly” (Elizabeth Transcript: 10). Elizabeth and others were concerned at the loss of curriculum “flexibility”, due to the imposition of political factors, like NAPLAN (National testing) and QCAR (State based testing) and the extent to which these external factors might restrict the development of the middle schooling philosophy. However, rather than being in fear of these factors, one school set about turning this into a positive emphasising the point that it is the way schools respond to these tensions that is important:
“Well we’ve got these tests in 7 and 9 happening and waiting to see what goes on there. I asked the teachers to view all those things as a positive…if you’re doing the right thing in classrooms which we are, students will perform well and you use them as diagnostic tools. They’re taking everything as a positive not a negative” (Bob Transcript: 9).

As Bob infers, the development and achievement of a shared vision is important. For some schools, the move toward a dedicated middle school had been an evolving process of understanding middle school philosophy and reaching some consensus. In the early phase of implementation, the philosophy was concerned with beliefs around pedagogy, the teaching and learning process: “the original vision was certainly based on a pedagogical belief” (Shane Transcript: 1). What emerged from the data was a pedagogy that: “focused primarily on students; they must teach students not just subjects” (Elizabeth Transcript: 1), and: “taught by small teams of teachers who taught students for big chunks of time and work and plan together across a trans-disciplinary curriculum” (Harrison Transcript: 1). The evolving nature of the philosophy demonstrated that as schools implemented middle schooling pedagogical practices they were constantly “commandeering all the large spaces” in the school to allow teachers the opportunity to develop these new pedagogical practices, as existing general learning areas (GLAs) were inadequate. In one site, after growing their middle school identity for over six years, a dedicated middle school centre was conceived and built. This created learning spaces that were more conducive to the new pedagogical practices for the middle years of schooling:

“… everything built into this building has a middle school focus. The rooms are multi-functional… they can be opened up; every room will have things in it like, gas taps, cook tops, sinks in every single room. Every room will have interactive whiteboards, flexible furniture, flexible storage, the whole bit… they will all have glass walls to enable people to connect with each other for the team teaching. Classrooms they’re much larger than standard size [GLA]and then there are smaller ones for small group teaching…the Library is connected to it, there’s a bridge that goes from this building to the Library.” (Elizabeth Transcript: 6).

In this site it is the coming together of a shared vision and a dedicated space that allows middle years philosophy to be realised. In contrast, two other schools made the decision from the outset that there would be a dedicated middle school and proceeded down that path. Both schools set about structuring their school into three sub-schools, junior, middle and senior. The difference being, that in one school, teachers were required to teach in both middle and
senior sub-schools, while in the other, the teachers were to be dedicated to only one sub-school. From the perspective of the teachers, the founding principal saw it this way:

“I think his [founding principal] stroke of genius at developing a middle school was to say look you [are] either teach in senior or middle, there won’t be any crossovers. So what you then end up with is… you teach in middle school that’s what you do, you’re part of that team, you eat together, you meet together and it just again inspires this very cohesive and directed, and purposeful, and motivated staff which is very important” (Clint Transcript:2).

The ultimate motivation to build a dedicated middle school in one site was articulated in the vision: “it is a very different way of teaching.” With the focus clearly on the needs of young adolescents, the decision to build a dedicated middle school was seen as the only way to recognise the unique needs of young adolescents which required doing something different, pedagogically. The dedicated middle school elevated the profile of the middle years and its middle school teachers:

“We made that decision because we really wanted to not be tied back to a timetable that’s you know, that says, no the bell’s gone, sorry, classes elsewhere, so all of those things that we’ve put in place from the start…diving into the deep end straight from the start. I remember the headmaster at the time saying, “Now, now, now, now, just one moment,” they won’t be teaching across campus. It took a little bit of explanation but I’m a big believer in it; it works well this way but not everybody can do it” (Rosemary Transcript:2).

With a dedicated middle school came “autonomy” for the teachers: “teaching in 7, 8 and 9 [provided the] opportunity to have quite a degree of autonomy. I think that’s a really, an energising thing for a teacher. It’s a healthy environment for a teacher to teach in” (Mae Transcript: 4). In addition, emerging from the teachers’ data the traditional day-to-day issues of access to resources were resolved: “it’s so hard to get a computer room because senior classes always have them. We’re having our own…and all of it really validates [why] middle school like this is so important” (Dixie Transcript: 6). Furthermore, it contributed to the growth of the individual teacher: “it gave me such a wonderful opportunity to really blossom and fly as a professional” (Mae Transcript: 6). The shift to a dedicated middle school provided opportunities to strengthen middle school pedagogical practices that were not able to be developed in the traditional pre-existing learning spaces: “With the new building you’ve got moveable walls between classrooms…for more things to happen… and people can work in
teams‖ (Ronald Transcript: 3). One teacher commented that for them: “the team that you work with is just fantastic, absolutely, it’s probably one of the best things about this middle school” (Simon Transcript: 4). Again, in this case, the dedicated middle school space enhanced the realisation of the middle schooling philosophy.

The prospect of a new dedicated building for middle school brought into clear focus the contrasts between those schools who had developed a dedicated middle school and those who had not. Groups of Year 9 students from two different schools made the following contrasting observations of their learning environment. In the school where there was no dedicated middle school the students observed:

“It needs to be burnt down. We are better off if our school would just be like “wow there’s no padlock,” finally we don’t have to freeze in winter and die in summer. It’s freezing in winter like literally we have to go to the library every lesson it’s that cold and then like in summer you die of heat. It stinks, it’s small. I think most of the classrooms need to be redone…Seriously, we just got a new paint job and I swear it looks like it’s about 20 years old already. And there’s a big hole in the wall. Yeah we had a hole in the wall of our classroom. This schools a hole. It is old” (Sneezy Transcript: 5).

From a school where there was a dedicated middle school the students observed:

“I remember when I first walked into the school, like the first time I walked into this building I was absolutely amazed by the amount of different colours they had. It was really different like you walk in … a lot of buildings are like all the same colour all the same. This one’s like yellow, red, purple, green, blue, there’s like colours everywhere. When you walk into a school you don’t expect to see… Yeah and not like boring square classrooms, a lot of them are like very different shapes” (Aladdin Transcript: 7).

Though articulated in different words, these Year 9 students’ experience of their learning environment brought into sharp contrast the need for learning spaces that are “engaging” “welcoming” and “innovative”. What emerged from the data was a recognition that many of the middle school practices such as “teacher teaming”, “small group learning” and being “child centred” required learning spaces conducive to middle years philosophy “which is a different way of teaching and learning.” The data revealed that if the middle schooling philosophy was to be implemented effectively, alongside the required pedagogical changes, was also the requirement that learning spaces needed to be reconfigured to reflect the necessary pedagogical changes. For some schools this meant building a dedicated middle school: “I
cannot see it working as effectively in a model where this is not the case, you know you might have a 7, 8, 9, 11, 12" (Clint Transcript: 3).

It became evident in the data that the extent to which principals and their school staff embrace the development of a shared vision depends on what model of middle schooling is being advanced. One model was evolutionary in nature while an alternative model was more deliberate in intent, through the dedication of a middle school space. From the data, those schools who had a dedicated middle school found that it successfully forged a new identity and allowed the school to respond more “effectively” to the emerging issues surrounding the teaching and learning needs of young people in the middle years of schooling. What was emerging from the data is new ways of working as a middle school teacher and is the focus of the next sub-proposition.

6.2.4 Sub-proposition 1.4: Reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher

All of the schools in the study were at different stages in their conceptualisation and implementation of the middle schooling philosophy. This influenced the variances in reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher being considered or advanced. As noted earlier, the challenge confronting schools was finding a model of middle schooling that they could build on, and one the school community could accept. Generally, this proved to be “difficult to find because everybody’s doing it differently” (Julia Transcript: 7).

Data surrounding what constituted a middle school varied between the P-12 schools and the Year 8-10 secondary schools. The P-12 schools identified “Year 7-9” as their middle school while the Year 8-12 secondary schools identified “Year 8 and Year 9” as their middle school. However, there was some hesitancy concerning the most appropriate way forward with some principals and teachers commenting: “I’m not sure what the best structure is, I mean some schools I’ve looked at and worked at go from Year 5 to Year 10; I’m not 100 percent confident in what is the best model” (George Transcript:1). On the other hand, other schools were quite assertive in the way they articulated their version of middle schooling: “the models available to a school looking at a middle school structure is 7, 8, 9 in this school and in fact you either teach in senior or middle, there won’t be any crossovers” (Clint Transcript: 2).
From the data, the staffing approach taken by the different schools would contribute greatly to the *reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher*. The notion of teachers being deployed in middle school only, proved to be a contentious issue regarding the most appropriate strategy of *reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher*. Except for one school in the study, there was an expectation that teachers would “teach across”, in both middle and senior schools. One principal highlighted this tension by saying:

“There’s [is] tension also between the approaches that people need to take in the middle school versus the approach that the same people may need to take if they’ve got a senior school class and that continual switching is sometimes difficult for people” (Elizabeth Transcript: 9).

What emerged from the sub-proposition *reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher* was that each school tended to have a different perspective on what constituted a middle school teacher. This was reflected in the different staffing strategies, with some schools taking the opportunity to experiment by deploying both primary and secondary pre-service teachers while others deployed only secondary pre-service teachers. One principal of a Year 8-12 school commented that their strategy was to appoint young beginning secondary and primary teachers into their middle school because:

“teachers need to be self-confident enough both to give and receive advice and that’s not something a lot of secondary teachers do well, they like to see themselves as experts in their subject. This is one reason why we have quite a high incidence of younger teachers in this area because they tend to be the most flexible and the most ready to learn and as long as we have the older teachers who can mentor them we’re okay” (Elizabeth Transcript: 3).

However, six years on, Elizabeth and her leadership team realised they needed to change the strategy and “balance our younger ones with some older ones, so that we have a better age profile in that area” (Elizabeth Transcript: 4). Nonetheless, most schools had a “50/50 mix of primary and secondary teachers” deployed in their middle school. Some schools went further by appointing a pre-service primary teacher to head the middle school. Consequently, what emerged was the tendency to engage pre-service primary teachers in preference to pre-service secondary teachers as they brought a level of openness to new things such as technology: “if you want to put in that technological side they’re going to be the ones who will be prepared to take it on board” (Paris Transcript: 3). This convinced Paris that pre-service
primary teachers were the best teachers for the middle school: “my background is primary school and I’ve been here for 6 years and it’s my only experience of a high school and I want people who are primary school. I know this and I can understand the other side” (Paris Transcript: 3). Paris goes on to substantiate her claim: “the problem with some of our secondary teachers, is they do not understand that kids go through a progress, stepping stones to get actually to where they are” (Paris Transcript: 4).

In another Year 8-12 secondary school, their concept of the middle school teacher was different again:

“people would not teach wholly in the middle school unless they chose to. One of the guarantees that had to be given was that a middle school teacher would also have senior classes. From my philosophy as a Principal anyway, that sat very well with me because I prefer people to teach across the whole school” (Harrison Transcript: 7).

According to Harrison, this would give “balance and perspective to what they do rather than giving them an unreal focus in one particular area” (Harrison Transcript: 7). This comment was echoed by other participants: “cross fertilisation of ideas from the middle school up to the senior school years and an understanding of what the senior school expectations are for teachers in the middle school” (Ronald Transcript: 4) was seen as important.

One motivation that emerged from the teacher data, for reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher was the opportunity to respond to the “overcrowded curriculum” by reducing the number of teachers that the students come into contact with” (Harrison Transcript: 1). To avoid: “eight or nine different teachers because the idea in Year 8 was to give them a sampling of lots of different things” (Ronald Transcript: 1) was a practise identified by teachers as one that contributed to an “over crowded curriculum”. To engage in sampling without “losing the rigour of the disciplines” was a particular concern. One school considered: “cutting down the number of subjects and [these teachers] looked at subjects where there was strong overlap in content and in expectations…SOSE, English and Religious Education” (Ronald Transcript: 1). The teachers argued that this allowed a reduction in “the number of teachers [allocated] for those three subjects to one person,…you had at least one person with that group of students for a longer period of time in the week” (Ronald Transcript: 1). For some schools, this resulted in a refashioning of classes and curricula into either an “integrated curriculum” or a “connected curriculum” or a “trans-disciplinary curriculum” of “SOSE, English,
Science, Maths, Arts and Religious Education”, in an effort to reach more students and to do so in an effective way. This represented a shift in the emphasis from students sampling a range of curriculum offerings to the developing of a more “connected” curricula which emphasised the development of the “whole child” with a clear focus on the relationship between teacher and student. This was a newly reconceptualised way of working that elicited strong support from teachers in this context, for it heightened the relationship between students and teachers.

Many student comments highlighted the importance they placed on the relationship with their teacher: “the better relationship you have with your teacher the more successful you’ll be in that subject. It makes it easier to approach the teacher and to talk about things” (Sam Transcript: 5). By reducing the teacher student ratio, and redesigning an already “over crowded curriculum” the idea of a “core teacher” and a “core class” emerged in some schools as one teacher stated: “our version of middle schooling was predominantly based around the idea of core teachers with a core class group of either Year 7, 8 or 9” (Shane Transcript: 1). The “core teacher” was seen as a strong “pastoral” support to students over the three years of middle school Year 7 (8)-9. In other places the core teacher would teach “English, Maths, SOSE and Science to all of their students in Year 7 and in Year 8 and in Year 9” (Rosemary Transcript: 2). One school married the “core teacher” with a “core class” and they moved together over the two years of middle school: “teachers on Year 8 take the kids up into Year 9, so Year 9 teachers will then go down to Year 8 with the next batch” (Paris Transcript: 4). This development reiterates the importance of new ways of working as teachers in the middle years.

What emerged from the data was a strategy for reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher, built on ways of doing things, within a secondary school context that is more commonly witnessed in the primary sector. As one teacher commented:

“I feel like we’re probably considered a bit of an odd piece, kind of on the fence between primary and secondary and I think people aren’t informed as to what we do. The primary I think have a slightly better understanding in that you know it’s very similar, they actually see it as a progression from what they do and that’s the general point” (Simon Transcript: 1).
The emergent way of working that more clearly reflected the philosophy of learner centred education was further evidenced in the following comment:

“I see not a lot of difference between the middle school teacher and a primary school teacher. I think that some of the best middle school teachers that we have had, and they’ve been in the majority of the teachers who have come through, have come through a primary [school] situation” (Ronald Transcript: 3).

Not all stakeholders supported this sentiment. Some principals stated that there is a danger in the perception that middle school was an extension of primary school. They argued that this was not a preferred stance: “I’ve never agreed with middle school looking more like primary school, I’ve always thought that that’s quite contrary to the needs of adolescents today” (Humphrey Transcript: 2). As noted above, the prime focus of the middle years is the efficacy of the teacher in responding to the needs of young adolescents. From all participants this was recognised as the underlying factor for the middle school. Some saw it as playing a “delicate dance” in allowing young people to “explore their identities”. Another participant described reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher as allowing young people to be “kids for as long as possible” and the ‘rite of passage’ from primary to middle years was not unlike graduating from “Wiggles” to “Britney Spears” where there are “lots of teachers, lots of choices and that keeps them engaged in their learning” (Julia Transcript: 1).

While the reconceptualisation of the ways of working as a middle school teacher revealed a range of divergent strategies and action plans, the data from the interviews clearly identified a common purpose in forging a middle years of schooling identity. From the interviews, a shift from a “discipline” driven curricula to a clear focus on the young adolescent and “understanding students as learners”, tended to underpin the reconceptualisation. This emerging shift was expressed in various ways. This comment from Elizabeth captures the sentiments of many of the participants:

“the teacher has to be focused primarily on students; they must teach students not just subjects. One of the characteristics of many secondary school teachers in particular is that they describe themselves as teachers of Science, or teachers of English or whatever, I would like the middle school teacher to describe themselves as teachers of people first, young adolescents and then they teach certain things to these people. So focus on the student rather than on the content of your subject” (Elizabeth Transcript: 1).
This sentiment was further echoed by other teachers and principals, such as the following:

“The notion that you’re teaching children rather than subjects is very important. Well you can get senior teachers who teach subjects, not students whereas you know, primarily you’re teaching, well the first and foremost you’re teaching young people then we worry about what you’re teaching them after that’s been established” (Harrison Transcript: 3).

However, while the data affirmed this strong focus on “child-centred” teaching not all teachers supported a singular focus. As one participant argued:

“[There are] two things, I think they [teachers] must be child-centred but they can’t be child-centred at the same time as sacrificing an understanding and knowledge of their subject. They [teachers] have to endeavour to get a balance between understanding their students and the content they have to get through in order to meet State requirements, but all that needs to be done with a sensitivity of where their students are up to both individually and as a group” (George Transcript: 1, 4).

Clearly a range of ways of working in middle years is evident. There is no consensus, as yet the student is consistently identified as the priority:

“Good teaching bottom line is, look at the kid in front of you, don’t look at the subject, look at that kid, taking the needs of those kids and that’s what I don’t see enough of… you know it’s all about how can we get these OPs or how can we get these kids the highest marks possible…but you’re not going to get there, unless you made sure they were emotionally okay and you had actually reached them, made them feel good about themselves” (Paris Transcript: 3).

Across the sites, the reconceptualising the ways of working as a middle school teacher is underpinned by a shift to a focus on the “whole child”. This implies a valuing of teaching and learning that is more holistic and therefore, requires a pedagogical shift from the teacher, one that focuses on the learning process: “they [teachers] need to be more concerned about how things are happening and how teaching, learning is occurring” (Ronald Transcript: 1). What emerged from the data with this focus on the “whole child” was an appreciation of the emotional and social needs of young adolescents which the participants agreed, could not be met effectively met by a subject driven curricula. The principals and teachers argued that to meet the needs of young adolescents, new ways of working that focused on an understanding of adolescence were necessary. So much so that:
“The primary reason why we should have a middle school because you develop staff whose area of specialisation is adolescence and there’s often a lot of talk about they need subject specialists and all of that to which I always reply, well they have specialists, they’re area of specialisation is adolescence and teaching adolescents and you know it is as I say a very delicate balance and we don’t always get it right” (Clint Transcript: 1).

Clint’s description of the teacher being a “specialist in adolescence”, points to an important attribute of the middle school teacher, one who understands learning that nurtures the whole child and brings an “enthusiasm” which engages and gives “the children the wings they need to fly”. This sentiment encapsulates the demand by most teachers that if middle schooling is to succeed then new ways of working must come to the fore.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter presents the core proposition that advocates the effective middle years teachers’ must demonstrate A capacity to forge a middle school identity. Each of four sub-propositions generated from the interviews of all the participants have been reported. Central to the capacity to forge a middle school identity, based on the data, is the need for leadership to disseminate such a vision and finally, the generation of new ways of working if the philosophy is to be realised.

In the next chapter, the data analysis turns to the second of four core propositions. This next core proposition states that it is the perspectives of stakeholders that teachers need to be adept designers of a wholesome curriculum if quality middle schooling is to be realised. Each of three sub-propositions will be articulated to support the theorising of this core proposition.
Chapter 7

The Middle School Teacher

Core proposition two:
It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum

7.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter noted key stakeholders believe that there are new ways of working required for a middle school teacher. The second core proposition is the subject of this chapter. This core proposition explores the ideas relating to the changing pedagogical practices of the middle years of schooling reform and the extent to which the middle school teacher is required to reform their curriculum. The proposition that has emerged from data analysis, and is the focus of this chapter is: It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers should be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum. Implicit in this core proposition are three sub-propositions: (i) to be designers of a wholesome curriculum middle school teachers should be creative and innovative in their thinking and practices; (ii) to be designers of a wholesome curriculum middle school teachers should engage in teacher teaming; and (iii) to be designers of a wholesome curriculum middle school teachers should be experts in designing integrated curriculum.

Therefore, this chapter is framed to:

- present and analyse the core proposition (7.2);
- present and analyse the three sub-propositions:
  - Middle years’ teachers creative and innovative in their thinking and practices (7.2.1);
  - Middle years’ teachers should be engaged in teacher teaming (7.2.2);
  - Middle years’ teachers should be experts in designing integrated curriculum (7.2.3);
  and
- provide a conclusion to the chapter (7.3)
7.2 Core proposition two: It is the perspective of key stakeholders that Middle school teachers should be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum

While there was broad acknowledgement that all teachers share a common “passion” and “love of teaching” it was noted by a number of participants that to be in the middle school meant “a different curriculum and [a] different delivery”. As one teacher put it, being a middle school teacher is a “very big challenge”. Hence, this core proposition of the middle school teacher as designer of a wholesome curriculum, involves refashioning and redesigning curriculum, leading to the introduction of new learning and pedagogical practices and assessment. As a designer, the middle school teacher is redefining the meaning of a rigorous curriculum through an emphasis on “collaborative” forms of curriculum, “differentiated learning”, “cooperative learning using small group strategies”, “negotiated learning” and designing an “integrated curriculum” that “crosses the subject boundaries” allowing for an innovative integrated approach to teaching and learning.

This integrated approach to teaching and learning has advanced the notion of a “seamless curriculum” between precincts [junior, middle and senior]” (Dorothy Transcript: 6). Whereas, before the onset of this reform of curriculum in the middle years, it was seen as something quite different and separate. Some participants noted that this change is not just about the middle school but “is a whole school approach” to change, and the implementation of the middle schooling philosophy is seen as a “catalyst for change” that will enhance teaching and learning across the whole school.

The middle school teacher a designer of a wholesome curriculum is nurturing the imaginations of her students. As one participant commented:

“…for teachers it’s [an] opportunity for them to feel quite nurtured and supported too. There’s a very different feel I think in the middle school because we are able to nurture. There’s a lot of emphasis goes into that nurturing aspect, into that relationship building with our students and I think that extends across our staff as well…Not only are they connecting with their students but they connect with each other on a similar level so I think that’s a very positive thing from a teaching perspective particularly in 7 and 8” (Mae Transcript: 4).

Furthermore, a designer of a wholesome curriculum, the middle school teacher needs to be committed to learning how to listen to students:
“They need to be listened to and it’s really important that they feel that they are listened to so that if they have something to say on any matter including what’s going on in their classroom they’re listened to and they like to be asked, they like to be worked with rather than spoken down to” (Elizabeth Transcript: 3).

From the data, the middle school teacher, while demonstrating her commitment to curriculum design and curriculum knowledge noted that “it is about students first”. Therefore, requiring the middle school teacher to “listen to students”, so as to understand them.

The middle school teacher a designer of a wholesome curriculum is bringing a new vitality to the middle school space providing opportunities for elevating young people and allowing them to find their “own voice”. As one participant commented the middle school teacher: “needs to be some sort of change agent or some sort of catalyst for change” (Harrison Transcript: 1). The emergence of the designer metaphor sees the middle school teacher not only as one who brings about change, but a teacher who creates a climate of receptivity in the classroom where new ideas are welcomed and imaginations are allowed to flow.

Since the focus on the middle years of schooling in the early 1990s, there has been growing evidence concerning the important role of the teacher to bring about change. The data gathered from this study affirm this and notes that the teacher is the “key” to advancing the change proposed by the middle years’ reform. This is a change that is characterised in the data as forging a “holistic approach” to quality teaching and learning which is responsive to student needs, helping them to re-imagine a world which empowers them and is full of hope. The magnitude and the consequences of the changes proposed by the middle years reform is unprecedented and involves the formation of a different type of middle school teacher – a designer of a wholesome curriculum. Further data from the participants relating to this attribute are presented in the sub-propositions that follow. The key sub-propositions are identified in Figure 7.1.
Sub-propositions of a designer of a wholesome curriculum

1. Creative and innovative
2. Teacher Teaming
3. Designer of an integrated curriculum

Figure 7.1 Sub-propositions of a designer of a wholesome curriculum

7.2.1 Sub-proposition 1.1:
Middle years teachers creative and innovative in their thinking and practices

The data revealed that as schools commenced their deliberations relating to the middle years of schooling philosophy they found themselves involved in a process of substantial “change”. The focus of this change was the “pedagogical practices” of the middle school, requiring the teacher to do something different, something creative and innovative. This comment from Kate reflects other participant attitudes: “they’re in a digital age…and student engagement is so important…we really need to go back to the pedagogy, we need to go back to the curriculum and the assessment, the way we teach it, what we teach, how we teach” (Kate Transcript: 2).

In addition, there was a consensus that classrooms need to be configured differently so that teachers are not ‘centre stage’: “We can’t teach with children in rows and us pointing to the board so we have to really reassess that” (Kate Transcript: 2). The teacher centred approach came under criticism by some students. One group of students clearly had reservations about the dominance of the teacher centred approach in their learning:

“[Teachers] who stand out in the front of the classroom and just…dictate from the book. Yeah and just reads the book…And just writes on the board. If they stand there and write the whole thing on the board and then you’ve got to copy it in the books and then they rub it off the board and keep writing and you are like…And when we get sheets…it’s okay to write down every now and again but when they fill the whole board like three times in one lesson and when it happens every single lesson you go “I don’t want to do this class anymore, at all.” It is the most boring way to teach and it doesn’t really go in” (Sneezy Transcript: 7).
“I like learning” but it had to be “enjoyable as well” was a common remark from students. However, for some students their middle school was not unlike that of primary school:

“Not boring stuff that you don’t need to know. Like in English we do lots of stuff you do in primary school. You just repeat it. Like speeches and how to write a speech…it just gets longer. And maths, last year we repeated almost exactly what we learnt in Year 6 and 7, it was so boring” (Sneezy Transcript: 7-8).

What students wanted to see were creative and innovative teachers who can engage them in:

“Being able to do the new stuff, being able to do new things and say “look I can do this.” If the teacher makes it fun, or at least interesting I can take it in… if they’re teaching and it’s really boring… than I just sit there” (Dopey Transcript: 6).

There were a range of perspectives on what constituted “learning as fun” but the activities the students identified as fun were all concerned with learning being “relevant” to them.

A repeating theme, from the data, was for teachers to engage students through trying “new things”. Some participants reflected that to be successful in the teaching and learning of the middle years reform called for both teachers and students to do their “very best”, but “understanding…to succeed you have to be innovative and you have to try things out” (Robin Transcript: 5). This led to some schools creating a culture of “innovation” and “experimentation”:

“There is a culture of, I guess, experimentation or having a go, at the school, and that comes from the leadership where it’s not expected that everything works brilliantly first time, best time. There’s very much a culture of learning within the staff and the leadership that actually rubs off on the students and I think predominantly that’s…what I get from the leadership is that to always do your best but to always improve what you’re doing, and to review what you’re doing. Reflect on it. Do it better next time, or do it again if you did it well the first time” (Robin Transcript: 5-6).

This commitment to be creative and innovative, according to some participants, generates a “positive learning culture” where students were engaged and “happy” and “experience some success”. Other participants felt as teachers they had been “empowered…they’re a little bit special and a little bit different” (Neil Transcript: 7).
From the data, it was evident that the development of an innovative culture facilitated a learning environment that was “mistake friendly” and enabled students to experience the world from both inside and outside the classroom:

“…letting the kids make their mistakes and realise what they’ve done, getting out there, finding different learning environments other than the classroom…so rather than just the chalk and talk, learners getting out there and learning through doing” (John Transcript: 6).

Furthermore, this creative and innovative approach to middle school highlighted the importance of the relationship between teacher and student because the middle school teacher: “spends more time working with students than a senior school teacher would… with that holistic view of the curriculum” (Harrison Transcript: 4). This focus on the importance of the relationship between teacher and student gave rise to one of the central understandings of the middle school pedagogical practices that it be “student centred”. Some went as far as to say that by being strongly “student centred and focused” enabled the teacher to be “flexible and creative”. The letting go of the teacher-centred approach in favour of the more student-centred approach involved “taking a risk” as one teacher recognised:

“…as a beginning teacher…it’s easier to come in and have a direct teaching style because you have control of the room and it gives you a sense of security, but once you feel a little bit more comfortable in that classroom it’s easier to be able to apply things and give a bit of that control away to the kids and I think that they develop a lot more trust and know that we have faith in them to give them that bit of space, I think that they respond to that positively” (Dorothy Transcript: 4).

This notion of ‘letting go’ was endorsed by other teacher participants who stressed the importance of “giving greater freedom” to students so they can “be challenged to be creative”. This created an opportunity for the teacher to “differentiate the learning” something that students were calling for: “…they [teachers] don’t think that everyone’s got different learning skills [styles]. They think everyone should be the same and that’s really annoying” (Sneezy Transcript: 4).

However, being a middle school teacher who is creative and innovative is not for the ‘faint hearted’, in fact it requires a “capacity for hard work”:
“The middle school teachers have to be prepared for and engage in a lot of hard work because they’re in a sense continually reinventing the wheel because every group that comes through they have to tailor what they do to that group because they’re teaching kids firstly. So middle school teachers, generally speaking are very hard workers and they’re always ready to work on new projects, they’re on continual search...to teach more effectively all the time (Elizabeth Transcript: 1, 3).

While there was consensus amongst most participants that middle school reform was at the “cutting edge” of teaching and learning, there were participants who expressed concern for the teacher because of the “large workload”. It was stated that, to be creative and innovative can be “lonely because no one else is doing it”. Therefore, some schools are more cautious than others when it came to “experimenting” and “trying new things”. One Principal commented: “the school was too young... too young to be so cutting edge” (George Transcript: 2) and needed to wait until the school was “more established” before being so innovative. Being creative and innovative is more than just mastering a set of techniques and methods but rather more complex. It involves seeing the process of teaching and learning as much more “holistic” and “responsive” by nurturing a culture of learning. According to some participants, to nurture this culture of learning will involve “taking risks”, though, “within boundaries”. In speaking to this need for the middle school teacher to be creative and innovative one teacher drew on the analogy of the “surgeon” to make her point:

“doing this is a bit like a surgeon in the 1970s; if they refuse to embrace arthroscopic surgery they’d be left back. We [middle school teachers] are now the new surgeons; if we don’t look at this stuff and see how it affects our adolescent learners, our 13, 14 year olds, we’ll be like that surgeon who’ll just get left behind” (Kathryn Transcript: 2).

It can be concluded that the extent to which a culture of learning is nurtured will depend on the teacher and their capacity to engage in creative and innovative teaching and learning practices.

Into such an environment of change, the middle school teacher is perceived to be at the “cutting edge” and, with “enthusiasm” has embraced the changes required to be creative and innovative. For the middle school teacher to continue to be “responsive” to the needs of young adolescents in creative and innovative ways, requires “taking risks” as they go beyond the boundaries to see with new eyes, new possibilities and futures. However, they can no longer “do this on your [their] own, it needs the teamwork” (Frank Transcript: 2). This requires
finding strategies where the middle school teacher can be supported and where the “workload” can be shared. Such a strategy is teacher teaming and is dealt within the next sub-proposition.

7.2.2 Sub-proposition 1.2: Middle years teachers should be engaged in teacher teaming

It was generally perceived by the principal and teacher participants, that the middle years reform was concerned with refashioning curricula to make learning more “relevant” and “engaging”, requiring the middle school teacher to be highly “collaborative” and “collegial”. The factor contributing to the effective implementation of innovative middle school strategies that emerged from the data was the capacity of the middle school teacher to work as a member of a teaching team. For many of the schools in the study, the middle school was built around teaching teams:

“Good middle schooling occurs when you have a team of teachers, [who] are pursuing common goals with reasonably similar values… who are able to work and plan together and who communicate well and have good relationships or the ability to develop good relationships” (Harrison Transcript: 1).

According to the data, a middle school teacher who does not possess this quality of teaming can “underscore” the quality of the teaching and learning in the middle school:

“…the thing that most underscores the quality of the middle school teaching staff is those few occasions when we’ve had one that hasn’t fitted in, or who hasn’t got the vision, or hasn’t caught a sense of what we’ve trying to achieve and they really do stand out, not in months but in weeks, that this person just is never going to survive” (Clint Transcript: 2).

At the same time teacher teaming poses an array of challenges for the teacher, who as a consequence of teacher teaming, is no longer working autonomously or separately from colleagues. So to work together effectively as a team:

“…middle school teachers need to be able to present what they think but not feel offended if someone says, I’ve got a better idea, or have you thought further, or can we bring this bit in, you know the collaborative thing is really high in middle school teachers” (Elizabeth Transcript: 3).
A number of teachers identified with the concern that teaching can be an “isolating” experience that can restrict the effectiveness of the teacher. However, after joining the middle school and becoming a member of a teaching team found this approach offered support not experienced before: “not only does the workload get shared around, but the sense of collegiality and pastorally it helps you get through the day” (Frank Transcript: 2). In addition, teacher teaming generated an enthusiasm for teaching and learning:

“...it was fantastic, probably some of the best planning I've ever done in my teaching career, because you get to bounce ideas off people and you get to discuss things, you get to try things out, you get to learn new things, you get to find out about a slightly different angle, you might be thinking of something, but someone else might be able to just improve it just a little bit just to help you go through and sometimes... you have an idea and they just turn around and [say], “No, it’s not going to work” that's [just being] professional” (Simon Transcript: 4).

Simon reflected the comments of other teacher participants when he said that teacher teaming is “one of the best things about this middle school, or best part of my job”. So much so that: “I think I am a better teacher because of this team” (Simon Transcript: 4). In addition, from the teacher data, one teacher comparing his experience to his previous school, found that working in a “collaborative team” renewed his interest in teaching young adolescents:

“I find that I have a lot more time to take interest in the kids...and find myself a lot more interested in their [young adolescents] pastoral needs whereas previous to this I didn’t; honestly I couldn’t wait to get out of the front gate and I didn’t take much interest in what the kids [did]” (John Transcript: 3).

Furthermore, “critical” to being a member of a team requires “trust” and:

“a preparedness to be willing to share their expertise or their idea with other people within that team situation to admit, well I'm not sure what to do here, so to seek assistance from those other people. Trust becomes critical I think in that, I mean they feel part of the team and if they can trust other people in the team and if they say, I don’t know what this is, than the person is not going to go off and tell everybody else” (Ronald Transcript: 3).

Moreover, being a member of a team requires a: “preparedness to give time... if you're going to be part of the team you've got to give time to get together and that's a difficult thing for teachers because they're busy people” (Ronald Transcript: 3).
The data revealed that teacher teaming provided a “strong pastoral” strategy and according to some participants, the emphasis on ethos of care strengthened “relationships between the teachers and students” (Shane Transcript: 1). The students agreed that they need to have their “own identity” which was created by belonging “to a small team of teachers”. It was acknowledged in both the principal and teacher data, that middle school young people do not: “…respond well to constant change or to the lack of certainty in dealing with a large number of adults who have different expectations” (Harrison Transcript: 3). This was reported as a confronting experience for many students as they moved from primary to secondary school. Therefore, from the principal and teacher data, the rationale for teacher teaming was based in the first instance on the “welfare” and “pastoral” needs of young people. In the words of Harrison: “they [middle school students] need a good degree of security and routine in what they do…less movement in the day…and [be] largely based in a home room is fairly important” (Harrison Transcript: 3). From a beginning teacher perspective, this focus on ethos of care through teacher teaming, helped meet and manage some of the pastoral issues around behaviour management:

“…having the support of other team members is great, particularly in pastoral areas where a particular student may be creating difficulty for another student or behaviour in the class. To be able to get a third party opinion or insight has proven to be extremely valuable and managing the stress that also inevitably comes with conflict has [helped] my wellbeing as a teacher…having the support of team members” (Robin Transcript: 4).

As evidenced from the teacher data, there was a confidence in teacher teaming as it ensured “that pastorally the kids will all be looked after”. Some students referred to teacher teaming as providing a “comfortable zone” where they had constancy of the same teachers for the duration of their middle years.

From the teacher and principal data it was “recognized that not every teacher has experience of sufficient depth of knowledge and in how to deliver content as well as simply the content itself… we came back to the original vision of time [and the need] to form teams” (Shane Transcript: 2). Consequently, for some schools teaming evolved around the position of “core teacher” identified with a “core class”:
“The idea of core teachers with a core class group...pursued on the basis to provide time for teachers to get to know the students better as learners and as people, time for the teachers to do some more detailed planning so the curriculum could become more vigorous for students and within the year levels, to look at how it linked between the year levels” (Shane Transcript: 1).

This innovative strategy of teacher teaming provided the opportunity for effective modelling by the teaching team to students by “working as a group, as a team working with students” in the classroom. This “modelling” helped establish an adult mentor for students: “somebody that they can connect to, to pursue their learning [and]... some significant person that will assist each kid in following their interests” (Simon Transcript: 5).

According to the teacher data, teacher teaming had developed a “sense of creativity and innovation from the teacher that would never have been able to be generated without teaming” (Shane Transcript: 9). The data further revealed that teacher teaming enabled teachers to learn different skills from other teachers, becoming aware of the “strengths” of the team and building on that in “creative ways”. In some schools, where there were dedicated learning spaces for middle school, “team teaching” was encouraged, giving teachers the opportunity to deliver together, thereby learning from each other and becoming “mentors” for each other. In the words of one teacher, teacher teaming enhanced their own learning of adolescence and “taught me a number of different teaching strategies... It doesn't always have to be chalk and talk” (John Transcript: 3). According to John, “has made me a more caring individual”. This change in attitude and the approach taken by the teacher was echoed in the student data: “Like he'll learn from like when we have fun like how to teach, like I think his teaching ways have changed since the start of the year” (Bashful Transcript: 5).

It was a common theme from both the teacher and student data that the teacher “does not know everything” and, as one student put it “they [teachers] are learners like we are”. Hence, this notion of “teacher as learner” became important as new curriculum was being designed and implemented requiring teachers to teach across subject disciplines. As one teacher commented: “not everybody is a genius in every learning area [subject] and yet we are asking them to teach there” (Rosemary Transcript: 3). This emphasis on the middle school teacher as “learner” was well articulated by Ronald suggesting that the teacher has to be aware of his or her “…capabilities… where she is as a learner and [aware] that she’s on a fairly steep change trail particularly as a learner” (Ronald Transcript: 2). Perceptively, the students commented...
similarly: “they [teachers] grow as learners as much as we do”. The data revealed that this was an important attribute of the middle school teacher: “[to be] open to new learning, an openness to share things with other people… they’ve also got to accept that they don’t know everything and that they’re learners with the kids” (Ronald Transcript: 3-4). Therefore, teacher teaming in a middle school learning environment was seen as “essential” and the middle school teacher has to be “prepared to learn”. This, according to the data, can only be achieved effectively through teacher teaming. Therefore, teacher teaming not only became an important support strategy for the teacher, but became an important “professional learning” experience for their own personal development as a middle school teacher.

From the data, teachers consistently found that through teacher teaming they were better off:

“I believe that, we work in a team of six teachers. I think that’s six times more the ideas, six times more the resources, six times more the mode of delivery and I think in a sense you actually save yourself some work” (John Transcript: 3).

While acknowledging the heightened workload of teachers in the middle school, the particular benefit of teacher teaming was found to be:

“…we all had a clear expectation of what we wanted and we’re setting really high standards...In terms of collegial support, I can feel that if I’m having a really bad day you walk in and there’s always someone there that’s been there before or that knows what to do. But again I think mostly it’s about the faith that everybody instils in each other, I know when my student walks out of my room and into another they’re walking into a classroom that has the same expectations which is a really huge positive, you’re not starting again in every lesson” (Dorothy Transcript: 5).

It became clear from the data that teacher teaming became a vivid positive teaching and learning experience. One teacher proudly commented: “it’s nice to be in a school where everyone is so positive and everyone is working together and we’ve got the same goals. [This] has just been the big wow factor for me” (Marilyn Transcript: 3).

Furthermore, from the teacher data, there was consistent comment made that as the teacher team became established and new pedagogical practices such as “co-operative learning” and “small group strategies” were adopted, behaviour management issues were “much less”. Moreover, others commented that teacher teaming gave opportunities for teachers: “to really
engage with the deeper needs of the students”. This, according to some principals, led to improvement in “academic outcomes”. As one principal proudly claims:

“I fully understand why people question you know whether they are getting the content and are they developing gains and so on but I actually think it’s an unnecessary anxiety and certainly I feel our brightest kids are absolutely flourishing, our strugglers are certainly doing better and the ones in the middle I think are probably you know doing as well as they would under any system; so yeah very happy with that” (Clint Transcript: 5).

In addition, there were “improved social outcomes” for students. Furthermore, there was “increased staff and parent satisfaction” in how the student learning was being organised and delivered.

What became apparent from the data, as collective responsibility increased through teacher teaming, it not only improved student learning but importantly, improved the professional learning of team members. This was demonstrated in the form of their own growth as a person and in their “competence” and “confidence” as a middle school teacher. From the data, this increase in collective responsibility by some of the teams, gave the appearance of genuine professional learning teams being established that were seeking ‘deeper’ learning.

This strategy of teacher teaming facilitated the development of professional learning teams. These professional learning teams, where teachers supported each other in “trust” were charged with the responsibility of refashioning a relevant curriculum for all students. This resulted in the design and implementation of an “integrated curriculum” for the middle years.

Designing an integrated curriculum is the focus of the next sub-proposition.

7.2.3 Sub-proposition 1.3:
Middle years teachers should be experts in designing integrated curriculum

In each of the schools there is a central focus on designing an integrated curriculum for the overall organisation of their middle school. However, each school, it is evident that a variety of approaches are taken. Some schools described their approach to the integrated curriculum as “connected curriculum” or “trans-disciplinary” or “integrated curriculum around themes” or “rich projects around a “big idea” or an integrated curriculum around “an overall theme”. In addition, some schools integrated only the Humanities Key Learning Areas (KLAs) of English and
SOSE, where others integrated both the Humanities and the Maths and Sciences. From the data it was found that some schools were in the embryonic stages of designing an integrated curriculum, others had been “trialling” for over “six years” and others had an established integrated curriculum for more than 10 years. The data reflected that some schools who took a cautious approach to curriculum design, demonstrated tentativeness and “fear” toward designing an integrated curriculum. Consequently, those schools tend to remain more aligned with the “Junior High School model” where students studied a full complement of curriculum organised around “specialist subjects” and “electives” within a conventional school schedule. On the other hand, there were schools in the study which were able to turn those fears into “taking risks” and successfully grew their integrated curriculum by developing a creative and innovative approach to curriculum design. This was demonstrated by how schools organised their time, implementing long blocks of time between “70 minutes” and “90 minutes” into a three or four block day. In addition, one school introduced a dedicated timetable for their middle school which was different to that of their senior school. In reflecting back over ten years of integrating the curriculum, one school saw this as a “journey” where the curriculum was allowed to evolve to where it is today. While proud at what they had achieved, the school was looking forward to doing a “bit more” by “throwing out half the furniture” and “knock[ing] down a few more walls”, by taking a few more “risks”:

“I’d like to see people embrace [it] a little bit more… and cut loose a Little bit more. It’s ten years and I think I’m going to start saying, “Okay, guys, go hard or go home” [chuckles] so we’ll see, but that’s something I think that risk taking saying to staff, you can take more risks, you know, spend more time negotiating where your kids want to take this topic. Focus on the end point but make the journey as interesting and diverse as you like” (Rosemary Transcript: 5).

The data revealed, by designing an integrated curriculum, schools were attempting to be responsive to an increasing range of issues confronting middle school teachers and students. From the principal and teacher data, the issue of an overcrowded curriculum and it becoming unmanageable emerged as one issue: “the middle school teachers feel that the curriculum is very crowded and the timetable is very crowded” (Mae Transcript: 9). But it doesn’t have to be this way:
“I think the thing is that there’s so much overlap. If you try and teach everything in isolation there’s an awful lot to teach but when you find all of the common ground within all of those things, it’s not that crowded. It doesn’t need to be that crowded. A lot of learning in many, many areas can go on through one activity. You start breaking them down into component parts, you’re not going to fit it all in and then sometimes in doing that you negate the value of some very, very good activities that might not sit under the umbrella of a subject area” (Rosemary Transcript: 5).

Another issue, which emerged from the data, was the existing Year 8, 9 and 10 curriculum had not been revised since the early 1980s. This raised concerns from some principals that the curriculum was not meeting the needs of this new generation of young people. As one principal commented:

“At the beginning of 1999, the whole middle school thing was just getting started. I came here and at the time some of the curriculum, particularly that for Years 8 and 9 and to some extent Year 10 was stagnant, it was at the time when after the Board of Secondary School Studies had changed to the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies and Years 8 to 10 were just left off in the wilderness somewhere still languishing with syllabuses that were back in the 80s. So the two things came together, we needed to do something about updating our curriculum and then the middle school thing came along at the same time, so we married the two ideas together and what we did was to try a little bit of integration, starting with the three subject areas that we decided would be most easily done were English, SOSE and Religious Education” (Elizabeth Transcript: 1).

In addition, there was a fear expressed by the principals and teachers in the data that designing an integrated curriculum would lead to a “dumbing down” of the teaching and learning. According to some principals and teachers, this fear needed to be allayed:

“That’s been a criticism that people have had here that it is sort of dumbing down, but I mean as a parent I had a daughter who went through the system and I saw what she was writing in Year 9 and to me that was a standard well and truly above compared to before… I’ve taught senior History as well… I think a lot of that sort of criticism comes from ignorance and we used to go along years ago, not dumbing it down but with an expectation that kids of that age could learn a lot more than what they really could and a lot of them fell by the [wayside]” (Ronald Transcript: 7).

Moreover, the suggestion that designing an integrated curriculum was “dumbing down” the teaching and learning process only served to raise the passions of some participants:
“It is acrimonious to privilege academic development at the expense of social, emotional development… most people now accept that the most important thing in life is to have a sense of emotional well-being and to be able to get on socially with people… no amount of calculus or cognitive knowledge is actually going, it’s very unlikely to lead to a happy life… the two have to go hand in hand… it is possible to have a curriculum that is limited in its ability to engage students. But you know we have found that there has been absolutely no negative affect on our students in terms of external criteria. So we’re getting more high distinctions in the maths and the chemistry” (Clint Transcript: 3-4).

To ensure the integrated curriculum was not reducing learning to its basic form, many of the participants argued that the integrated curriculum needs to be “rigorous and self monitoring” with “regular reviews”. From the principal and teacher data, this need for rigour with its emphasis on “achievable standards” and “evaluative processes” was dependent on “the design of the [integrated] curriculum [and] if that is not done than it won’t have rigour” (Dorothy Transcript: 4), and “academic standards” will not be met.

Principally, designing an integrated curriculum was more concerned with engaging students by making curriculum more “relevant to the students”. From the data, the integrated curriculum functions by “combining subject areas [enabling teachers] to look for the links between them, [and] the relevance of how one area [subject/KLA] became relevant to another” (Shane Transcript: 2). In the context of one school, the initial phase of designing an integrated curriculum was in the Humanities KLAs and became the “model” of how an integrated curriculum might look. Schools that adopted integrated curriculum combined “English, SOSE and Science” or “English, SOSE and Religious Education” which became known in those schools as “Integrated Studies”. In a further set of schools the integrated curriculum was in “English, SOSE, Maths and Science” and “Arts and Technology” in another. From the data, those schools integrating Maths and Science only came after the successful trialling of English, SOSE and/or Religious Education. This progression to include Maths and Science in some schools represented the second phase in their process of designing an integrated curriculum.

As noted earlier, the data revealed a diversity of approaches and understandings of what is meant by designing an integrated curriculum. There is no data to suggest a singular model. Some participants expressed initial fears and a reluctance to be engaged in designing an integrated curriculum, preferring instead to use terms such as “connected curriculum” or
“connected tasks” while still reflecting the conventional subject based approach to curriculum design:

“I really think when we talk connected curriculum we’re not talking about integrated studies, that’s not what we’re talking about at all… but using commonsense as to when that can be connected as opposed to losing the essence of stuff like I don’t know I’m not a great one for Study of Society and the Environment or like Social Science being able to define History, Geography…I think that’s what happens here that you don’t lose a sense of the whole, you know there is a distinctiveness and an independence in curriculum… connected where it should be… to make it [curriculum] meaningful” (Julia Transcript: 7).

In addition, this notion of the “connected curriculum” became more a strategy of “connected tasks” in the elective subjects of “Visual Arts and Technology”:

“…[it is] in those elective groups that we’ve done the connected tasks, tasks that operate across four learning areas or three depending on the situation and then essentially that’s where we’ve really focused on… really connected with technology and their [student] interest areas and so on” (Humphrey Transcript: 5).

Alternatively, in another school it appeared that some participants were concerned that designing an integrated curriculum created an artificial learning experience by making “false links”:

“The term integrate is used here but the mantra in the school in terms of the 8 KLAs, was integrate where you can, where you can’t; don’t sweat it okay, you don’t make false linkages… when you start making false links, then it loses its [meaningfulness], becomes de-contextualised and the students begin to disengage with the whole approach” (Harrison Transcript: 1).

These concerns gave rise to alternative conceptualisations of integrated curriculum which further fuelled fears as the following comment suggests:

“…the integrated approach where, you basically take a problem of interest to the students and work with it without any regard for disciplinary boundaries, KLAs or anything like that and you work on that until the problem’s solved or whatever, it’s very difficult to get that to fit. The research shows that there are good results from that, but the practicalities of making something like that work is just impossible” (Harrison Transcript: 1).
From the data, these initial fears for some schools took some time to overcome, as one teacher participant acknowledged:

“I think originally there was such a fear that you would do it [wrongly]… everyone sort of tried to do it in a sort of manner and I think that now people being able to evaluate that have now been able to make minor changes in some places, major in others, so hopefully not dumping it all together” (Dorothy Transcript: 6).

However, in another school, after trialling the integrated curriculum for “three years”, this fear of “dumping it altogether” was realised and the school “reverted back to a completely traditional high school model”. The Principal of the school commented: “we’re moving away from integrated curriculum” because:

“I’m not confident putting teachers outside A: their comfort zone and B: outside their knowledge base… staff here in the middle school have worked a large number of hours to try and understand curriculum content outside of their area and I think that’s a huge call for them… I don’t think many teachers are able to fulfil that because it requires an amazing amount of preparation, and an amazing amount of knowledge, and ideas and I don’t think it’s got a lot to do with training, it’s got a lot to do with the people who just have a genuine passion for what they’re doing… I think it’s a very difficult transition for them [teachers]” (George Transcript: 3,6).

George went on to assert that in his school there was not a freshness of approach across the middle school and the approach to curriculum integration tended to be “fixed” into a “Year 7” mode of delivery. Consequently, by Year 9, according to George, the integrated curriculum had become a “novelty” that was wearing thin:

“I believe Year 9 is a fairly tough year… by that stage the novelty [Integrated Studies], is wearing off with our kids…I’ve done this for 3 years now, I’ve done the Integrated Studies, I’ve done my project, and I think that’s a tough call on our Year 9 teachers as well. How do maintain this with a fresh and vital approach, with vitality?” (George Transcript: 8).

While the data revealed a diversity of approaches to designing an integrated curriculum, there was consensus in the study that the approach to the middle years’ curriculum needed to be concerned with “making linkages” between subjects and KLAs:
“I use the term integration, but what I’m really talking about is having some sort of trans-disciplinary approach to the curriculum because the kids need to see the linkages. They need to see their learning as a whole, they’re too big for primary school but they’re not quite ready for a more independent approach in Years 10, 11 and 12. They need to have the opportunity to have input into their curriculum by negotiating. There needs to be a reasonable degree of negotiation in it. They like to work at that age in groups and by a lot of conferencing, so the curriculum needs to be geared in that sort of way” (Harrison Transcript: 1).

Harrison describes a “trans-disciplinary approach” to designing an integrated curriculum. He considers the “linkages between disciplines and fields of knowledge” as important. Therefore, he organised his teachers to “work and plan together across a trans-disciplinary curriculum [around] some sort of big idea, not a theme and have [students] do one assignment [that] covers four subjects” (Harrison Transcript: 6). Harrison proudly comments that this approach works: “For people who’ve worked in schools know that to get four Heads of Department to work together like that is pretty rare” (Harrison Transcript: 6).

For a number of schools in the study, this combining of subject areas, looking “for the links between them” and the “relevance of one area to another” and to be “more project based rather than content driven” proved to be particularly challenging. Once the initial “trialling” of the integrated curriculum had passed its first year, there was much more confidence and recognition that the integrated curriculum facilitated some positive teaching and learning experiences. One participant put it this way: “it’s initially more work for the teacher but I think once, you know short term pain for long term gain” (Marilyn Transcript: 2). In addition, by designing an integrated curriculum it allowed for the “implementing of different things, I think that’s great. It gives it a little bit more meaning and purpose and that’s probably the main thing” (Marilyn Transcript: 5).

From the teacher data, the process of designing an integrated curriculum facilitated a review of subject areas and redressed their programme of study for Year 7 through to Year 9. The data revealed that as schools embraced a more creative and innovative approach to curriculum design by designing an integrated curriculum, teachers adopted a more flexible, creative, coherent and consistent approach to classroom pedagogy:
“In a middle school, with an integrated curriculum, you will necessarily have more group activities and because you can’t just talk and talk for a whole day, there will be more independent learning …it’s very much about group activities and children working at their own pace, and trying ones best to differentiate the curriculum so that all the children are making progress” (Clint Transcript: 4).

This approach to curriculum design also allowed for a “common” and consistent focus on literacy and numeracy. One school used the “Stepping Out” programme as “the school wide pedagogy”, and was central to the repertoire of pedagogical practices for the integrated curriculum. Therefore, designing an integrated curriculum ensured that pedagogy did not become formulaic:

“doing the same thing over and over like copy off the whiteboard every lesson…it's the last lesson and they [the teacher] say “copy this chapter,” or something I'm just writing and I'm not taking it in, not learning anything” (Sam Transcript: 8).

From the teacher data, designing an integrated curriculum placed an emphasis on a pedagogy that appeals to a wide range of learning styles, requiring teachers to differentiate the learning:

“There’s an expectation for teachers of the middle years, to try and present activities or learning experiences to the kids that are fun and give them the opportunity to be engaged in what’s happening”(Mae Transcript: 2).

To assist teachers to differentiate the learning, one school implemented the “Let me learn programme” which helps identify a student's preferred learning style. A student described the strategy this way:

“I know for me Year 8, Let Me Learn [the] teacher would sit down with me and did up a confluency test and I [scored] very high on it, she would say, “Well this is the areas that you’re going to be very strong in, so I won't help you with them” but if you have an area where you’re weaker she would help me with the other areas that I lacked. Which in middle school sort of gave me I think a strength, more of a strength, I mean I'm still a very confluent student but now I realise where the other areas have been picked up, I don't just concentrate on my [preferred] area” (Frodo Transcript: 5).
The data revealed that designing an integrated curriculum required the teacher to “[think] about things outside [their] own teaching area” and possess “the skill of flexibility”. Hence, getting the mix or “balance” within the teaching staff was all important. The more established schools who had designed an integrated curriculum and were well under way had achieved this “balance” with their “core teacher” concept:

Our school is structured that you have a core teacher for each class of students, 25 students at each year level. Now in our system here we have six classes of 7, seven classes of 8 and eight classes of 9, each of those classes has their core teacher and the core teachers teach English, Maths, SOSE and Science to all of their students in Year 7 and in Year 8 and in Year 9 it’s usually split into a Maths/Science person, and an English/SOSE person or whatever their teaching strengths are” (Rosemary Transcript: 2).

This concept of “core teacher” ensured there were teachers “who [were] passionate about their subject area”. In addition, specialist teachers were deployed within the middle school to teach “Music, Home Economics, Art, Christian Living, PE, and Languages” (Rosemary Transcript: 2). For most schools in the study, the integrated curriculum was developed around a thematic approach to learning which one participant proudly commented: “it provided superb opportunities for us to integrate and link across core subject areas and I think we do that really well” (Mae Transcript: 2). Another school in the study was looking at extending this thematic approach to learning across both “core” and “elective” areas with an “overall theme”.

Moreover, emphasis was placed on the “autonomy” of the teaching teams to implement this creative approach to learning:

“A teacher’s timetable in middle school; the only thing that appears on their timetable are the specialist lessons so all core learning is negotiated with the teachers themselves so they decide you know, because we have a fantastic approach to what we do so they decide where the Science, the Maths, the English and the SOSE fits. It allows them to integrate the curriculum and it allows nice large blocks of time that means that they can put different activities in there. They can get to the venues, they can come together as a year level etc. so it maximises the flexibility for blocks of time uninterrupted so that learning can take different tangents, be exciting; it’s up to the teachers” (Rosemary Transcript: 2-3).

According to Mae, what results from this approach is an integrated curriculum that:
“...promotes the fact that we want the students to enjoy themselves, you know to have opportunities for open ended activities, opportunities for students to negotiate with their teacher about the styles of things that they’d like to do but within the agreed structure that you have” (Mae Transcript: 2).

From the students’ perspective the integrated curriculum did provide a clearer structure for developing conceptualised thinking through making those subject linkages: “...it’s sort of all about, the same topic...different aspects...coming from different angles and [from] all three subjects” (Grumpy Transcript:1). It enabled students to explore across “fields of knowledge” and developed critical thinking:

“It’s also pretty good because our curriculum is pretty flexible like it just gives you a general topic and you can go in depth in one part of that topic and your teacher pretty much just helps you where you need help, that sort of thing. In Year 7, almost every subject that I did was like totally fuelled by the class, like the teacher would just say “we are going to look at this unit” and we just gave hundreds of ideas that we can go with that. Then in Grade 8 we had things like the Science fair... that was like a whole team effort and we pretty much prepared it all and we got the opportunity” (Sam Transcript: 6).

From the student data, the integrated curriculum demonstrated that knowledge and skills are interchangeable because the teacher themselves needed to be interchangeable. Students were more confident and enthusiastic about their learning because the integrated curriculum gave them “choice and freedom” to pursue their interests and “you [had] more responsibility”. In addition, from the teacher data there was recognition that as you released more decision making to the students, there were heightened levels of “confidence”, “enthusiasm”, “independence” and “co-operative learning”:

“I have seen a definite improvement in their results in terms of investigative processes mainly. I think the other major benefit which again in this case it would be how they are able to relate to each other in terms of confidence in what they’re doing, comfort within an environment and then being able to negotiate and communicate better between themselves and then with adults [teachers] as well in my experience” (Dorothy Transcript: 3).

In conclusion, it is evident that this approach to learning facilitated a heightened sense of student maturity and respect for themselves and their teachers: “our teachers, our classroom,
our classmates…it all just creates a really good learning environment and that makes you want to learn” (Sleepy Transcript: 8). This level of engagement and enjoyment through the integrated approach led one student to proudly claim that: “I think the teacher can make a big difference” (Pippin Transcript: 1).

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the core proposition that it is the perspective of the key stakeholders that middle school teachers need to be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum. Three sub-propositions generated from the interviews of all the participants are also reported. Teachers reported that their preferred pedagogical philosophies were challenged and they had to “take risks” in order to progress their creative and innovative ideas so that they could feel a sense of ownership and pride as a designer of a wholesome curriculum. This core proposition advanced the sub-propositions of the middle school teacher as one who is creative and innovative, is engaged in teacher teaming and is a designer of an integrated curriculum.

Being a teacher is demanding enough; being a middle school teacher is demanding at a new level. The middle school teacher is responsible for forging new relationships with young adolescents. For middle schooling philosophy to be developed with integrity, it is increasingly necessary that a stronger focus on early adolescence be sustained as the platform to engaging curriculum, teaching and learning. The following chapter develops this theme, by analysing the next core proposition of the middle school teacher. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers must be specialists in adolescence.
8.1 Introduction

Central to the middle school is the education of the early adolescent. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that teachers in middle the years of schooling should be specialists in the study of adolescence. This core proposition cultivates a focus on the new type of middle school teacher which is emerging from the data. This chapter will focus on this third core proposition and three sub-propositions.

Therefore, this chapter is framed to:

- present and analyse the third core proposition (8.2);
- present and analyse the three sub-propositions:
  - the middle years teacher is a facilitator of transitions, friendships and relationships (8.2.1);
  - the middle years teacher is required to have a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of the middle years learner (8.2.2);
  - the middle years teacher to demonstrate a passion to serve as an advocate for the middle years learner and for the middle years (8.2.3); and
- provide a conclusion to the chapter (8.3).

8.2 Core proposition 3:

It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers must be specialists in the study of adolescence

The research literature and the data presented in this thesis overwhelmingly affirmed that adolescence is a time of profound change. One participant likened the changes taking place in adolescence as a “rollercoaster” and a ride that the middle school teacher had to manage:
“Middle school teachers have that unenviable task of trying to manage the rollercoaster that the students go through both emotionally as well as academically and I think that’s probably where their role is the most difficult because students don’t want the warm, fuzzy teacher of the primary school, they do want to be treated like adults” (George Transcript: 4).

In a more assertive mood one of the teacher participants argued that young people “are going through so much change they don’t know how to deal with it” (Paris Transcript: 6), and “they’re useless to you if they’re not socially and emotionally happy” (Paris Transcript: 6). Paris is suggesting that to be an effective middle school teacher requires an understanding of the developmental uniqueness of the middle school learner. This is echoed by other participants when drawing attention to the issues facing young adolescents who are “[going] through puberty, hormonal changes…their emotions are just all over the place” (Bob Transcript: 1). How to respond to the special needs of these young people becomes all important and, for the middle school teacher, can be “a tricky balancing act”. At the same time, it needs to be recognised that working with these young people is not for the ‘faint hearted’ but rather needs teachers to be “passionate” and “committed” to this age group:

“I think one particular need of a middle school teacher, is to truly understand what adolescence is going to look and smell like and appear like… if you are not passionate and positive about dealing with kids who behave in that way you are certainly going to struggle irrespective of how good you are with the students” (Shane Transcript: 7).

From the students’ perspective, they too recognised that they are going through changes and are not sure how to explain it, let alone understand it:

“Like you can be best friends with someone in primary school and then you come here and you’re in different classes and stuff and you just don’t see them anymore…and they totally change and you wonder how it kind of happened that quick…Yeah I think everyone changes like sometimes people change in big ways but sometimes it’s just very small. I know I’ve changed because of my vocabulary, I say certain words a lot more than I should. I don’t know why but lately I just say “yeah that’s sick,” and just say “sick” so much. You just catch on to words. Yeah like how I was in Year 7, I don’t know, but I miss [being] like that. I don’t know how you explain it. You worry more about what people think of you when you say that and people give you more of a hard time about it. Yeah because like in primary school I was really secluded and stuff and now I’m like a bit louder and I voice my opinions a lot more” (Sneezy Transcript: 1).
Furthermore, students recognised the change in teacher behaviour with the transition from primary school to secondary school:

“...they treat you more maturely too... more adult. But we’re not adults, we’re not adults yet we’re still pretty much kids. Yeah I know but they do a bit of both and slowly the more adult things become more than the child things. You do like more mature things but it’s also equal to the stuff you did in primary school” (Dopey Transcript: 5).

According to some participants this “balancing act” reflects how these young people are “nurtured” and how they are pastorally “cared for” in “bridging that gap” between the needs of the emerging young adult “where they’re going through puberty, quite a troubling and difficult time, their emotions are just all over the place (Simon Transcript: 1) and the demands of “curriculum depth in areas that they’re not familiar with and not so good at” (Bob Transcript: 3). This “bridging the gap” will “create tensions” because “it is a difficult period of transition in the growth from child to adult” (Clint Transcript: 1). For Clint and others in the study, this is the central reason why the middle school teacher needs to be “a specialist in adolescence” (Clint Transcript: 1). Clint argues strongly for this specialisation in adolescence:

“The primary reason why we should have a middle school is because you develop staff whose area of specialisation is adolescence and there’s often a lot of talk about they need subject specialists…I always reply, well they have specialists, they’re area of specialisation is adolescence” (Clint Transcript: 1).

Moreover, from the student data there was recognition that the middle school represented a “new start” for students and that there was a strong focus on them as individuals. The data revealed that there was a readiness in students to learn more about themselves because they can see themselves changing. Some students observed that “we’re getting older” and “it is just such a huge change I think because of our maturity levels and stuff” (Sam Transcript: 1). Students found that their teachers talked and listened to them much more than they did in primary school, although “it didn’t have much to do with school work. We were just expressing what we think about the world and everything. It was quite random” (Bashful Transcript: 5). While not for everyone, “learning about yourself... was quite good” (Pippin Transcript: 2). In fact “teachers shape you kind of” (Pippin Transcript: 13). For other students, this focus on learning about self was not as important.
This attribute of the teacher a **specialist in adolescence** requires the teacher to be “positive” and “optimistic” in their dealings with the young middle school learner. According to the data, some participants acknowledged that the students of this age, young adolescents, are “full of enthusiasm” and it is this enthusiasm that the teachers need to tap into and affirm:

“They’ve got so much energy, they want to raise money for the school, they want to do all these different things in their new school to be proud of the school and it hasn’t always been the case that we recognise this enthusiasm, give them a role, give them an opportunity, give them a badge, give them some sort of status to achieve that” (Neil Transcript: 6).

The data strongly acknowledged the importance of “enthusiasm” and how “exciting” a time it is for the young adolescent to be in middle school:

“They’re very enthusiastic kids. They’re a work in progress and the more we learn about them, the more we sort of know the way they develop and although they follow basically the same trajectory, they’ve all got their little idiosyncratic ways. They’re impulsive, one day they’ll be quiet and pensive and the next day they’ll be all over the shop and jumping around and carrying on, but that’s what makes them unpredictable and great to work with. They’re so enthusiastic about things they can run away with an idea really quickly; sometimes you have to curb their ability to run away with the idea” (Elizabeth Transcript: 2).

When responding to the unpredictability of adolescence, Elizabeth draws attention to this attribute a **specialist in adolescence**, demonstrating how important it is for the middle school teacher to respond in ways that exhibit an understanding of adolescence. Elizabeth asserts:

“They’re kids that need understanding and increasingly teachers in this area are understanding of these kids, I think some better than others but they’re working on it. What the kids need at this stage is, they need help to be able to focus, some of them can do that reasonably well some are hopeless, they have an attention span of the average ‘gnat’ and really need to be drawn into something and that’s where the what of your study comes in, if it’s intrinsically interesting or not, they need guidelines, they need to know what they can and can’t do, you know boundaries around things and although they often push against them that’s their job. I think in the long run they’re pretty happy to know that the boundaries are there, they don’t cope well in classes and we’ve had a couple of them [teachers] who don’t get it and the kids, they’re sort of hanging from the rafters basically” (Elizabeth Transcript: 3).
In addition, the teacher and principal data, affirmed the need for the middle school teacher to be “optimistic” and “flexible” when responding to the “frustrating times with young adolescents”. Again, from Elizabeth:

“Our teachers need to be optimistic knowing that they can make a difference in the lives of these kids. They have to be flexible because the kids are all over the place some days and focused the next and they have to be able to cope with both of those extremes and everything in between. They also have to be able to cope with all extremes all the time in all their classes which makes it a big deal” (Elizabeth Transcript: 1).

What emerges from the data is the recognition that the middle years of schooling are different because of the “unique developmental phase of early adolescence”. Hence, the need for a specialist middle school teacher:

“Yes, you can be a specialist early childhood educator. You can be a specialist senior Maths teacher and I believe you can be a specialist middle school teacher because you dedicate yourself to wanting to work with this age group. You have to be a bit of a risk taker you know, you have to be able to say “Well, okay the interest level here is going in this direction; I’m going to go with it,” so you don’t have the constraints for example of a senior curriculum where, “That would be lovely boys and girls but we have to get through this because this is what you’re assessment piece says we have to do”…[we] actually have the flexibility in our school and it’s paramount that teachers in the [middle school] are brave enough to use it” (Rosemary Transcript: 2).

Many of the participants acknowledged the middle years as “tough years” for the middle school learner. The importance placed on student well-being through a strong ethos of care focus where “safety”, “empathy”, “compassion”, “love”, “forgiveness” and “flexibility” were seen as critical characteristics embedded in this attribute of the middle school teacher a specialist in adolescence. Together with an understanding of adolescence this attribute provided “a nice little anchor” in which to support the middle school learner as they assume more independence and freedom as emerging young adults. The data recognised the uniqueness of the middle years and advanced the attribute of the middle school teacher as a specialist in adolescence. Furthermore, data from the participants relating to this attribute are presented in the sub-propositions that follow. The key sub-propositions are identified in Figure 8.1.
8.2.1 Sub-proposition 3.1: Middle years teachers as facilitator of transitions, friendships and relationships

The middle years can be “a little bit rocky” as the middle years learner assumes more “independence” and at the same time a distancing from adult authority. This brings into sharp focus the importance these young people place on strong relationships with their peers and teachers. Achieving that balance between the two extremes is the key to success as a teacher in the middle years: “the teacher that can be your friend, at the same time, being an authority figure is something that can change who you are as a student, it just gives you that extra freedom and ability” (Frodo Transcript: 8). However, negotiating these two extremes can be quite difficult as the student data revealed: “all [teachers] are different and they’ve all got different personalities and you’ve got to like, know who they are to get along with them and stuff” (Aladdin Transcript: 5). One Year 9 student developed real anxiety when it came to the end of semester with the prospect of class changes and the impact this would have on her teacher and peer relationships:
“The one thing I dread every year, every semester is changing classes. Finding out your teachers, because then you know that you don’t have anyone that you know in that class and it's uncomfortable when you have to go in groups and you don’t know anyone; and when you don’t know the teacher as well. Especially in high school because you don’t know all the teachers. And I still don’t know all the people, like I know them but I don’t really know them. The same with teachers like I will know their names and I know what they look like but I don’t know like the other way round, I’m not sure still” (Sleepy Transcript: 3).

From the student data, graduating from Year 7 to Year 8 heightened fears of not making new friends and how their new teachers would respond to them:

“Graduation from primary school is pretty fun. I felt like really big like “oh my god I’m in high school.” You go from Year 7 being at the top to Year 8 being the smallest. I was always the tallest in primary school and now I’m the shortest. You have to go through the entire primary school process again. It's like starting again, you're through primary and you're like “yes” and then you get to [middle] school and it's like “oh I've got to start again, oh great here we go.” That's the worst part. (Dopey Transcript: 1)

This worry of going into Year 8 was met with apprehension and trepidation by many students. It was for some an absolutely daunting prospect:

“Like I just wish some of the teachers would disappear. And make Year 7 go longer, I loved Year 7, I loved my teacher and she used to like care, my Year 7 teacher actually cared about how we were, how we were feeling. They seem to care more that’s all. Because we’re in such a big school the teachers don’t really have the time or they don’t really care. I hate the fact that the teachers, just say, you have a teacher that has senior students as well, they always put the seniors first, like I know it’s sort of more important but they are always like “no I’ve got to do the seniors now.” It's annoying and you feel kind of rejected” (Sneezy: Transcript: 2).

From the data, the move from primary school to secondary school proved to be, for a number of students, a milestone event fraught with much misgiving because of the potential loss of friendships and the fear of not fitting in:
“When you get to high school you’ve changed and they [friends] become completely different people. Most of the time it’s for the worse. Like you can be best friends with someone in primary school and then you come here and you're in different classes and stuff and you just don’t see them anymore. Yeah and you think you know them in primary school and then you come to high school and they totally change and you wonder how it kind of happened so quick” (Sneezy Transcript: 1).

One student went as far as to say that “if you don’t have any friends” you will tend to have “a bad attitude in class”, and it is those friendships with peers that “keep you coming to school”. From the teacher data, a similar point was made concerning this need for relationships that are “healthy and happy” and contribute to a students’ motivation to “continue with their education”.

In contrast, some of the student participants liked their Year 8 experience because it was “brand new” and “exciting”. They trusted the experience of the teacher to “guide” them through this transition from primary school to high school:

“I liked Grade 8 probably the most just because it wasn’t as much pressure and it was brand new. I think that the teachers really helped you get used to it but I was pretty lucky because all my teachers were really supportive and stuff like that. Yeah and they’ve all been there before, I mean a lot of the teachers had Year 8s before and they know that they are all scared…not everyone can make friends like that, some people really struggle” (Sam Transcript: 11).

Moreover, students found that middle school provided a “comfortable zone” which gave them that sense of “security” and “safety” to confidently traverse the transition from primary school to secondary school:

“[middle school] it’s kind of like a comfortable zone. Especially in Year 8 because you got to know everyone in your classroom… [it] would stay the same for the next year. You got to know everyone…that’s a good thing to get to know other people and it’s still good to have those people around you that you know very well” (Sleepy Transcript: 1).

This notion of middle school being a “comfortable zone” for students, reflected their appreciation and respect they had for their teachers. The students noted that the nurturing of a “comfortable zone” by the teachers provided “stability” in their relationship with both peers and teachers. Something they were looking for:
“I think everything just relates back to that we don’t want to split up our teacher and our class because we all have such close bonds that we don’t want to leave that. Yeah, they all like their stability [integrated studies class] and I really think they should keep it.” (Sleepy Transcript: 12)

From the teacher data, the middle school was a “nicer place to be” and for some students was the “highlight of their day” because it provided:

“stability and consistency and the care that they may not be getting in other parts of their lives so it’s critical that we maintain those relationships with kids and with families and the wider community” (Rosemary Transcript: 5).

The data strongly revealed that the middle school reform offered new ways to respond to transition issues surrounding the young middle school learner. From the teacher data, there was recognition that students did not navigate this cultural change from primary to secondary well and they believed that “we can do this better”. According to some teachers, the middle school reform facilitated the emergence of a significant adult to “mentor” or to be the “guardian” of the young middle school learner:

“It seemed that they did go to the bottom of the pile, became a bit disconnected so the vision was to provide for students in the middle school a structure where they had a lot more contact with one significant adult that they could feel connected and that they actually saw the learning that was going on as something relevant and useful to them for their future education and their lives” (Rosemary Transcript: 1).

While the data revealed the importance of peer friendships, it also found that “strong relationships” between the teacher and student strengthened student social and emotional well-being. As one Year 11 student said to a new Year 8 student: “the best advice I think, is make friends with your teachers because you need them, you need them on your side especially on-side” (Sam Transcript: 8).

The principal and teacher data, noted the “critical” importance of the teacher-student relationship. For the middle school learner this represented a “different relationship” from what existed in prior settings. As one participant observed:
“It’s relationships with their peers, those of their own age, but also it’s a relationship with the adult who’s in the classroom with them, be that primarily the teacher, it could be the teacher aide or another person. In terms of, it’s not sort of a friend relationship in terms of the adult-student one, but it’s got to be worked on to try to get it to be a positive relationship because until … I think the young [people] at that age need that relationship to exist before they’re going to be open to learning” (Ronald Transcript: 2).

There was agreement amongst the teachers that the nurturing of relationships between teacher and student was a fundamental attribute of the middle school teacher. Frequently, from the data, teachers would comment that the middle school teacher has to be “interested in developing good relationships” with the young middle school learner. So much so, that it can change attitudes from “not so much of them and us anymore” and can turn round “negative experiences” of high school. According to the teacher data, this emphasis on relationships and ethos of care enabled the middle school teacher to work closely with students and “puts them in a good place to learn”. Developing strong relationships between teacher and student helped:

“reduce the putdowns, the bullying and all that sort of thing, getting the kids to work together as a team or as a group, getting the kids to work together to extend themselves, getting the kids to take on charity roles and be more community-focused” (Neil Transcript: 8).

Other teachers noted that this focus on the teacher-student relationship was “different to the traditional teacher-student relationship” as it encouraged students to “seek assistance and talk about things”. Importantly, the middle school teacher became the “advocate” for the young middle school learner: “I think the kids who are coming through have greater strength in believing who they are and are more prepared to look at developing a closer relationship with their teacher” (Ronald Transcript: 4).

The data demonstrated that schools which “maximised time” by organising the middle school differently, ensured “quality time” was made available in the timetable to “support” the student. This approach also allowed time for the teacher to be with their students to develop this relationship “so they can actually make sure that these things occur more effectively” (Rosemary Transcript: 2).
The data demonstrated that students in the middle years need strong relationships with supportive adults. Teachers’ relationships with students during these years were seen as “critical” and “make all the difference” to wanting to continue to learn or not to learn. Some teachers argued, that nurturing close relationships with their students led to a “happy school and a happy staff”. Therefore, building those relationships between teacher and student is “the secret” which allows for a greater understanding of the needs of the middle school learner.

The need for teachers to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of the middle school learner is the subject of the next sub-proposition.

8.2.2 Sub-proposition 3.2: Middle years teachers require a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of the middle years learner

From the principal and teacher data, there was recognition that the particular needs of middle years’ learners are different from those teachers of younger children, and different again from teachers of senior years’ students. In addition, the data reports that, like all developmental stages, middle school learners are diverse in their learning styles, their learning engagement and their general level of performance. One teacher reflecting on his own reasons for becoming a middle school teacher drew attention to the diversity of needs that this age group poses for the middle school teacher:

“I became a middle school teacher because of the particular phase in children’s development where they’re moving out of the child phase through adolescence. They’re not quite adults and yet they’re not children either, and they’re just far more, I guess, diverse in their thinking. They’re starting to test out their own ideas. It’s a time where they’re putting into practice a lot more of the nuts and bolts, or pragmatic things they’ve learnt in terms of their literacy and numeracy. They’re actually starting to see the world around them as something that goes beyond themselves. They’re fairly egocentric but they are at the point where they’re actually starting to…they’re starting to find their way in the world and see that there is a relationship between themselves and the world, both the physical side of it and the social side of it” (Robin Transcript: 1).

The student data also recognised this diversity amongst their peers and expected teachers to be more responsive to their needs “since not everyone learns the same way, some people are more practical and others like more theory work” (Sam Transcript: 11). Students were
particularly critical of teachers who “just sort of set the work and expect you to do it”, with little attention to difference.

Principally, the middle school teacher is one who has an understanding of the diverse needs of the middle years’ learner. These needs include “emotional as well as intellectual” aspects of learning. Some participants prioritised the emotional needs of students because “if we don’t capture the young people that we’re working with then it’s a waste of time trying to teach the subject” (Paris Transcript: 1). Therefore, a middle school teacher has to be able to:

“cater for the diversity of needs in the classroom and so we’ll find out what experience they’ve had in restructuring, you know three or four levels in a classroom and sometimes more than that. The middle school teacher has to be flexible, adaptable, hard working, not locked in to one way of teaching, be prepared to take on change, change that they know is better for the young adolescent and realising that our young adolescents are changing year to year, that the generation we have now is different maybe to the generation we have next year. So I guess that flexibility and adaptability is essential” (Paris Transcript: 1).

In “catering for diversity” the middle school teacher is required to become more personalised in their approach to teaching by being more responsive to the individual aspirations of learners. From the teacher perspective, the focus in the more “traditional secondary school” is on the “teacher”. In the middle school the focus is on the “student” allowing for “individual needs to be catered for a lot more”. One school saw their middle school as providing a “buffer” for students as opposed to students being “thrown in at the deep end and getting lost” which characterised the “traditional secondary school”. Therefore, in the middle school:

“The teachers look at the needs of students and every year our curriculum changes, not so much curriculum it does modify but the delivery changes according to the needs of the students and I know that’s always the difficult thing to do in the classroom but I think that’s one of the measures that individual needs have been met” (Bob Transcript: 1).

The principal and teacher data recognised that there needs to be “clear boundaries” set by the teacher. Students need to know “what they can and can’t do”. However, while students may act against the boundaries because that’s what you do as a young adolescent “they do like to
know where the boundaries lie” (Elizabeth Transcript: 3). According to Bob, students “relish the safety net, the parameters that we set up for them” (Bob Transcript: 1).

Furthermore, teachers interviewed in the study articulate the importance for “to actually be able to explore their identity” in as “many different ways as possible”. Hence, the importance of boundaries that are “flexible” enough for them to engender in themselves, “a sense of genuine belonging and identity to their classroom that goes beyond their subject area” (Shane Transcript: 6). For the teacher to be responsive to the desire the middle years learner to explore identity formation, she has to go “far deeper” than traditionally expected, allowing the student to focus on themselves by “appreciating others, appreciating themselves and understanding themselves”. According to Shane, creating such an environment allows the student to discover “how they learn [and] why they bother to learn”. Consequently, students begin to discover “their strengths of their learning [and] how they can improve and address their weaknesses” (Shane Transcript: 7). Shane and others argued that students need to be “continually challenged” not just by the “nature of the content” but by the “nature of the learning process” itself. There were many references in the data to raising the “rigour” and “expectations” of the middle school curriculum. One teacher commented “we don’t want kids marking time” and another mentioned “what we might have gone too far on is lowering the bar, lowering the expectations where we’ve tried to be a bit too warm and fuzzy to the detriment of rigour in the curriculum” (Kathryn Transcript: 6). Hence, it is a “delicate balancing act” that the middle school teacher plays in meeting the emotional and intellectual needs of the young middle years learner, while at the same time ensuring the learning expectations are always kept high, and outcomes achieved.

Aligned with this mandate for “boundaries” is the expectation of the middle school teacher to be “flexible” in allowing students to grow in their own time: “they’ve got three years to move from being a child to being a young adult” (Bob Transcript: 1). Therefore, a flexibility that allows the teacher to “[find] ways to reach them [students] and to reason with them sometimes and to understand them” (Cher Transcript: 4) is required. The student data revealed that when teachers were “understanding” of student needs there was much more engagement and respect:
“Yeah. If you need to talk to them [teachers] they are really approachable… if you have a problem you can go up and talk to them. You can talk to them about anything, it doesn't have to be about school it can be about anything and they’ll listen to you. Problems that you have at home or something that you know you can go up to them with” (Happy Transcript: 7).

“Flexible, flexible, flexible”, according to the data, is a central attribute of the middle school teacher as they “try something else” which “works with your kids” to understand the diverse needs of the middle years learner. Though, there was a word of caution, “don't be patronising” the “kids will see straight through it”.

In addition, a number of teachers noted that other more “flexible ways of dealing with students” need to be found to “keep students in school”. In some schools, behaviour management was a heightened issue, so much so, that it was contributing to “teacher burn out”. Consequently, “teachers were not [putting] their hand up” to be involved in the middle school. From the student perspective, managing their “homework” and other things like “guitar lessons after school” was making the school day “just so long”. This telling comment from a student amplifies the point:

“you go home, you feel like they give you like homework in every session so it's just an overload of work and when you get home you don't want to do school work you just want to get away from it…” (Sam Transcript: 10).

Moreover, the issue of homework highlighted how teachers need to respond differently and acknowledge the diverse needs of young people. Groups of Year 8 and Year 9 students articulated that if you don’t do the homework you get “punished with a detention at lunch time”. The issue surrounding homework and teachers’ uncompromising response when it was not done caused some students “to not even bother to try and do it”. Another student commented: “…you shouldn’t get punished. Like when all the teachers give you homework you might like forget about something and then the teachers have a fit” (Sam Transcript: 10). Students were looking for greater understanding and empathy from the teacher as this comment suggests: “They have to be patient with students’ learning, especially if they get angry if you can’t get something… I just lose the will to try and do it” (Sleepy Transcript: 10).

Other schools approached this issue of student workload differently and gave students some ownership:
“Yeah, so if you work hard in class then you don’t have as much homework because the homework all depends on your class work because we’ll have a chapter to do in maths and he will give us like 45 minutes and you could get the whole thing done or you get half of it done and half at home. Yeah, it just depends on how hard you work at school because they don’t normally set things just for homework most of it’s set for class but then you finish it at home if you haven’t had time” (Bashful Transcript: 2).

The issue of homework and the lack of “choice and freedom” and the inability to “negotiate” the learning, contributed to student behaviour management problems. According to the teacher and student data, a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of the middle years’ learner could avoid many of the student behaviour issues encountered by the teacher. Instead of “writing the suspension dates”, perhaps asking a more probing question is required:

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

Kathryn demonstrates her commitment and advocacy to the middle years learner as she probes more deeply in an attempt to understand the young adolescent student:

“Well, the teachers said this kid loves snakes. I said, “So why don’t we fashion a programme around snakes? Can he work independently in the library? Can he be given [the] opportunity to negotiate what he would like to do in order for us to support him through this time?” I said “You know, this kid’s been moved from one class to another and has gone perfectly up to two weeks ago. There has to be a reason why two weeks ago he came undone.” The guy in his office has said, “I don’t know.” I said, “Well, ring up and ask the question, you’ve got a relationship going with the mother.” Anyway it came to light that the phone call wasn’t made, because she wasn’t home but the Maths teacher passed on a bit of information… this kid’s father was leaving the area that information came two weeks ago. You know there’s always got to be a reason for something happening and that’s where I guess in a middle school teacher a good understanding and relationship with the teacher, family and relationship with the kid and knowing what’s happening before stampeding in on something, you know some stupid thing which then ends up having a kid belted and then walking from Mt. Coolum through the middle of the night and not going home and ending up in gaol” (Kathryn Transcript: 6)

The data suggests that the middle years’ learner switches off or becomes disengaged from learning if their needs are not being met. From the student data, understanding the teenage years was identified as an important quality that was overlooked. Students commented that
they were of a different generation to that of their teachers and were asking for a different response from them to better meet their needs:

“They have to learn how to work out how teenagers think because as you get older you kind of forget how things work. I hate it when the teachers go “I was a teenager once too,” but like from when they were and now it’s a lot different. The generations have changed. It really, really annoys [me] when they go “in my day we didn’t do that,” and I’m like “well it’s not your day.” “It’s quite a few years later, we do things different now can we not talk about it.” Technology, hello” (Sneezy Transcript: 8).

The teacher data affirmed that it was “good to get a better awareness of the generation that we’re teaching” (Jane Transcript: 3). Some teacher participants identified the curriculum and its irrelevance to this generation as one of the reasons for student disengagement. They stated:

“embracing the information age, [knowing] about what makes kids tick and what’s going on in their heads and if we don’t look at what they want and allow the curriculum to deliver what they want then we’re going to continue to have behaviour problems” (Kathryn Transcript: 6).

Other teacher participants highlighted the characteristics of this generation of learners and the inability of some teachers to incorporate these elements into their teacher and learning:

“I think we’re very removed really still even in what we’re trying to do in middle school in reaching those kids at where they’re at. They are the ‘Y’ generation so where are the facilities for us to be able to use? Why aren’t mobile phones allowed in the classroom? There’s that big gap still and as much as we’re trying to teach towards middle school and we talk about independent learning and getting them more just in time learning and developing their skills at being able to use information appropriately and all of that stuff, we’re not coming to the party for them and well, it’s like everything, teaching’s always behind what’s going on outside. So they’re a visual group of [learners] and we keep wanting them to sit down and write essays and do this and prepare for University but it’s not about that to them” (Paris Transcript: 2).

In addition, there was a concern that compounded this problem of inter-generational understanding. This concern relates to a culture of “blacklisting” topics that might be more relevant and engaging to the student:
“I remember a student chose tattooing; now these were two boys who were allowed to work together. They produced a fine piece of work and they stood up in front of an audience and presented it but the next year it was howled down as there were too many of those types of topics that were chosen, therefore we go back to giving them a choice still but it had to be a topic that fell into this topic or this one under ancient history or this one under modern history, and of course the enthusiasm level died” (Kathryn Transcript: 6).

Instead of stimulating and challenging students in their learning, some teachers found that by the school “blacklisting” a range of topics, internet sites and technology was sending the wrong message to students. Paris asserted:

“by blacklisting all these things, what are kids going to do with that blacklist? They’re just going to think it is all bad and if we brought them in and taught them the appropriate way to use these things we’d be on the right track, but you know it’s very difficult in my position to bridge that gap because you’ve got to consider, a school’s not allowed to do middle school because they’re not getting the OPs, so if you come in and be radical like that what’s going to be blamed first, the radical” (Paris Transcript: 2).

There was a general feeling by some teachers that to engage students by offering more “choice” and “negotiation” was to be labelled a “radical” which left oneself open to “criticism” from people outside the middle school. This criticism was based on “misconceptions, misunderstandings and even misgivings” because the teaching and learning strayed too far from the content driven and instructor based approached that typifies the typical traditional curriculum. However, there was a strong belief by a number of participants that the more you “differentiated” the curriculum and the more input you gave students into what they were learning, the more engaged they became. This approach challenges the complacency of secondary school teachers to implement a static curriculum.

A comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of the middle years’ learner creates many challenges for the middle school teacher. According to one teacher, through understanding the needs of the middle years learner you are bringing “fresh hope” to schooling as you recognise students not as “learning problem” or a “behaviour problem” but as an “independent” and “autonomous” learner. This can be realised through the teacher being flexible and having the capacity to differentiate learning to assist and help middle school learners to achieve desirable outcomes. If understanding the needs of the middle years’ learner is an important attribute of the middle school teacher to enhance student success, it is
equally important that the teacher serves as an advocate for the middle years’ learner. This will require “passionate teachers” who are always working to find new ways to put students first. Having this *passion to serve as an advocate for the middle years’ learner* and the middle years is the next sub-proposition.

### 8.2.3 Sub-proposition 3.3:
Middle Years of Schooling teachers must demonstrate a passion to serve as an advocate for the middle years learner and for the middle years

Students in the middle school call for a teacher who cares for them, works at building trusting relationships to guide and counsel them, and be responsive to their developmental needs. Many of the principals and teachers interviewed met this challenge and demonstrated a passion for the middle years’ learner. From the student data this passion was evidenced in the way the teacher approached the class “she always seemed happy and interested in us” (Bashful Transcript: 4).

Much of the principal and teacher data recognised the importance of “wanting to make a difference” and being “ready to learn with the kids” even though at times it was against the odds because “it can be very frustrating at times working with young adolescents, particularly around the end of Year 8, Year 9” (Elizabeth Transcript: 1). It was argued that a passionate teacher is someone not “just filling in time or just doing their job”. The middle years are “tough years” and require teachers “who are passionate about doing their job” was the belief of many teachers.

It is evident that having a passion for the middle years’ learner highlighted the willingness of the middle school teacher to be advocates for middle years’ learners. Young people want teachers who take an interest in them:

“I think the worst thing a middle school teacher can do is to start treating the student like a student and not like a person. I think that everybody who comes to school is first and foremost a person and then a student. I think when the teacher loses sight of what the student is feeling and focuses on getting a result that’s when things go wrong. It’s almost like a football coach, if you’re pushing a player that you know is having a hard time in his personal life or isn’t feeling like he can do the best that he could, you don’t treat him like a football player, you treat him like a person and give him the room and the space to achieve the best” (Frodo Transcript: 8).
To serve as an advocate for the middle years’ learner and for the middle years assumes a commitment from the teacher to make a difference to the lives of the middle years’ learner:

“I found [with] the middle school that [at that] age you can get the most from them and I don’t just mean in the cognitive sense but as a person, as a student, a spirit. I believe that they’re at those years where you can do the most with them and make the most difference. I think Year 7 to 9 you’ve got the best opportunity to shape and mould and do what you can with them” (John Transcript: 4).

Given the “rocky road” this age group experiences, one teacher hoped that the passion and commitment she had for the middle years’ learner would influence student behaviour:

“I think that that age group is where a lot of kids really switch off and don’t want to be anywhere, not necessarily don’t want to be at school, but they just don’t want to be anywhere that anyone else tells them to be. So for me to be able to deliver a curriculum that allows kids to have passion about something, it might not be what I’m passionate about but something they’re passionate about and to hopefully maintain because the good work that I see being done the kids are so excited about whatever they are doing, to maintain that passion enough to be able to know what they want to do in senior, which will hopefully allow them to make better decisions and enjoy what they’re doing a little bit more” (Dorothy Transcript: 6).

In addition, being passionate for the middle years learner implies that the teacher will be “excited by learning” and help young people “learn from their mistakes”. To realise that “you do genuinely care about them” will help students in any way that “makes that journey a little bit easier”. This advocacy for the student can give a sense of reassurance:

“For a student to know that their teacher really cares about them and wants the best for them, you know, not only from an educational perspective but from a pastoral perspective as well I think this also puts them in a good place to learn” (Mae Transcript: 4).

Furthermore, teachers state that the more the student feels they are cared for and valued by their teacher “the more successful” they will be in their learning. According to the data, this allows teachers, students and parents to “celebrate” the achievements of the child. Advocacy for the middle years’ learner is an important quality in the way some schools report student achievement:
“you get the parents in, you get the student in and it’s just a time to sit and as much as anything else it’s time for celebration. “This is what your daughter’s doing. Have a look at this fantastic work, you share it and you are proud of this. Mary [student] what do you think?” “Oh I think could have done better at this,” and the confidence that students get from that and of course too having to take responsibility for where you’re at as a student. If there’s something that needs to be discussed then “Hey, let’s just discuss openly in front of your parents so you don’t get this, oh she said, they said, that story goes home” so we always include the student and the parents in our three way conferencing” (Rosemary Transcript: 5).

The data further illustrated that the effective middle school teacher is someone who is “prepared to learn with the students and who’s prepared to meet students on their terms”. In this way student are well positioned to experience success:

“They need to experience success which a lot of them haven’t for many years either at home or at school, in the sporting fields they feel worthless, and they’re turning [to] their friends for support, where they once turned to an adult. Adults have the skills to give them that support” (Kate Transcript: 4).

This passion for the middle years was recognised by parents. It was their desire that teachers “develop good open relationships with parents”. Being the advocate for the middle years learner requires bridging the gap between school and home: “it is just so important”. One teacher went as far as to say that being the advocate for the child with the parents is an “important ingredient for the child’s overall success”:

“I have to work really hard at this; parents feeling comfortable to come and see you, parents feeling comfortable to ring you. Even if it’s a negative or a positive thing… I will continue to work towards having an environment that’s open and friendly and fair” (Mae Transcript: 5).

The data confirmed that teachers who are committed to making schools “nicer places” and “good places to learn” ensured that students navigated this transition to adolescence smoothly. Having a passion to serve as an advocate for the middle years learner redefines the middle school teacher as the “companion” not just the instructor of the learning experience. This implies that the middle school teacher is one who walks beside her students, sharing their fears and joys as they “search for identity in those early adolescent years”. By being a
“companion” to the student, a willingness and commitment by the middle school teacher to be a strong advocate for the middle years’ learner is evident:

“Understanding first and foremost, they need to be consistent, they need to feel safe, they need to feel valued, they need to have success, they need their individual talents to be appreciated, they want someone to care unconditionally but understanding, understanding, understanding” (Rosemary Transcript: 1).

Importantly, the data revealed overwhelmingly that students wanted to be “cared for unconditionally” but they also wanted to be treated “more like adults”. This represents an important challenge for the middle school teacher and to do this requires them to:

“accept them[students] as people even if you don’t approve or accept their behaviour. I think that is where we stand alone to some extent most other years simply follow the rules. We are aiming for a touch of flexibility there to recognize the development of these young men and women” (Shane Transcript: 8).

Other teachers were more candid. They stated that to be an advocate for the middle years learner you “must love kids” and be “genuine” and “unconditional” in that care and concern for these “vulnerable” young people. According to one teacher, this strong pastoral approach requires the teacher to be forgiving: “I think they have a need for forgiveness and [an] awareness that they can come back from issues” (Shane Transcript: 7). As a consequence, this offers students “fresh hope” and new possibilities along with a “new start”.

8.3 Conclusion

The third core proposition has been the focus of this chapter: It is the perspective of key stakeholders that teachers in the middle years of schooling be specialists in the study of adolescence. The data confirmed that being a “specialist in adolescence” is reconceptualising the ways in which middle school teachers are required to work with young people. So much so, that to be an effective middle school teacher requires teachers to be “companions” on the adolescence “journey”. To do so requires the teachers to: nurture strong teacher-student relationships; understands more deeply the diverse needs of adolescent learners; and serve as an advocate for the middle years’ learner and for the middle years itself. The core proposition progressed the sub-propositions of the middle school teacher as one who commits to be a facilitator of transitions, friendships and relationships, is committed to understanding
the diverse needs of the middle years’ learner and one who has a passion to serve as an advocate for the middle years’ learner and for the middle years.

In order to support this new type of teacher, in a context of continual change, support systems for the teacher will need to be created. The following chapter develops this theme, by analysing the next key proposition that has been generated through the analysis of data namely: It is the perspective of key stakeholders that teachers in the middle years must demonstrate a capacity to sustain middle school reform.
Chapter 9

The Middle School Teacher
Core proposition four:
It is the perspective of key stakeholders that the middle years teachers must demonstrate a capacity to sustain the middle years reform

9.1 Introduction

Early adolescence is recognised as complex middle school practices are being reconstituted and technology is making new pedagogies possible. In this context the middle school teacher is required to develop the capacities to sustain the reconceptualised curriculum proposed by the middle school reform. This calls on the middle school teacher to become an advocate of change to ensure that appropriate resourcing and support systems are in place. Both the principal and teacher participants of the study identified the capacities to sustain change as “essential” if teachers were to “adapt” and “embrace” new ways of working with young middle school learners. The study has noted that the advent of middle schooling, with its focus on early adolescence and the new ways of working with middle years’ students, is only a recent development in Queensland. Therefore, the middle school teacher cannot do this alone and specific support systems are required.

The data from the study noted there should be a “collaborative” effort on the part of school leadership, teachers, parents, system authorities and universities in supporting teachers to make the middle school reform more effective. A process that will engage all stakeholders in shared decision making, setting goals and implementing a change plan is required. The fourth core proposition focuses on a capacity to sustain the middle years reform, is the subject of this chapter. The final core proposition, it brings attention to the support systems required to secure changes that are identified within the interview data. If change is to be sustained over time and if outcomes from the reform are to be substantial, identifying the support systems which assist the middle years teacher will become “critical in the context of middle years reform.”
Therefore, this chapter is framed to:

- present and analyse the core proposition: key stakeholders report a perspective that middle school teachers must demonstrate a capacity to sustain middle years reform (9.2);
- present and analyse the three sub-propositions:
  - middle years teachers should be advocates for teacher education, professional development and induction of beginning middle years teachers (9.2.1);
  - middle years teachers should become effective managers of learning (9.2.2);
  - middle years teachers should be facilitators of parent involvement and education, if middle years reform is to be sustained (9.2.3); and
- provide a conclusion to the chapter (9.3).

9.2 Core proposition 4: It is the perspective of key stakeholders that the middle years teachers must demonstrate a capacity to sustain the middle years reform

The study confirmed that embarking on a middle years curriculum is an opportunity to improve the learning outcomes for young adolescent students. Many of the participants felt there is a need for a different approach to curriculum design. In addition, there was increasing recognition that the middle years is a ‘high stakes’ area for learning, often accompanied by teaching that is not always appropriate for middle years students. There was a general feeling from the data that teaching and learning in the middle years is too content-driven and instructor-based. Therefore, something different in the learning and teaching of this age group is required:

“…arriving in this school, I haven’t had too many people not say to me, “It’s time for us to move on.” It’s time for us to move on and they [teachers] simply want some definite direction as to what it might look like. So for me, having come from a situation where I’ve been heavily involved in middle school reform, it’s given me a degree of credibility here in this school” (Harrison Transcript: 4).

Embarking on a middle school curriculum was not always met with support and often proceeded despite the negativity and lack of resources. One school likened their initial undertaking of middle schooling as “putting our toe in the water”. While most schools
proceeded with caution, schools in the study experienced substantial difficulty in launching their middle school:

“because there was not total acceptance by all staff that this was a feasible way to go, some of the people who initially said yes they’d like to be in it, when they found out how much work it entailed got cold feet, some of them became a bit negative towards it. Some of the middle managers who had various understandings and misunderstandings of it were a bit negative towards it, so we had a hard time of it in the early stages” (Elizabeth: 2).

In another school there was a perception that middle schooling was not “real education”:

“When we first started off, people saw us as just having fun and it wasn’t real education. We copped a lot of criticism from our own senior school; teachers who’d worked in say Year 8 and 9 classes saw something different happening” (Bob Transcript: 7).

However, most schools in the study stood by their conviction that something different needed to be done to meet better the needs of these young people. In these schools teachers proceeded with implementing the middle schooling philosophy:

“…we decided, we’d keep going, so we kept going and over time people realised that in spite of any negativity that was happening we weren’t going to stop it, so get onboard or shut up basically. After about 3 years the people in Maths/Science came to me and said, “We think we can do something to,” I was delighted because I wasn’t going to push it but when they came and said, “We think we can do something to,” I said, “Go for it and I’ll give you the same sort of help and support that the others [integrated studies team] get currently.” Over time I think people have decided that, although some still have a few reservations about it but basically this is what we’re doing and there are still some people who look down their noses at it, but hey who cares” (Elizabeth Transcript: 2).

Strong leadership was required in schools where misunderstanding and negativity toward the implementation of the middle schooling philosophy was identified. The principal was required to articulate a particular vision of middle schooling, and put in place processes that allowed for a forum for staff to present their ideas and concerns. Some schools set up a “task force” a “Middle Schooling Committee” and in another, a “Consultative Committee” to harness support and to give direction:
“The Consultative Committee, it makes recommendations. One of the writing instructions was that they had to within their structure take account of the development of middle school, so that we would stop or try to stop this, middle schooling being put down by people who are really focused on Year 12’s telling the Year 8’s and 9’s what they should be doing. So as a result of that [the committee] came up with a structure which recognised curriculum leadership in middle school so that we now have Curriculum Leaders, not Heads of Department, we changed the terminology deliberately because we said that gives direction as to what we wanted, we changed the role description to fit the title, Curriculum Leader and we then divided them up so that we now have some dedicated middle school positions” (Elizabeth Transcript: 6).

The data revealed that issues surrounding the implementation of the middle schooling philosophy were influenced strongly by the middle management structure and the ability of the Heads of Department to communicate. There was a fear from Heads of Department that their particular subject area could diminish in academic rigour as a result of the implementation of the middle schooling philosophy:

“I think it is to a certain extent and that’s why there’s a range of people who are quite happy to move on. The issue there is going to be Heads of Department who are going to feel that they’re faculties are being gutted or whatever and not seeing you know the need for a bigger picture. That’s why, before we can construct something new, in a sense we have to go through and review and research so that we can deconstruct what is here and it needs doing” (Harrison Transcript: 7).

Some schools perceived the move to middle schooling as “a huge change” that was putting staff under increased pressure. Therefore, there was a perceived need to “pull back”:

“Just the pressure that everyone’s under, you know. Getting pulled in multiple directions I guess. The philosophy and culture stuff tries to stop that, but there are so many things that we ask of our teachers, so it’s really, you know you think sometimes we’re spreading them so thin” (Humphrey Transcript: 8).

From the data, the teacher participants were looking for more flexibility in staffing that took into account the new ways of working with middle years’ learners. However, other participants were hesitant and expressed a desire to “keep a foot” in both senior and middle school. From the principal and teacher data, the perception of the status and value of the middle school teacher surfaced as an issue. The issue went to the heart of the support mechanisms required to sustain different types of middle school teachers. One principal asserted:
“I’d really love to get over this notion to educate, not just the staff but the general public about the value placed on particular types of teaching. In the primary level the Year 7 teacher tends to get more status or more kudos than the Year 1 teacher and the Year 12 teacher gets more kudos than the Year 8 teacher” (Clint Transcript: 7).

The data demonstrated that the development of a specialist teacher of the middle years created “tensions”, in particular, within secondary school staff. Some participants argued that this concept had to be confronted: “I violently disagree with the perception that senior teachers are more important than the middle school teacher and better at it. All that is silly nonsense” (Elizabeth Transcript: 9). While participants were divided on the issue of whether or not there should be specialist middle school teachers, there was recognition that a number of teachers are particularly skilled in working with young adolescents and these skills need to be acknowledged and valued. Some schools in the study made that decision, recognising that middle schooling required a different way of teaching, and, deployed staff accordingly. One school described their decision to advertise and deploy teachers specifically for middle school as “diving into the deep end”. Another school believed that “to have a foot in each camp, [middle and senior] is very difficult” (Rosemary Transcript: 2). However, while it was acknowledged that, “not every school can do it [deploy specialist teachers]” because it needs “resources” and “the support of administration”.

The data revealed that the issue of how to resource and support the unique needs of middle school teachers was an important factor in sustaining the reform over time. Many principals in the study described this as a crucial issue: “Resourcing, essentially resourcing issues associated with timetabling approaches in schools and a school’s capacity to provide for release time and for professional development are the major issues as I see them” (Harrison Transcript: 6). However, supporting the implementation of middle schooling required a re-evaluation of existing teaching and learning facilities and learning spaces. Certain schools planned for “specialist facilities: Art, PE, Technology, if we’ve got to share [with senior] it’s makes life very difficult so we’ve been blessed with what we have here in the way of facilities and support” (Rosemary Transcript: 2).

The data demonstrated that schools who were implementing middle schooling philosophy require specific support systems for both the teacher and student. According to one principal, providing these support structures was difficult:
“...it’s a major nightmare because we run a different timetable for junior, middle and senior to be honest that’s really big for the very practical reason of tuckshop and so we have different break times that sort of eases the queuing and so on. Things like the theatre, the library, the electronic learning centres all of those facilities it would be much easier if there was a common timetable. We haven’t really solved that yet. In fact what we’ve tended to do is just create more school specific resources.” (Clint Transcript: 4).

Other participants commented that middle schooling is “expensive” especially around “staffing and resource allocation”. Consequently, finding ways to support these changes required planning and funding from sources that had not been explored before. For a number of schools implementation involved:

“once we’ve decided on the curriculum then we need to think about well, how are we going to teach? And once we’ve decided that then we need to look at, okay in an ideal world what would the organisation of our middle school look like? What structures would it have in place to make that happen? But then unfortunately things like timetabling senior school, access to physical resources, industrial awards, all of those sorts of things come into play so then becomes a range of compromises which shape what the middle school actually looks like” (Harrison Transcript: 4).

The principal data confirmed that sustaining reform of the middle years of schooling requires significant resources: financial, human and physical. In addition, the data revealed that support systems have already emerged as schools commenced restructuring, re-culturing and improving their middle school. Furthermore, it was recognised in the data that the middle school teacher is the “key”, and is the critical connection between curriculum change and student learning. Hence, the teachers’ capacity to sustain the middle years’ reform emerged as an important theme in the study. Additional data from the participants relating to this proposition are presented in the sub-propositions that follow. The key sub-propositions are identified in Figure 9.1.
9.2.1 Sub-proposition 4.1: The middle years teacher must be an advocate for teacher education, professional development and induction processes

It was acknowledged in the study that since the introduction of middle schooling in Queensland there had been limited specific teacher education in pre-service education programs designed to graduate teachers into the middle years sector. A lack of pre-service teacher education posed specific challenges for schools as they developed their middle school. One teacher saw it this way:

“University probably 14 years ago, started separating their teachings into subjects specific e.g. you could be an Accounting/Phys-Ed [teacher]. So now we’ve got these combinations that we’re trying to gel into our middle school which sometimes, isn’t the ideal” (Kate Transcript: 1).

The concept of middle schooling was introduced in Queensland at a time of significant change in curriculum development with its focus on an outcomes based framework Year 1-10 and the introduction of the New Basics curriculum (Education Queensland 2000). In addition, it came at a time when there were limited resources to advance the concept of middle schooling because of the competing curriculum reform priorities. The concept of middle schooling was proposed by different education authorities in the late 1990s with comprehensive documents.
put forward by Education Queensland and Brisbane Catholic Education. Teacher education did not respond to the State initiative.

The principal and teacher data confirmed that the middle school teacher is required to have a “knowledge base that is broader than most other areas of teaching” (Clint Transcript: 2) and “demonstrate a genuine understanding of the needs of young adolescents” (George Transcript: 2). It became clear that it was a shared perception of teachers that pre-service programs were not meeting these needs. As one beginning teacher claims:

“you know middle schooling is just a trend and it’s already on its way out. We were meant to get training when I was at University specifically on middle school but they didn’t do that” (Dixie Transcript: 3).

One principal noted that while it would be advantageous to have dedicated middle school teachers, there were not the resources or pre-service education to do so. Participants in the study referred to the middle school teacher as a “generalist teacher”, further fuelling the debate regarding the status of the middle school teacher. In two of the schools of the study, unless the middle school teacher had “two specialist areas” it was unlikely they would be employed in that school because they were required to teach in both middle and senior schools. According to some participants, to teach in both middle and senior schools: “gives balance and perspective to what they do rather than giving them an unreal focus you know in one particular area” (Harrison Transcript: 7). Harrison is quite critical of teacher pre-service programs suggesting that graduate teachers “who trained as middle school teachers, simply do not have the knowledge or the expertise to teach in the senior school” (Harrison Transcript: 7). Therefore, according to Harrison it is only the:

“big schools like us that might be able to afford a couple of you know, a couple of generalist teachers who teach only in Year 8 and Year 9 but the reality is that we want teachers like that but they also need to have an area of speciality. We’ve provided this feedback to Universities about the reality of the needs in high school” (Harrison Transcript: 8).

Many principals agreed that universities have an important role to play to ensure the middle school teacher is appropriately prepared for a reformed schooling environment which includes middle school. One participant asserted encouragingly that:
“Universities are grappling with what does a middle school teacher look like. But I think until universities look at the way in which they teach secondary teachers there is going to be a shortage of people who understand and can best teach in middle school” (George Transcript: 2, 9).

Moreover, the study confirmed a belief there is an increasing need to “focus now on the middle school learner at universities” (Ronald Transcript: 3). Teacher participants also stated that while they graduated with “double majors”, a need existed for “some theoretical study about the concept” (Kathryn Transcript: 4) of middle schooling to be central to teacher education. The study confirmed that only two teachers had graduated from university with qualifications in middle school teaching, one from Tasmania and the other from South Australia. According to participants, this qualification “led to getting the job here, a school that has a middle school” (Robin Transcript: 2).

This lack of pre-service education program graduating middle years’ teachers led some schools to develop their own professional development program. One school, with the assistance of the school system authority, enrolled the initial middle school group of staff in the Deakin University Middle Years of Schooling Module, which was facilitated locally:

“five people went off and did this extensive course which went over a number of weeks and they came back and talked to the rest of the staff and then we set-up a working party about investigating further and seeing what we could do” (Elizabeth Transcript: 1).

All schools in the study cited professional development as a significant requirement if the changes proposed by the middle years of schooling philosophy were to be sustained. In addition, all schools in the study set aside significant funds to support the middle school teacher to access professional development opportunities. So much so that in one school:

“we very rarely refuse a request for Professional Development. We have a Professional Development Committee that meets weekly and reviews the requests that have come in. I send all material related to Professional Development to the chair of that committee and occasionally I will say I think this particular teacher might benefit from this. We have an international house bursary of up to $10,000 for staff to go overseas for Professional Development which is used every year” (Clint Transcript: 5).
While not all the schools in the study were able to provide this level of funding, there was an assumption that the middle school teacher would “make sure they continue their professional development and study” (Bob Transcript: 8). From the teacher data, this became an issue of resources and school budgeting “all things can be achieved if it’s planned” (Dixie Transcript: 3). In addition, from the teacher data, there were concerns surrounding access to professional development and which teachers were selected to participate in particular professional development opportunities:

“the Head of Science, yeah they went and they said it was really valid and they wished a whole lot of other teachers could have gone to have seen how good it was. But they were the heads of ... not us” (Dixie Transcript: 3)

Some schools in the study limited the professional development opportunities of individual teachers because of the time it took teachers out of the classroom and the “release costs” of having a teacher out of the school for a day or more. Alternatively, some schools funded “smaller class size” or used middle management points to employ an extra teacher to give “additional teacher release time” or provided “off line planning time together” which was seen as “vital”.

Targeted professional development emerged from the data as the most effective support, facilitated by bringing someone into the school, thereby reaching more staff. One school focused on “understanding the middle school learner” and planned their pupil free days for that year around this theme. This strategy not only allayed concerns of teachers missing class time because of professional development opportunities, it also became a whole school focus.

Teacher teaming was another important professional development activities:

“The staff would treat team teaching as a professional development session so that sharing of strengths, I think is very very important in middle school because not everybody is a genius in every learning area and yet we are asking them to teach there. It also allows the students to see that, just like they have strengths and areas of weakness so do the teachers” (Rosemary Transcript: 3).

The data revealed that increasingly, teachers “gave very freely of their time”. New ways of harnessing that time in some schools were being explored. In two of the schools in the study,
staff meetings were revised to become more concerned with professional development than administration. Furthermore, these meetings were held more regularly. One school had adopted a fortnightly meeting time:

“We have sessions on a Thursday afternoon called professional information sharing times and that can be someone from outside but more often is someone on staff and we share something. It might be something about, classroom management. It might be something about specific students, it might be something to do with a subject area or whatever, creative writing, it doesn’t matter but we get together on a Thursday afternoon, just for an hour and have some form of sharing” (Rosemary Transcript: 4).

The administration that might have once been associated with the monthly staff meeting was replaced with a weekly “Tuesday morning staff meeting and briefing”. According to the principal and teacher data, this led to improvements in communication between leadership and staff and improved relationships amongst staff more generally. This shift in the meetings focus contributed strongly to address any negativity and uncertainty that was present, concerning middle school issues.

Clearly, the importance of professional development for the middle school teacher has been identified as a priority in sustaining middle years reform. Schools were quite generous in supporting teacher requests. As one beginning teacher proudly described:

“It’s been quite an interesting learning curve and with some good professional development a great way to see kids slightly differently and teach them and affect their lives a little bit more than perhaps I have done in the past” (Simon Transcript: 1).

It became evident that Induction processes for new and beginning teachers into middle schooling were not well developed. As one beginning teacher claimed:

“one of the learning support teachers said she asked whether we had specific instruction for middle schooling and no we didn’t. I think that would have helped to know what middle schooling was all about and what it meant at this school” (Dixie Transcript: 3).

Both principal and teacher participants agreed that induction programs are necessary. However, the shape that induction processes tended to be different across all the schools in the study. Some schools had no induction program at all while others had developed a
“buddy” and a “mentor” program to support new and beginning middle school teachers. Most schools used their pupil free days in January, prior to school commencing, to have a general induction for new staff, but the focus was not necessarily on middle school:

“We have a general induction program for new teachers into the school and if they’re involved in the middle school and most new teachers generally are, there’ll be a specific section that will focus on that” (Ronald Transcript: 6).

Some schools in the study saw the planned curriculum meeting times that took place on pupil free days, as a default induction program:

“the only induction I’d say they have is that they have planning time and in that planning time all is revealed so to speak, so they have that planning time before they actually start and I’m talking, a day, sometimes two days” (Paris Transcript: 2).

Surprisingly, the principal data reported a lack of concern for the importance of induction processes. Principals believed immersion to be more important: “for any teacher, you really don’t know how something works until you’ve been with it for a year.” (Elizabeth Transcript: 9). Clearly, this is not a comment supported by the teacher data.

Nevertheless, a number of schools in the study and some schools specifically resourced the development of an induction program and had “a whole procedure in place in our pupil free week in January for new staff”. (Mae Transcript: 8). The development of such a program, in one school, became a comprehensive two year “mentor” program supporting the new middle years teacher:

“The mentoring programme involves a check list of curriculum and assessment, go through all the bits and pieces and then they come under the guidance of the year level coordinator to become part of the team. The first year in, let them just settle in with their classes; don’t put any huge demands on them although the experienced teacher may take on more” (Bob Transcript: ).

In addition, the newly appointed teacher was provided with a second mentor who is an experienced middle school teacher. The second mentor is only active as long as the newly appointed teacher perceives the need: “just sitting alongside them when needed and then they will move away from that at their own [choosing]. So some might start moving away after a
month, for some it might take 9-12 months” (Clint Transcript: 5-6). At the end of the first year the newly appointed teacher is given an “appraisal” by their two mentors. One teacher commented that after having a difficult start the mentoring program “helped her negotiate the demands of that group of students, and got her through a really tough year” (Mae Transcript: 4). A further support to the induction process in some schools is a staff handbook which could be accessed on line and staff were expected to “familiarise themselves with the content and to seek clarification if required” (Bob Transcript: 6).

Evidence has been provided, to this point, that teacher education, professional development and induction processes in support of the middle school teacher is considered as “vital” to teacher development. Professional development of this type represented an important challenge for school leadership teams. There is sufficient evidence of the need for schools to consider ways to resource and support the middle school teacher in their on-going education. As noted above, middle schooling is embedded in a context of change. To implement change requires planning and resourcing if the change process is to be effective and achievable.

9.2.2 Sub-proposition 4.2:
Middle years teachers must be effective managers of time for learning

The teacher data overwhelmingly demonstrated that overall teacher effectiveness in the middle years is determined by the quality of the time organised to support student learning. For some schools in the study this was achieved through innovative timetable structures that provided flexible blocked time. Furthermore, teachers required formal allocation of time for planning as teaching teams. There was a view shared by most principal and teacher participants that “a timetabling approach which allows for large chunks of time for teachers to work with their students” (Harrison Transcript: 6) was the most effective way of working with the middle years learner. Most schools in the study had moved to or were moving to a “block schedule” of “70 minutes” or “75 minutes”. This approach to timetabling meant less movement for students and created “flexibility” in the learning processes. However, there was a view from the teacher data that normally, the focus of timetabling for the middle school was concerned with “putting people in front of classes”. Furthermore, it was normal practice to consider the middle school timetable after the “senior school had been timetabled” (Jane Transcript: 4).
From the student data there was a mixed response to the newly allocated long blocks of time. The following comment is representative of students across the study: “[students] only like forty minute [lessons]. I find that I can sit through a forty minute lesson better than a 70 minute lesson” (Aladdin Transcript: 3). Students expressed concern that teachers were not using extra time effectively. Some teachers in the study were quite challenged by long blocks of time: “I wouldn’t be able to sustain myself, I think it’s a long time for even having four lessons in a row… two doubles is very difficult to keep the kids on task” (Dixie Transcript: 4). There was consensus that 70-75 minute blocks of time was not used effectively. Moving away from the standardised timetable of 40 or 50 minute class periods required some lead in time for teachers and professional development support to make best use of the increased lesson time and the flexibility that it offered.

The principal and teacher data revealed that timetabling was “a huge issue” in the middle years where many “compromises” had to be made. All schools in the study, except for one, found that the timetable only worked when teachers were deployed across both middle and senior schools:

“We could handle having a few specialist middle school teachers on staff here but we couldn’t have too many because to make the timetable work, they’ve got to be able to go and teach in the senior school” (Harrison Transcript: 7).

In one school there were concerns with middle school teachers not having a full teaching load which meant they had “to pick up classes in senior”. Timetabling increasingly became an issue “because we have teachers who teach across middle and senior” (Ronald Transcript: 4) and “one of the guarantees that had to be given was that a middle school core teacher would also have senior classes” (Harrison Transcript: 7). Consequently, most schools from the study were not able to reconcile this impasse, resulting in key aspects of the middle schooling philosophy being “compromised” and the traditional, subject based approach was sustained as the central factor shaping student learning. One school in the study which reconciled this impasse between middle and senior school developed a separate timetable for middle and senior school. It was acknowledged timetabling “is a major nightmare” though “we manage reasonably well because we run a different timetable for middle and senior” with “different break times and this frees up specialist facilities allowing greater access” (Clint Transcript: 3), in particular, for the middle school. This school believed that the “middle phase of learning is a
very different way of teaching” and went about organising their senior and middle schools “discreetly different” and “is the absolute key to its success”. According to the principal, this was so much so, that: “it inspires this very cohesive and directed, and purposeful, and motivated staff which is very important I cannot see it working as effectively any other way” (Clint Transcript: 1-2). In addition, it has resulted in “a very stable staff now with minimal turnover” (Rosemary Transcript: 6).

Teachers also required a further “time” dimension to be considered. The “biggest hindrance” to the teacher being more effective “is time, getting that planning time” (Paris Transcript: 7). The teacher data clearly identified that “working in your team if you don’t get planning time it is just so, so difficult” (Cher Transcript: 3). While there was consensus from the data that teaching teams need regular formal scheduled time to meet, it was another thing to achieve it. As Paris laments:

“We try and get the timetable to give us at least a lesson a week [50 mins] where we can all meet in our Year 8 Integrated Studies group, or Year 9, or Maths/Science but it becomes a timetable nightmare for that to happen sometimes, but I think it has to be a priority” (Paris Transcript: 5).

Due to the different ways of working in the middle years and the different approach to curriculum design some schools in the study recognised the importance of scheduled planning time for teaching teams:

“The timetable needs to allow teachers to have time to plan together because that’s the key. If you’re going to have a trans-disciplinary [Integrated] curriculum you’ve actually got to have teachers talking to each other” (Harrison Transcript: 2).

However, Harrison qualifies his comments by saying this is the ideal: “in an ideal world you would also have common spares but that’s just not possible” (Harrison Transcript: 6). Therefore, Harrison makes a “compromise” like most schools in the study and provided middle school teachers “one day release for planning per term which is very expensive and then the ongoing commitment was one day per semester” (Harrison Transcript: 6). The ambivalence of some schools towards supporting middle school teaching teams with appropriate scheduled planning time is further demonstrated in this comment by Neil: “timetabling those sorts of little extras are pretty challenging” (Neil Transcript: 4).
While recognising the importance of team planning time, some schools in the study, made “compromises” by targeting Year 8 teachers, giving them “one extra spare period per fortnight” (Neil Transcript: 3). Neil justifies this extra time with the assertion that “it gave [teachers] an expectation that being on Grade 8 was something special and planning was extremely important for the Year 8 learner” (Neil Transcript: 3). However, from the teacher data, it became clear that teachers preferred common spares with team members “so we’re able to do planning and marking, moderation, that sort of thing” (Frank Transcript: 4).

There was empathy expressed by some schools personnel who “walked the walk as well as talked the talk” (Bob Transcript: 6) with their teachers, conscious of their workload and understanding their needs. This required finding ways in the timetable to ensure teachers had “common spares” which enabled them to meet in their teaching teams and, in turn, build positive relationships between leadership and teachers. Some schools were better able to do this than others because they were willing to plan and try innovations new with the timetable:

“In relation to timetabling issues I think we’ve got to continually try to develop planning time for teachers so that if it’s possible they’re free at the same sort of time. We blocked times and people have a 150 minute block of time rather than having it split all over the place, so we try and do that as much as possible” (Ronald Transcript: 4).

The data revealed that some schools were revising the amount of time teachers and students were able to spend together as a team over more than one year. Some school realised it was important to keep teams together for two or three years to ensure continuity and keep the membership of teams stable. This was achieved through the practice of ‘looping’, having teachers stay longer with their students by “keeping the same teachers in Integrated Studies in Year 8 through to the end of Year 9”. This ensured both the “continuity” in teaching teams and in the composition of student groupings. In addition, this practice of looping provided the time needed to “build teacher/student and teacher parent/relationships” (Ronald Transcript: 4). However, from the teacher data there continue to be concerns surrounding the ability or the desire of the school to build in timetabled support for middle school teaching teams as part of their workload not as added release time.

For most of the schools in the study middle schooling is “a work in progress” and is acknowledged from the participant data that it is important to keep “revisiting what we are
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Some participants suggested that there is a need to identify the “factors that are really affecting the success of the learning, is it really about the philosophy of middle schooling” (Dorothy Transcript: 14). One of these factors affecting middle school teachers is parent perceptions of their effectiveness and how the school supports the teacher in communicating with parents. This key sub-proposition is analysed in the following section.

9.2.3 Sub-proposition 4.3: The middle years teacher should be facilitators of parent involvement and education

Comments from the principal and teacher data confirm the importance of parent involvement and education. While parent involvement was a sensitive issue for most school communities in the study, the data revealed the centrality of the middle school teacher as a facilitator of parent involvement and education. The principal and teacher data gave overwhelming affirmation of the “vital” role parents play in the support of their own child’s learning, and of change in implementing something new and as far reaching as middle schooling.

There was consensus from the data that parent education was an area in which teachers could improve their communication: “we could do better”. This is further amplified by the following teacher comment:

“It’s an area we could probably improve upon. We could do more parent information sessions about middle schooling philosophy you know, the benefits that are to be gained for being a part of middle schooling” (Mae Transcript: 8).

Some of the teacher participants argued that parent education is about “relationships with parents” that needed to be developed. It was their belief it is often “neglected”. According to one teacher: “getting to know the parent, maintaining parent contact after hours, that sort of thing, having things so that parents are comfortable coming to the school” (Kate Transcript: 3) is important. Another teacher put it more sharply: “To have the parents supporting what you’re doing and being on the same page is everything” (Mae Transcript: 5). Therefore, working at developing positive relationships between teacher and parent “makes the whole thing so much easier. Otherwise you’re in deep water” (Mae Transcript: 6). Based on the data, it can be argued, the middle school teacher needs to take steps “to feel comfortable with parents”.

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In all schools in the study there was recognition by parents that middle schooling represented “something new”. It was conveyed that middle schooling is a unique approach to curriculum change and “parents didn’t necessarily understand or found it difficult to deal with because it wasn’t what they did at school” (George Transcript: 2). Therefore, parents wanted “certainty and security” and looked to aspects of their child’s schooling that was “recognisable to them as parents”. For most schools in the study there was a belief that “the concept of middle schooling is still unfamiliar and difficult to sell and market to parents” (Shane Transcript: 1). Hence, the cautious approach taken by some schools towards the implementation of middle schooling philosophy was evident in this research.

One school openly acknowledged that due, to internal uncertainty about how the middle school should be structured, “confusion about jurisdictions and where decision making lay” (Shane Transcript: 1) evolved. One school principal reflected on how difficult it was to initiate the reform because of parental lack of understanding of the middle schooling approach to curriculum. The principal commented that it was the teachers that bore the brunt of the early criticism: “one of our Year 7 teachers said the first year they were absolutely hammered by parents, absolutely hammered by both primary and secondary [parents]” (George 8). The principal further reflected that: “I do believe they [teachers] felt supported I know that, but wow it was hard”. (George Transcript: 8). With the increasing participation of parents in the life of the school, Shane came to the realisation that a fundamental need of middle school teachers was: “how they are supported when it comes to parents who will try and attack and critique them” (Shane Transcript: 9). In particular, this support is essential during the early phase of introducing the transition to middle schooling.

From the data, this perception of parents “being unfamiliar” with middle schooling philosophy was brought into sharp focus with the implementation of the integrated curriculum. As one teacher described:

“The issue of combining subject areas to look for the links between them, the relevance of how one area to another to become more project based rather than content driven has proven particularly challenging. In terms of the perception parents had about its academic rigor” (Shane: Transcript: 3).
The shift in curriculum reform, where subjects were no longer separated, led to confusion amongst some “parents, students and other members of the school that they don’t do English and they don’t do Science” (Shane Transcript: 2). According to Shane, this was the:

“Single greatest lesson I’ve learned in the three years, of just how committed, industrious and vigorous you have to be in relation to parent information and the marketing, not just to [future] enrolments, its to your current clientele in trying to explain and getting them to see and understand how it operates why you’re doing what you doing” (Shane Transcript: 2).

The data revealed that, in general, parents were cautious about change, in particular, curriculum change. Despite the fact that parents support an integrated curriculum in the primary school, they are cautious of this approach in Year 8 and Year 9:

“Year 8 [and Year9] they see this as introductory and transitional so can sort of grin and bear it with gritted teeth and by the time you get to year 9 they are already sniffing pathways to university and they want their children to be driven into a separate subjects, separate teachers and that basically is what they recognize as being schooling is the key difficulty” (Shane Transcript: 3).

In some schools in the study, the middle schooling approach to curriculum had some parents asking questions regarding the qualifications of the middle school teaching staff. Parents became concerned that specialist subject teachers were teaching outside their area of expertise. According to one principal:

“Parents are very aware, very conscious of ensuring that the teachers who are teaching particular subjects have the training in that particular subject. That is something that we hear a lot, we have to be mindful of hat when we deploy staff” (George Transcript: 3).

The data revealed that as schools implemented the transition to middle schooling, teachers became “responsible for so many things”. There was a view shared by some teacher participants that:

“teachers themselves just get a little bit depleted and just a little bit fragile. We have a lot of needy students and a lot of difficult home situations and not every teacher can deal with that, you know, so I think you’ve got to continue to be quite supportive of teachers” (Mae Transcript: 6).
Hence, the call for middle school teachers to become facilitators of parent involvement and education requires effective communication to parents through education, ensuring the interpretation of policy and practices reflect the school’s position as it advances change. The schools in the study, which had proceeded successfully through the first phase of implementation, noted that “we copped a lot of criticism” in the beginning, but “we did a lot of work with the parents…this is why we’re going this way” (Rosemary Transcript: 3). According to the data, educating parents about the change to middle schooling “was one of the major tasks, we were nurturing them [parents] and many of them have changed their view and have been very supportive” (Bob Transcript: 7). Furthermore, one school in the study claimed: “We have a lot of parents who want to bring their kids to the middle school here. There’s a queue of people wanting to get in here” (Bob Transcript: 7). According to Bob, the success of their middle school is due in no small measure to how it has been resourced and the ability of the middle school teachers “to engage with the parents” and “keeping standards up”.

As the data revealed, there were misunderstandings surrounding the type of involvement parents should have. However, the data overwhelmingly affirmed meaningful parental involvement in their own child’s education requires openness by the school to parent participation which is facilitated continually by extending the invitation to participate. As the data demonstrated, the schools that were most successful at introducing middle schooling philosophy were those which gave parent participation a high priority “we did a lot of ground work with them [parents]”. Giving high priority to parent participation allowed the school to developed structures and practices like “parent information sessions” and “three-way conferencing” to report student progress and promoted a “parent friendly middle school” which enabled them to reach their goal. Schools of this type had the ability to harness the energy of parents in all its manifestations, by enabling the change to middle school becoming a reality.

9.3 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the section of data analysis outlined in Chapter 6 to 9. Four key propositions have been generated from the data, due to the process of coding and analysis that was detailed in Chapter 3 and 4. This process of grounding theory in the data has generated four substantive theoretical propositions that became a platform from which an evolving theoretical model has emerged. This theoretical model is detailed in the following chapter.
Chapter 10

The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher

A profession is not created by certificates and censures but by the existence of a substantive body of professional knowledge, as well as a mechanism for improving it, and by a genuine desire of the profession’s members to improve their practice (Stigler & Hierbert 1999:146).

10.1 Introduction

This chapter presents *The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher*, a model that is based on the language, constructs and themes that emerged from the data gathered throughout the study. The substantiative theory building based on the core propositions examined in the previous Chapters 6-9 give rise to a theoretical model of the attributes of the middle years teacher. This model provides an empirical basis that is rigorous in informing the reconceptualisation of the teacher in the middle years of schooling. By identifying the attributes of the middle school teacher the education community will be better positioned to meet more effectively the diverse needs of young adolescents in this new learning society. As a Grounded Theory model, it is as complete as the empirical data allows. The empirical model may also provide theoretical insights and add value to the existing body of knowledge, regarding the middle years of schooling teacher.

Therefore, this chapter is framed such, it:

- presents the four attributes model a substantive model for developing the distinctive attributes of the middle school teacher in the school organisation, based on the data analysis and discusses the main elements of each attribute (10.2);
- discusses the conditions influencing the efficacy of the middle school teacher attributes by identifying the enabling and disabling conditions implicit in the model (10.3); and
- provides a conclusion to the chapter (10.4).
Figure 10.1 The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher

Disabling Conditions
- Lack of a clear change plan
- Limited consultation with stakeholders
- Divergent views on what constitutes relevant curriculum change
- Leadership that maintains the status quo
- Curriculum delivery is fragmented
- Resistance to change from curriculum leaders
- Inadequate attention to the transition from primary school to secondary school
- Lack of fit between the learning environment and understanding adolescent needs
- Absence of infrastructure to support teachers

Enabling Conditions
- Identification of critical pre-requisites for change
- Engagement with all stakeholders to develop a shared vision
- Empowerment of teachers, parents, and students
- Development of new leadership patterns of collaboration, accountability, and initiative
- Synthesis of new knowledge and understanding of adolescence
- Development of a caring supportive learning environment
- Leadership by the principal which is transformative
- Development of an environment that values lifelong learning
- Development of appropriate teacher education and opportunities for professional learning
- Development and commitment to professional standards
10.2 The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM)

This phenomenon of the middle school teacher is interpreted through the lens of the four core propositions that are reported in the previous Chapters 6-9. These four core propositions have been the platform for developing the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (the FAM). This theoretical holistic model is presented in Figure 10.1. The four key attributes are:

1. A capacity to forge a middle school identity;
2. A designer of a wholesome curriculum;
3. A specialist in adolescence; and
4. A capacity to sustain middle school reform.

In this chapter, the key components of this model will be analysed. It can be argued that this model makes a substantial contribution to the current conceptualisation of the middle school teacher which is currently vague and informed by myth and intuition rather than empirical findings. Moreover, the model presented here will identify, for the first time, the attributes of the middle school teacher based on data elicited from the perspectives of a large sample of practising principals, teachers, and students. The model is constructed from the empirical data to illustrate how the four attributes and the components of the model stand in relation to each other. The model depicts each component of the model as one of four, each having an interactive influence on the other. Each of the attributes consists of a number of elements as central to its construction. Furthermore, two sets of conditions have been identified: enabling conditions which facilitate and support the realisation of the attributes, and a set of disabling conditions that limit the actualisation of the attributes within the context of middle schooling. It is argued that the enabling conditions provide the conditions for change whereby the school organisation has the capacity to implement strategies which will re-culture, reform, revitalise, reconceptualise and restructure schools, leading to fundamental school improvement.

By definition, a model is a simplification of reality, where the complexity that it represents is reduced for the purposes of understanding its essential character and communicating it to others. The following sections illustrate how the model can be applied within the complexities of middle school teaching and how the attributes underpin new ways of working as a middle school teacher. Each attribute of the model will be outlined in turn. Furthermore, the importance of the model and the contribution to knowledge will become apparent.
10.2.1 Attribute 1: A capacity to forge a middle school identity

The attribute *a capacity to forge a middle school identity* requires teachers to consider the transition of the young adolescent from primary school to secondary school, from childhood to adulthood and to locate these transitions in the context of transforming teaching and learning practices. To forge a middle school identity is to recognise the middle years of schooling as a phase of learning, not as a special program to manage transitions. Rather, the attribute calls for the teacher to be a catalyst by forging a middle school identity characterised by the development of critical, literate, socially aware young people who demonstrate a strong sense of community responsibility. The capacity to forge a middle school identity that revitalises teaching and learning is urgently needed in the lives of teachers and students today.

The *capacity to forge a middle school identity* is a central attribute of the middle school teacher. It is important because the middle school teacher is at the forefront of reform. The influence of the middle school teacher is the “key” to forging a middle school identity. This attribute is dependent upon pedagogical change at the local level, and sustained support from school and system leadership for teachers who are committed to change and innovative approaches to curriculum design and engagement of the middle years’ learner.

For the middle school teacher to have a *capacity to forge a middle school identity* several elements are required:

**Element 1.1 Dedicated middle school space for learning**

The first key element underpinning the attribute of a capacity to forge a middle school identity is the ability to restructure the middle years of schooling by reforming the existing school structures to clearly identify a learning space which is dedicated to the middle years learner. In doing so, recognition of the middle years of schooling with its own dedicated space brings clarity and elevates the learning experience of both student and teacher. In restructuring the physical space of the secondary school to include a dedicated middle school, which is well resourced with high quality facilities, and with dedicated middle years teachers, affirms that this approach to teaching and learning is innovative and new by being committed to and institutionalises important values and beliefs concerning young people and their education, based on research. Restructuring to take account of the new conditions influencing young people is to acknowledge the turbulent and unpredictable life course that is facing young
adolescents. Identifying a dedicated space for the middle years learner gives due recognition to their distinctive needs and provides stability and an identity for these young people.

Element 1.2  Re-culturing the school

The capacity of the teacher to change the teaching and learning culture is a necessary element when forging a middle school identity. The teacher is an active participant in this reform who values risk taking and works collaboratively with school leadership to envision and implement a new culture in the school. This requires a change in behaviour, values and expected outcomes. Furthermore, the focus of teaching and learning is reconstructed as a community of learners is profiled. This call for change and the reconstitution of school culture is unique to every school as a new learning culture evolves, central to which:

- teachers working collaboratively is valued by all,
- reforming teaching pedagogy becomes a priority,
- responding to change is a daily event,
- continuous professional learning is pursued by all staff.

It is argued that such conditions ensure the continuous improvement in the learning outcomes of students. The teacher is the catalyst for change. The comprehensive understanding and commitment the teacher brings to the middle years helps challenge and change practices that better serve the learning needs of young adolescents and well-being of each and every student.

Element 1.3  New leadership patterns

The elevating of a teacher to lead reform of the middle years of schooling is critical to support its teachers and forge a middle school identity. This recognises the centrality of the teacher in this reform to assume new roles and responsibilities to try new approaches, take risks and be part of a learning team. Hence, the appointment of a middle school leadership position is imperative to this attribute being realised.
10.2.2 Attribute 2: A designer of a wholesome curriculum

The implementation of middle schooling philosophy since the late 1990s has been informed by a range of curriculum reforms and influenced by educational trends that embrace national reforms with a focus on quality teaching, pedagogical processes, literacy and numeracy, life-long learning, assessment and reporting. This outcome has given an unambiguous message that the middle years’ curriculum is to be rigorous. It is also to be a curriculum design that forges a holistic approach to quality teaching and learning which is responsive to young adolescent needs, helping them to re-imagine a world that empowers them and is full of hope and optimism.

The middle years of schooling teacher is responsible for transforming the middle years curriculum into a wholesome, relevant and lifelong learning experience for the middle years learner. A new approach to the design of curriculum in the middle years is provided by this attribute and in a rapidly changing society is challenged to articulate its purpose more clearly.

A designer of a wholesome curriculum is an attribute that requires the teacher to be a learning catalyst and for the students to be the ‘stars of the class’. It is a curriculum that refuses to caricature or stereotype representations of young adolescents. Moreover, the wholesome curriculum rejects the traditional curriculum of compliance and competition that chronicles adolescence through ideologically filters that are increasingly alienating, disengaging and disenfranchising of young people. This concept of a wholesome curriculum draws upon the nurturing skills of a parent and the design skills of the teacher to expand the horizons of her students and is concerned with restoring harmony and well-being for the young adolescent learner. As a designer of a wholesome curriculum, the teacher is required to explore in non-condescending ways an identity for the young adolescent that values social justice, ethics, community engagement and active citizenship. The wholesome curriculum serves the middle years’ learner by capturing in depth, and with empathy, the tensions and ambiguities that shape the lives of so many young adolescents in this new time. Underlying the concept of a wholesome curriculum is an affirmation of the young adolescent learner, providing for a kind of authenticity and hope that will make a positive difference in the lives of young people. This serves as the ultimate arbiter of this attribute.
For the middle school teacher to be a designer of a wholesome curriculum several elements are required:

**Element 2.1 Commitment to the middle years’ learner**

The middle school teacher will hold a deep personal commitment to the middle years learner, as co-constructors of the curriculum. They will understand comprehensively the developmental uniqueness of this age group evidenced by the design of curricula, pedagogical practices and assessment strategies. Such teachers are collaborators who value learning partnerships with their students, demonstrating empathy while engaging them in real world learning experiences.

**Element 2.2 New forms of engagement with colleagues and students**

The middle school teacher will develop new forms of engagement with colleagues and students. This means that the middle school teacher is not autonomous; she will be a team player, collegial and transformative and adapts a holistic and systematic approach to curriculum design to ensure every student can succeed. A teacher of a wholesome curriculum will ensure excellence and equity where every child will succeed through being a reflective lifelong learner, an active citizen, a compassionate and ethical individual, and one that makes healthy lifestyle choices.

**Element 2.3 Working in teaching teams**

The middle school teacher is a member of a teaching team, a collaborative work group in the delivery of the middle school curriculum. Teaching teams are essential to enable teachers and teacher aides to learn together and to value add from the collective knowledge and experience of the team. Teacher teaming increases interaction between professionals which fosters team learning and problem solving, enabling teachers on teams to be more effective and confident in the belief that they can make a difference to improving student learning outcomes.

**Element 2.4 Engaging in curriculum design**

The middle school teacher has to be capable of generating a thorough reconceptualisation and reinterpretation of traditional curricula in light of the constantly changing educational, social and cultural conditions facing young people. The teacher will need to recognise that
curriculum design is complex and multidimensional and to enthusiastically engage with improving student performance.

**Element 2.5 Design an integrated curriculum**

The middle school teacher is to design an integrated curriculum, which is focused on relevant and important ‘big ideas’ or themes based on problems or issues of personal and social importance in the real world of the middle years learner. Such a design of curriculum will deliberately reach across and beyond traditional subject/KLA boundaries to plan curriculum. This approach to curricula requires the teacher to think differently in how knowledge is organised and presented. This approach to curriculum design forms the hub of the middle school curriculum by linking and connecting to the diverse fields of knowledge. Adopting an integrated approach, the middle school learner is given greater opportunities to engage and to make meaning of those ideas within learning communities, to problem solve, to think deeply, and to respond critically and responsibly on their new found understandings.

**Element 2.6 Give students a voice**

The middle school teacher as a designer of wholesome curriculum is to be firmly learner-centred. This approach to teaching and learning is to value inclusiveness and collaboration, through democratic, team work principles, which liberate students through giving them a voice. The curriculum, invites students to become empowered to live with dignity and purpose.

**10.2.3 Attribute 3: A specialist in adolescence**

To be an effective middle school teacher requires a comprehensive understanding of the developmental uniqueness of early adolescence. Hence, middle schools must be grounded in the diverse characteristics and needs of this age group. This has implications for the way curriculum design, pedagogical practices and assessment strategies are developed to engage and enhance student learning outcomes.

The middle years of schooling is recognised as part of both primary and secondary school education. For middle schools to thrive they have to be developmentally responsive to the learning needs, interests and characteristics of the middle years learner. It is this concept that is at the heart of middle years’ philosophy. The middle years’ teacher specialises in this single phase of development: early adolescence. Therefore, the middle school teacher is a specialist
in adolescence. The attribute a specialist in adolescence highlights that the teacher should not just be learner-centred, but also needs [to be] adolescent centred, adolescent focused and adolescent driven.

The establishment of a middle school recognises the period of adolescence as a distinctive life phase. As such, it creates a learning and social space for young people to interact and develop in, enabling new ways of ‘being’ for the young adolescent. Hence, the middle years learner is being differentiated, whose needs are different from younger and older students. Affirming this difference empowers young adolescents, who are in a process of transforming themselves, with a sense of their own identity.

A specialist in adolescence, the middle years’ teacher exudes a passion for working with young adolescents and is prepared to do so. The attribute reflects empathy for the ever changing transformation in the student’s growth from childhood to adulthood and for the changing dynamics of popular youth culture. Through middle years teachers demonstration of dedication and commitment they create exciting learning possibilities for all students. The teacher’s professional commitment and passion for young adolescents will make a difference in the lives of the middle years’ learner.

For the middle school teacher to be a specialist in adolescence several elements are required:

Element 3.1 Meeting the affective needs of young adolescents
The middle school teacher has to have the belief and desire to build relationships with students. The middle years is a ‘rocky time’ for young adolescents and the building of trusting relationships with the young adolescent learner is critical during their development and is a pathway to improving student performance. The teacher is required to create a learning environment where the student feels safe, comfortable and happy, allowing for their affective needs to be met. Students will not thrive if these affective (emotional, social, spiritual and physical) needs are not met.

Element 3.2 Advocate for the middle years’ learner
The middle school teacher is an advocate for the middle years’ learner. Each child needs at least one adult on which they can rely for help and to navigate the often turbulent time that is
adolescence. The advocacy of the teacher is fundamentally an attitude of concern and care for the middle years’ learner, being there for them by promoting a culture of compassion, understanding and mutual respect. To be an effective advocate for the middle years’ learner is dependent on trust gained through continuity in relationships over time.

**Element 3.3 Communicator with parents**

The middle school teacher continuously seeks to build open and positive communication with parents through monitoring student work and by creating opportunities for direct parent involvement. To build positive communication between school and home is essential. This will make parents more receptive and respectful of the teachers’ workload and professional judgement, even when reporting concerns regarding behaviour and academic performance. The true measure of this element is when parents and teachers understand and respect each other and have regular contact. This helps the teacher to bridge the gap between school and home where the child can see both home and school have the same expectations and it creates an environment that is cooperative and supportive. This will give meaning and build respect for the traditional parent/teacher interviews which are required by law to be held twice per year.

**Element 3.4 Flexibility**

The middle school teacher is to be positive and flexible in their dealings with young middle years’ learners and build on the enthusiasm of the young adolescent. For this attribute to be realised it is crucial the middle school teacher explore different ways to reach students and to understand them, and allow issues to be reconciled. This will ensure increased student engagement and respect.

**Element 3.5 Ethos of Care**

The middle school teacher is required to build positive relationships between teachers and students. Students’ expectations for success are dependent on healthy positive relationships with teachers and peers. Much of young adolescent engagement and motivation is a direct result of this relationship. When students feel cared for they will have a high personal stake in their learning. When they do not, their engagement and motivation will diminish with a consequential decline in achievement and well-being.
10.2.4 Attribute 4: A capacity to sustain the middle years reform

Effective middle years teachers need to be ever alert to what it is that they need to do and to know, so that they may continually grow in their understanding of this reform of the middle years. Hence, the attribute a capacity to sustain the middle years’ reform is crucial in establishing school-based communities of practice and to lead professional learning in the middle years.

Teaching in the middle years contains many features that are recognisable but the overall approach is innovative and new. Therefore, the middle school teacher is required to be an advocate of teacher education, professional learning and induction processes. In addition, the middle school teacher should be a facilitator of parental education and a manager of student learning time. To achieve this, the middle school teacher needs to prioritise professional learning as the vehicle to improving learning conditions for students of the middle years. This will require professional learning that attends not only to data about the students and their environments but to include the latest research and literature to inform the new learning practices. This is essential if teachers are to “adapt” to and to “embrace” the new ways of working with young middle school learners.

The success of the reconceptualised middle school rests on the willingness of teachers to invest their efforts in the middle years’ learner. Teachers will be required to comprehensively understand and be passionate about working with young adolescents and demonstrate that the middle years is a rewarding place to work. This attribute emphasises the importance of the development of a high performance learning culture which is dependent on continuous professional learning by the teacher. Therefore, targeted professional development for the middle years teacher centred around adolescence, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is imperative if student learning is to improve. In addition, targeted professional development is necessary if this reform is to be sustained long term.

For the middle school teacher a capacity to sustain the middle years’ reform will require several elements:
**Element 4.1 Engages in continuous professional learning**
The middle school teacher engages in continuous professional learning to inform this reform. It will be necessary for teachers to be resources for each other through collaboration, observing each other’s practice and engage in peer observation and feedback. This is vital in the context of change in moving to an authentic middle years approach. It will require the teacher to reinvent themselves by embracing and adapting new approaches to teaching and learning, such as planning across the curriculum. For the middle school teacher to be creative and innovative, it will be essential for the school organisation to provide ongoing professional development opportunities that enable teachers to find ways of refreshing and reinvigorating their practice.

**Element 4.2 The middle school teacher is a learner**
This requires the teacher to be a lifelong learner, one who is committed to it as a path to becoming an effective teacher. A commitment to lifelong learning is critical to sustaining the vision of improved student learning through innovations in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices that reflect the distinctive needs of the young adolescent.

**Element 4.3 The middle school teacher is a moral motivator**
This requires the middle school teacher to foster an open exchange of ideas where teachers feel supported when exploring aspects of their own practice that they see as ethically responsive or problematic. Building trust which recognises and understands teachers’ different experiences and preparedness for change is essential for standards of practice to improve.

**Element 4.4 Forge a new professional identity**
The middle school teacher is required to forge a new professional identity through being evidenced-based in their teaching and learning practice. It is essential that this new identity facilitates a fundamental shift in the ways of working as a middle school teacher which identifies best practice to enhance improved learning outcomes, such as through brain-based learning.
10.3 Conditions influencing the efficacy of the middle school teacher attributes

The Four Attributes Model can be implemented within differing school contexts. Within each context a set of disabling and enabling conditions exist which will influence the efficacy of the middle school teacher attributes. Stakeholders from the different sectors have variable resources and priorities concerning the implementation of middle years of schooling concept. When a balance between disabling conditions and enabling conditions, can be achieved, the model is most effectively realised across contexts.

10.3.1 Disabling conditions

In terms of the realisation of the attributes of this model, a lack of consultation with stakeholders concerning the change process can be disabling. Articulation of a vision is required if the change is to have clarity and energy. Disabling conditions such as limited time and lack of consensus amongst key stakeholders are evident, only the vested interests of a few stakeholders are realised, and as such will act against the change process, leading to undesirable results. A failure to consult with key stakeholders limits comprehensive discussion of options regarding middle schooling and the means of understanding and identifying the values, ideas and experiences of those stakeholders, who are essential to the implementing the reform.

Disabling conditions eventuate when ill-informed manifestations on what constitutes relevant curriculum arise and when the varied expectations of how to design a wholesome curriculum are not rigorous or supported by research findings. This can result in a range of misunderstandings regarding the integrated curriculum. One particular misconception suggests that the integrated curriculum will blur the traditional subject boundaries, resulting in a loss of intellectual quality and rigour. Far from being less rigorous, the design of an integrated curriculum breaks the cycle of the isolated, fragmented and compartmentalised structures of curriculum that have characterised twentieth century schooling. In designing curriculum that makes teaching and learning more contextual by being inductive, holistic and interactive gives greater access to new knowledge in more meaningful and relevant ways that makes sense to young adolescent learners. Such contextualising of teaching and learning provides important links to students’ life experience, needs and interests. A designer of a wholesome curriculum, the teacher is concerned with the life skills of thinking and cooperating within a learner-centred environment. In addition, the wholesome curriculum presents the
teaching and learning in connected and holistic ways that result in integrated learning which is highly rigorous in improving intellectual quality and performance of students in the middle years.

The inability of the leadership team to lead in particular ways that empower the teacher can be disabling, leading to a lack of commitment to curriculum change by teachers. Such lack of faith in teachers by the leadership team, particularly Heads of Department to design and deliver a more engaging and innovative curriculum can thwart the change process. Disempowered teachers who are forced to comply with traditional subject discipline approaches inhibit necessary reforms. Moreover, resistance from Heads of Department can hamper the realisation of attributes pertaining to curriculum change, particularly, when this can be the catalyst for infrastructure change. Some leadership teams may see this as a threat to their ongoing positions of authority. It is essential that leadership positions be created in the middle years that recognise the innovative approaches to curriculum design which include both pastoral and academic responsibilities.

Close relationships between staff and students in the middle years sector is a key to learning engagement. In some contexts, the transition of students from primary school to secondary school can inhibit the forging of these vital relationships. This disabling condition can be compounded further when there is a ‘poor fit’ between the school organisation and curriculum for the middle years.

How learning time is managed in the middle school can hinder or facilitate curriculum delivery. In contexts where learning is delivered in a fragmented way through the timetable, the management of students becomes problematic and the attributes of the middle school teacher can be constrained. For example, when the timetable is fragmented into short blocks of learning, a lack of continuity for both teacher and student is evident. This arrangement seriously disrupts any opportunities to stimulate close supportive teacher-student relationships and the manifestation of this attribute is stifled. While not sufficient in itself to create a participative learning community, the forging of close teacher-student relationships is a necessary precondition for authentic middle schooling.
A lack of infrastructure has been identified as an important disabling condition when building a school ethos in support of middle schooling. When there is limited assistance provided by management in order to support the needs of teachers who feel overwhelmed by curriculum demands in a context of innovation and reconceptualisation, teachers cannot realise their full potential. They report feeling ineffective, demoralised and ‘burnt out’. Ambivalence demonstrated by management toward providing the infrastructure and resources to support the realisation of the middle years teacher attributes, seriously threatens the success of middle years schooling. Providing appropriate and timely infrastructure redevelopment is an essential precondition if the Four Attributes Model is to be realised and sustained.

The model maybe further restricted when a clear strategic plan underpinning the reform is not evident. Tensions can arise amongst stakeholders if change is perceived as ill-advised, lacking in focus and clarity. Confusion concerning policy and direction emerges within the community which ultimately leads to withdrawal and cessation of involvement. Most importantly the attributes may become lost in such an environment. Therefore, it is imperative that conditions be created for substantive learning concerning the outcome of the reform and strategies to improve relationships amongst all stakeholders.

The next section outlines the enabling conditions that are necessary if the attributes of the middle school teacher are to be realised.

### 10.3.2 Enabling conditions

There are several enabling factors that establish the conditions for the FAM to be realised. To forge a middle school identity, a change plan that is collaborative and collegial needs to be developed if it is to grow and be sustained over the longer term. Hence, a shared vision or shared meaning is a key element in enabling the middle school teacher to demonstrate a capacity to forge a middle school identity. Finding shared meaning goes to the heart of educational change and leads to re-culturing which underpins a teachers’ capacity to forge a middle school identity.

Adhering to a well developed strategy and to uphold an understanding of the change process provides the conditions for the middle school teacher to effectively implement a shared vision of middle schooling philosophy. The middle school teacher needs to elicit supportive
leadership to take the vision beyond traditional boundaries and to overcome the challenges that the change poses.

Central to the realisation of the attributes is a commitment to empowering not only the teacher, but students and parents as well. This power of student, parent and teacher remains an untapped strength which schools are yet to utilize effectively. Community consultation which is open to the ideas and realities of others is a key to success when attempting to forge a middle school identity. Harnessing the energy of the parent, teacher and student and developing a shared vision for the school are essential. This is a key element which is central to the FAM being realised.

These enabling conditions can be seen where new leadership patterns of collaboration, accountability and initiative through leadership, provide the context for teacher empowerment and the taking up of new roles and responsibilities, for the trying of new things, for the taking of risks and for becoming a key player in the reform. Thus, the centrality of the teacher in this reform is recognised.

The enabling factors that establish the condition for the realisation of the FAM and of curriculum change rest on the teacher’s capacity to engage in collaborative forms of curriculum design: curriculum integration, differentiated learning, cooperative learning through small group strategies, negotiated and contract learning. In such conditions the teacher is enabled to advance new knowledge and understanding of early adolescence which will revitalise the middle school learning space.

A culture that is built around a caring supportive environment is an enabling condition allowing the student to feel a strong sense of belonging. In such an environment strong teacher/student relationships are fostered, positioning the teacher to better meet the learning needs of students by tailoring teaching and learning strategies to students’ specific needs.

Transformative leadership (Fullan 2007) by the principal is an enabling condition that is pivotal for the realisation of the attributes. It is a leadership that cultivates a culture of continuous improvement through supportive trusting relationships by persistently focusing on improving quality teaching and learning. In creating such an environment school leadership is providing
opportunities for professional development, participation and shared decision making which will lead teachers to become committed and involved in the change process.

In addition, this enabling condition creates an environment that values lifelong learning. It is an environment that is focused on continuous learning. This involves teachers working collaboratively to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills, in order to be more effective teachers, committed to continuous improvement in student learning. This requires knowledge and understanding of adolescent and child development as well as adult development as a way to create a learning environment that raises productivity while safeguarding human well-being.

A commitment to professional standards is an enabling condition that has the potential to re-culture the school environment into a professional learning organisation. The features of which are the development of accountability and collaborative processes that value consensus solutions to problem solving. The middle school requires high standards of practice from all teachers if improved outcomes are to be realised from this reform. The National Framework for Professional Standards (MCEETYA 2003) for teaching and the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (QCT 2007) can provide the conditions necessary to learn new ways of working together as teachers. Central to the achievement of these attributes are stronger avenues for teacher professional learning that will result in re-culturing the working conditions within which the middle school teacher works.

10.4 Conclusion

The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher is presented in this chapter. The analysis of the main elements embedded within the attributes of the middle school teacher emerged from the micro study of six schools in South-East Queensland which informed the development of the model. Each of the attributes is outlined in a substantive theoretical holistic model representing the main concepts and processes influencing the efficacy of the middle school teacher attributes. Disabling and enabling conditions have been outlined as influencing the teachers in implementing the model successfully.
Chapter 11

The Way Forward

I am a teacher at heart, and I am not naturally drawn to the rough-and-tumble of social change. I would sooner teach than spend my energies helping a movement along and taking the hits that come with it. Yet if I care about teaching, I must care not only for my students and my subject but also for the conditions, inner and outer, that bear on the work teachers do. Finding a place in the movement for educational reform is one way to exercise that larger caring (Palmer 1998:182).

11.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the way forward, implications and recommendations of the findings of the study are outlined. The chapter commences by briefly restating the purpose of the research and the methodology of the study. The relevance of the study to secondary schooling in particular, concerning the middle school teacher is identified and implications of the study concerning the identification of the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM) in South-East Queensland schools are outlined.

Therefore, this chapter:

- presents a summary of the purpose and methodology of the study (11.2);
- presents a summary of the main research findings and their overall importance in relation to the research aims (11.3);
- outlines implications for policy and thereupon recommendations (11.4);
- articulates implications for practice and thereupon recommendations (11.5);
- highlights implications for further research and thereupon recommendations (11.6);
- analyses implications for methodological research (11.7); and
- presents the thesis conclusions (11.8).
11.2 Purpose of the study

The central purpose of the study in search of the middle school teacher was to investigate key stakeholders perspectives of the attributes of the middle school teacher to determine what differentiates the middle school teacher from primary and secondary teachers in the micro-setting of South-East Queensland schools. The study was designed in response to the persistent calls by Barratt (1998), Hill and Russell (1999), Luke (2002), Hargreaves (2003), Smyth (2003), Lovat (2003), Pendergast & Bahr (2005), Bryer and Main (2005), Carrington (2006) and Fullan (2007), who are seeking empirical evidence to support a reconceptualisation of the teacher working in the middle years. The middle years of schooling reform in Australia is intent on pursuing teacher development that best facilitates the transition of young people from childhood to adulthood. This type of teacher development should be responsive to “new times” (Hall 1996:224), where significant change in the social and economic strata of the community is taking place. Many theorists (Luke et al. 2002; Smyth 2003; Smyth & Hattam 2004; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Bahr & Pendergast 2007; Fullan 2007; Nayler 2009) suggest that the need for reform is urgent because the reform of secondary schools in Australia “is one of the most elusive educational issues of our time” (Smyth et al. 2003:177). A key to this reform is the centrality of the teacher of secondary school students, in particular young adolescent students. The case for defining the attributes required of the middle years’ teacher is imperative if education for adolescents is to be reconceptualised. This requires a new position description for secondary/middle school teachers in Australia at a time of national curriculum reform.

Middle schooling as an educational sector is not well established in South-East Queensland and is only a relatively recent development within the Australian educational landscape. Within these developing contexts, the middle school teacher is not differentiated from secondary or primary teachers.

The study, In search of the middle school teacher, is concerned with the different perspectives of the participants and, like the schools with which they work professionally, is a human activity. The personal perspectives of the principals, teachers and students in the different middle school settings, provided insights through which understandings of the desirable traits of the middle years’ teacher could be sought and expressed. Furthermore, these stories made connections between the participants across a variety of school communities in the study. The
data gathered from the interviews were comprehensively analysed to generate meanings relating to the phenomenon of middle school teacher attributes (Strauss & Corbin 1990). To date, limited research has been undertaken on this topic.

11.3 Methodology of the study

_In search of the middle school teacher_ was an inductive inquiry into participant perspectives regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher. The study used a methodology that generated substantive theory rather than one that tested preconceived theories or propositions. Therefore, this project adopted the qualitative methodology of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998), which allowed for the generation of perspectives relating to a multitude of issues that participants were passionate about regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher. Hence, this was a methodology that generated substantive theory which is reliable and responsive to the particular context and the vision of the individual participants (Limerick et al. 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 2003a; O'Donoghue 2007; Morse et al. 2009). A deeper knowledge of participants' perspectives regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher emerged as the data were strategically analysed. This new knowledge will be useful to guide future practices, and as such, is regarded as valuable and considered important in the field (Corbin & Strauss 2008).

The focus of qualitative research is contextual, giving emphasis to the ‘lived’ experience of the participants in free-flowing and open-ended conversations (Fontana & Frey 2005; O'Donohue 2007). However, these conversations were guided by in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the main research method that was used to generate data concerning the perceived attributes of the middle years of schooling teacher. The interviews gave access to knowledge and interpretations that required thorough and systematic procedures to enable analysis and to build theory regarding the middle years’ teacher (Guba & Lincoln 1998; Charmaz 2006; O’Donoghue 2007). Transcriptions of individual interviews provided detailed and critically reflective descriptions of participants’ experience, which indicated their passion and commitment to the research topic. Grounded Theory methodology was particularly appropriate for this study, _In search of the middle school teacher_ because it allows access to a diverse range of perspectives concerning the research focus and enables ‘multiple voices’ to be heard and interpreted conceptually.
The data gathered for the study were generated from principals, teachers and students from Education Queensland, Catholic Systemic and Independent schools in South-East Queensland. Each of the 29 principals and teachers and the 11 student focus groups complemented the enquiry method that captured a wealth of experience and knowledge in the context of the research question being explored. The participants brought to the study comprehensive knowledge and experience concerning the phenomenon of the middle school teacher within their individual school context and of the respective school system organisation. This knowledge included the school’s mission and purpose, knowledge regarding the strategies of working differently with the middle years’ learner, knowledge of self and knowledge of the external influences with consequences for the school (Flick 2006). The analysis of the data findings of the study, presented in detail in Chapters 6-9, contain the analysis as it emerged, generating the core propositions that became apparent from data contained in the forty interview texts.

The choice of Grounded Theory as the preferred methodology was validated by the ease with which participants entered into the process and through their engaging and comprehensive data. The participants generously gave of their time and engaged openly, reflecting their commitment to working with this age group. Moreover, the trust and openness experienced while researching the middle years of schooling teacher will remain a personal and a professional highlight. It became apparent that the participants expected the new and emerging issues evolving from the middle years reform agenda would be addressed, so that the middle school teacher can be sustained and be nurtured to grow.

11.4 Major research findings

The research achieved its aims, which were:

- to differentiate the middle school teacher from other teachers: primary school and secondary school teachers;
- to develop a substantive theory, and consequently, a model that identifies the attributes of the middle school teacher in the micro setting of South-East Queensland.

This research study is responsive to the calls by Barratt (1998), Hill and Russell (1999), Luke (2002), Bryer and Main (2005), Pendergast and Bahr (2005) and informs some of the
identified gaps in the research with its focus on the attributes of the middle years teacher. The wide variation that exists in the definition and implementation of the middle years of schooling philosophy from across different education sectors was evident from the extensive summary and range of the existing literature (Chapter 3). From this literature review it became clear that there was an urgent need for further inquiry to bridge the gaps concerning the effectiveness of the middle years reform, particularly, in relation to the ill-defined attributes of the desirable middle school teacher. Using Grounded Theory methodology was an effective method providing participant perspectives regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher (Chapter 4 and 5). The study outlined and analysed the core propositions as they emerged from the data (Chapter 6-9). Building on this extensive analysis, the study developed a substantive model (theory), the Four Attributes Model (the FAM), to inform research on the middle school teacher (Chapter 10). While the study was uniquely located in South-East Queensland, the elements that emerged as important may be transferable to other schooling situations (Chapter 10). This model provides a new and important portrayal of the ways of working as a middle school teacher.

The knowledge gained regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher can be used to guide action. Generalisation of the model beyond this study is not possible due to the research method adopted hence, no conclusions are made concerning schooling jurisdictions outside the context of this study. However, given the ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon in this inquiry, the reader is invited to facilitate individual analysis and possible application of the model (Strauss & Corbin 1990), as he or she sees fit. In this sense the study is generative not generalisable (Morse et al. 2009).

To provide further confirmation of the relevance of the main elements for understanding the attributes of the middle school teacher, the four attributes model of the middle school teacher was juxtaposed with a range of research literature which provided insights into the usefulness of the model. The model is grounded in the experience and perspective of the participants and is relevant to other situations. This authenticates the validity of the model.

Bryer and Main (2005), concluded from an Australian literature review of middle schooling research that there exists a “practice gap” between the “ideal and the actual” of this middle schooling reform. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps in research by theorising what it
means to be a middle school teacher and to encourage peer-review and discussion, presentations to the educational community in Australia (Aspland & Rumble 2009) and publications in the international context (Rumble & Aspland 2009). In addition, a major report to the participating schools and school system authorities in the study has been prepared.

11.5 Implications for policy

Primarily, this thesis highlights the importance of the changing nature of teachers’ work in the reform of the middle years of schooling in South-East Queensland and parallels the findings of Pendergast et al. (2005). Middle schooling as a movement for change is a relatively recent development within the Australian educational landscape (Barratt 1998). Therefore, the notion of a middle school teacher with their own unique set of attributes is shedding new light on the centrality of the teacher in this reform. The extent is such that it challenges the default position that the attributes of the teacher are generic and not differentiated from other teachers (QCT 2006). The middle schooling philosophy and how this philosophy is being interpreted and implemented in various schooling jurisdictions around the country needs to be understood within the context and conditions of young people in this post millennial time, and in light of the development of the middle years of schooling reform.

The problem posed by this study, *In search of the middle school teacher*, is concerned with creating the conditions that support a different type of teacher, a middle school teacher, a type of teacher who works differently with this age group by being responsive to the distinctive needs and interests of young adolescents. At a time of national curriculum reform in Australia, the emergence of the middle schooling concept is a defining moment, as it has identified for the first time that the young adolescent is someone who is not only “caught in the middle” (Fenwick 1987:3) but is “stuck in the middle” (Luke et al. 2002:134).

If middle schooling reform is to bear fruit in this country, policy makers nationally will need to respond to the reform in such a way that it breathes new hope by advancing the learning capacities of young adolescents. Moreover, it will require teachers to forge new childhood discourses which reconstruct adolescence away from the deficit age-stage, biological narrative that determines adolescence as a time of “storm and stress”, instability and rebellion (Lesko 2001; Patel-Stevens et al 2007). This narrative of adolescence has led to teaching practices preoccupied with control, taming, surveillance and compliance (Connell 1998; Smyth...
et al 2003; Hunter & McDonald 2005; Carrington 2006). To continue to view young adolescents as unfinished and deficient will only further their alienation and disengagement with current teaching and learning practices and schooling philosophies and structures (Hunter & McDonald 2005). Therefore, a new construct is needed to draw on social discourses that focus on the young person’s identity and that position the young adolescent in multiple and less certain ways. The reconstruction of adolescence away from the dominant deficit models is essential if improvement in student performance, engagement, motivation and well-being is to be realised (Hunter & McDonald 2005; Carrington 2006). Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the implication for policy is to reposition the centrality of the teacher to become located within a classroom learning community and to redefine young people as the focus of learning.

11.5.1 Recommendations for policy

The following recommendations are a result of the data analysis (Chapters 6-9) that have been elicited from the perspectives of the participants within each of the core propositions. These recommendations are relevant to the South-East Queensland context, and may be generalised if they are deemed to be of relevance to other education jurisdictions. The recommendations provide a focus for those who are responsible for providing appropriate schooling pathways for young people at the system organisation level of schools.

Based on the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), the recommendations for (i) education systems policy and (ii) school policy are:

(i) Education systems policy

- Develop and articulate an appropriate set of professional standards that support high standards of practice for teachers in the middle years providing the conditions necessary to learn new ways of working as teachers. Such a set of standards needs to incorporate theFAM.
- Build legitimacy and authenticity of the middle years as a distinctive phase of learning, by enabling pedagogical reform to enhance student engagement, motivation, performance and well-being.
- Deploy teachers with specialised knowledge and understanding of early adolescence in the twenty-first century and the skills to lead and teach in the middle years.
• Plan and support the restructuring of the physical environment of secondary schools to include dedicated middle school learning spaces which are well resourced with high quality facilities, and with specialised middle school teachers. In the case of new schools, plan for the inclusion of dedicated middle school centres.

(ii) Schools policy

• Provide the infrastructure and resources for continuous teacher learning to enhance teacher knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, assessment and knowledge of broader educational issues, policies and theories to improve adolescent learning outcomes.
• Provide strategic financial resources to support evidence-based research into the efficacy of the middle school teacher attributes.
• Facilitate partnerships between community organisations and higher education providers to ensure teachers in the middle years have access to the technologies and skills that they need to succeed in advancing this reform of the middle years.
• Provide opportunities for the school community to participate in authentic educational decision making.
• Provide a safe learning environment for teacher innovation and reform of learning in the middle years.
• Develop new patterns of leadership that empower the middle years’ teacher to lead this reform through the adoption of new roles and responsibilities in the design of curriculum.
• Build and support teachers’ capacity to innovate through evidenced-based practice.

A fundamental ingredient for improved student learning outcomes is quality teaching and learning. This study indicated that teachers and principals do not need to be convinced of the middle years of schooling approach to learning, but they require policy changes of this type if the findings of this study are to be enacted.

11.6 The implications for practice

The empirical literature focusing on the young adolescent learner, overwhelmingly cite student alienation, disengagement and disenfranchisement from classroom learning as the primary concerns driving middle school reform. Carrington (2006) argues, students:
May well be physically present in classrooms, but many of them are ‘absent’ in ways that range from passivity and disinterest, through disruptive behaviour and violence, to truancy and early school leaving (2006: 90).

This disengagement has resulted in a significant dip in student performance with a parallel decline in quality teaching and learning practices (Luke et al. 2002; Carrington 2006; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; Pendergast et al. 2005; Hayes et al. 2006). Therefore, as this study highlights the reconstitution of teachers’ work and the focus on the middle school teacher is important, not only to recognise the middle years as a critical stage of learning, but to arrest adolescent decline in performance, motivation, early school leaving and well-being (Smyth et al. 2000; Smyth & Hattam 2004; Smyth 2006, Carrington 2006; Yates & McLeod 2007). As this study has found, some current teaching and learning practices do not align with the needs of the young adolescent learner. Furthermore, the empirical literature (Lingard et al 2001; Luke et al. 2002; Carrington 2006; Whitehead 2006; Pendergast et al. 2005; Pendergast & Bahr 2007; Rumble & Aspland 2009) confirms many contemporary classroom practices are not responsive to the needs and interests of these students. As a result these students are inadequately prepared for a world that is undergoing unprecedented social, cultural, economic and technological change.

11.6.1 Recommendations for practice
The following recommendations are a result of the data analysis (Chapters 6-9) that have been elicited from the perspectives of the participants within each of the core propositions. These recommendations are relevant to the South-East Queensland context, and may be generalised if they are deemed to be of relevance to other education jurisdictions. The recommendations provide a focus for policy makers, teacher practitioners and inquirers who are responsible for the delivery of appropriate curriculum experiences for young people at the level of the local school community. The recommendations are grouped into four categories: organisational, teaching and learning, parent communication and the higher educator sector.

Based on the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), the recommendations for improved organisational practice are:

- Leaders and administrators to understand how different teacher expertise is valued and developed in school organisations and deploy middle school teachers using
theFAM to support the middle years learner and to improve student learning outcomes.

- Leaders and administrators develop and understand the importance of having a shared vision.
- School Boards/Councils set aside funds in the school budgeting process to provide scholarships/bursaries/financial assistance to support middle school teachers in their continuous learning toward an accredited credential in the middle years.

Based on the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), the recommendations for improved practice in teaching and learning are:

- Teachers and support staff develop new ways of framing adolescence, moving away from deficit understandings of adolescence.
- Heads of curriculum and teachers collaboratively coordinate curriculum development that is wholesome, integrated, differentiated, negotiated and inquiry based, organised around the students’ life-worlds, so as to enhance learning engagement and to improve student learning performance.
- Heads of curriculum and teachers develop authentic assessment tasks aligned with the curriculum design and pedagogy which are intellectually challenging and relevant to the lives of students.
- Heads of Middle School assign each student a pastoral mentor who is an advocate for the young student. Teachers demonstrate a desire and passion, specialist capabilities, dedication and commitment to working in the middle years and instilling the attributes of lifelong learning, resilience and love of learning in the middle years learner.
- Heads of Middle School and teachers develop and nurture school-wide teaching teams:
  - provide the structural capacity for teaching teams to have common planning time and flexible blocks of learning time;
  - provide for continuity of teaching teams and student composition of teams through looping: allowing teams to sustain their learning impact for at least two to four years enabling students and teachers to deepen their knowledge of and trust in each other, thereby creating a powerful small learning community.
• Heads of middle school and teachers with the school executive leadership develop and design dedicated middle school learning spaces that value learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning by:
  ➢ creating open learning environments that facilitate autonomous and independent learning;
  ➢ structuring open learning environments that are welcoming, flexible, mobile and conducive to displaying student work;
  ➢ providing for independent and small group activity areas in the learning centre by outfitting the learning centre with innovative non-fixed furniture and colour-appropriate furnishings;
  ➢ provide, adjacent to each learning centre, an enclosed annexe with an interactive whiteboard and with a one-way observation mirror; (the annexe ideally accommodates up to 20 students for tutorials and teacher directed learning);
  ➢ outfit each learning centre and annexe with wireless lap top technology, sound system, soft lighting and natural lighting, appropriate climate control, and room security.

Based on the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), the recommendations for improved practice in teachers’ continuous professional learning are:

• Teachers to be provided with and understand the need for continuous professional learning and reflective practice on learning to inform pedagogical practice in areas of teacher teaming, curriculum design, authentic assessment, working with difference, adolescent and child development, modelling lifelong learning attributes.
• Heads of Middle School coordinate regular school based professional development opportunities through observing each others’ classroom practice and to engage in peer observation and feedback and self evaluation of learning.
• Heads of Middle School provide each beginning and new middle school teacher with a mentor for 12 months to assist the middle school teacher in their knowledge and understanding of the middle school, its procedures and policies, curriculum and assessment practices.
• Head of Middle School and mentor provide timely feedback to the new and beginning middle school teacher culminating in a report at the end of 12 months from their mentor.
This report is obtained through a three-way conference with the middle school teacher, mentor and Head of Middle School appraising the middle school teacher’s capabilities, identifying teacher goals and suggesting recommendations for improvement.

- Heads of Middle School develop and implement a school based induction program for beginning and new middle school teachers. It is recommended that:
  - A 10-12 hour non-negotiable professional learning program focusing on adolescence, how to create middle school learning spaces, teacher teaming, integrated curriculum, beliefs and philosophy,
  - Professional Development be delivered in mixed mode: face-to-face and on-line, and a journal of their induction experience.
  - Make reflective practice compulsory and structured for teachers. Teachers will be introduced to the value of journaling and invited to keep a journal of their induction experience.
  - Award an accreditation certificate awarded on completion as evidence of the compulsory professional development hours required of the teacher.

Based on the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), the recommendations for improved practice in parent communication are:

- Heads of Middle School and teachers develop strategies that facilitate direct and open communication with parents, to establish trust and respect, and to ease the transition from primary school to middle school. To enhance effective communication between school and home, mechanisms such as emails, phone messages with invitations to return the call and developing parent programs can close the gap between school and home.
- Provide regular classroom ‘expos’ that engage parents in students’ learning by enabling parents to play a central role in their child’s learning and making the middle school classroom ‘parent friendly’ will enhance teacher/parent communication.

Based on the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), the recommendations for improved practice in the higher education sector are:

- Develop specialist middle years teacher education programs (undergraduate and graduate) which focus on philosophy, pedagogical and assessment practices,
curriculum design, adolescence and youth culture, technology, literacy and numeracy, and a knowledge of broader educational issues to inform best practice in the middle years.

- Implement specialised teacher education programs that prepare teachers to design and implement innovative pedagogies.
- Undertake research relating to the identity of the middle years teacher to inform the education of teachers.
- Develop and initiate cooperative partnerships with schools to inform middle years best practice and to provide support as a site for further research in the efficacy of the middle school teacher attributes.

The evident decline in quality teaching and learning in the middle years provides a strong justification for continued focus on how to improve and better support the middle school teacher. The findings of this research study, through the FAM, provided an argument that it is quality teaching, innovative curriculum design, advocacy for the middle years learner and continuous professional learning that are the critical factors in improving learning outcomes of young adolescents – all of which are necessary for effectively implementing middle school reform (Whitehead 2000; Luke et al. 2002; Pendergast & Bahr 2005; MYSA 2008).

11.7 Implications for further research

This thesis presents a substantive model of teacher attributes - The Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM). The FAM informs the gap in the theoretical literature by providing a substantive model of the attributes of the middle school teacher based on the perspectives of principals, teachers and students in the micro setting of South-East Queensland. More extensive research will be required to determine the relevance of this model in other education jurisdictions. Furthermore, the need to do a longitudinal study evaluating the authenticity of the model across sector contexts is recommended.

The expanding interest, highlighted in this thesis, into middle schooling at the policy formation level across all states and territories suggests that middle schooling is not a ‘passing fad’ but rather is firmly part of the new Australian educational landscape (Pendergast et al. 2007; Nayler 2009). All the policy directions firmly enunciate the aim of improving the learning
outcomes of the middle years’ learner through innovative curriculum design that will diminish student alienation and disengagement. However, the effectiveness of the middle schooling initiatives in various jurisdictions, in achieving the stated aims of middle schooling needs more investigation to ensure that future policy development is evidenced based.

11.8 Implications for methodological research

This thesis used a qualitative inductive inquiry approach to develop theory regarding the attributes of the middle school teacher (Strauss Corbin 1990, 1998). There are few middle years of schooling studies using Grounded Theory as a research methodology. This approach has been used to develop theory concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher, pointing to what differentiates the middle school teacher from other teachers: primary school teachers and secondary school teachers. In adopting the comparative analysis approach, as through the use of Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998), the study provided a detailed description of the everyday world of middle years teachers from the perspectives of principals, teachers and students. The study improved knowledge and understanding of the context of middle years of schooling and for change to be successful, the perspectives of the people involved in implementation must be understood (Hammersley 1993; Fullan 2007).

The methodology chosen for this inquiry has provided participants with the opportunity to share personal experiences of their professional reality as middle school leaders, teachers and students (Denzin & Lincoln 2008a). The disclosure of professional narratives in the context of interviews has enabled the reporting of these participants’ experiences to contribute to a collective educational review of the work and positioning of the middle school teacher in specific context. It has provided the basis on which different perspectives are able to contribute to findings that inform those engaged in the reform of the middle years of schooling. Therefore, this thesis makes an important contribution to the knowledge and application of using Grounded Theory research methodology in an education context.

11.9 Thesis Conclusions

The study was designed to investigate key stakeholders perspectives concerning the attributes of the middle school teacher and to determine what differentiates the middle school
teacher from primary and secondary school teachers in the micro-setting of South-East Queensland schools. Although the middle years of schooling have become an important site for research, policy making and reform, there is a gap in understanding the nature of, in particular, the articulated attributes of an effective middle school teacher, has remained under researched. This study has addressed this oversight.

The methodology of Grounded Theory interrogates the perspectives of key stakeholders (principals, teachers and students) which led to the generation of four propositions. These propositions are instrumental for advocating middle school reform. They include:

1. It is the perspective of stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to forge a middle school identity;
2. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers must be adept as designers of a wholesome curriculum;
3. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers must be specialists in the study of adolescence; and
4. It is the perspective of key stakeholders that middle school teachers demonstrate a capacity to sustain the middle years' reform.

These theoretical propositions underpin the conceptualisation of the Four Attributes Model of the Middle School Teacher (theFAM), which consists of four key attributes and a set of elements implicit to each attribute.

Such findings are the key to the reform of policy and practices that shape middle years reform in South-East Queensland. If such findings can be actualised, it can be argued that the learning experiences of young adolescents in South-East Queensland will be enriched and students at risk of alienation and disengagement will be minimised.
Chapter 12

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Appendix A

Barbara Palmer
Manager, Office of Research

October 28, 2008

Associate Professor Juhani Tuovinen
Faculty of Science, Health and Education

Mr Paul Rumble
61 Alfriston Drive
Buderim Qld 4556

Dear Juhani and Paul

EXPEDITED ETHICS APPROVAL FOR AMENDED RESEARCH PROJECT – In search of the middle school teacher (5/07/100)

This letter is to confirm that on 28 October 2008 the Chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Sunshine Coast granted expedited ethics approval for an amendment to the project, In search of the middle school teacher (5/07/100).

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Sunshine Coast will ratify this approval at its meeting of 25 November 2008.

The amendment of the project relates to an extension of ethics approval until 31 December 2009.

The conditions for ethics approval for this project as outlined in our letter of 27 June 2007 continue to apply.

If you have any queries in relation to this matter or if you require further information please contact me by email at humanethics@usc.edu.au or by telephone on (07) 5459 4574.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Palmer
Manager
Office of Research
Appendix B

Letter to Sunshine Coast Regional Executive Director and Brisbane Catholic Education Executive Director

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

TITLE OF PROJECT
In Search of the Middle School Teacher
The function of the middle school teacher in schools on the Sunshine Coast from the perspectives of administrators, teachers and students.

Faculty of Science, Health & Education

Ethics approval number: S/07/100

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Juhani Tuovinen
Director Education Programs
Faculty of Science, Health & Education
University of the Sunshine Coast
Maroochydore DC Qld 4558
P: 07 5459 4580
F: 07 5430 2881
E: jtuovine@usc.edu.au

Principal Inquirer: Paul Rumble
61 Alfriston Drive
Buderim Qld 4556
P: 07 5477 7473
M: 0405 440 499
E: prumble@usc.edu.au or PaulR@ges.net.au

The aims of this research is principally gathering information about the function of the middle school teacher. Through the conducting of semi structured interviews with teachers and administrators, student focus groups in Year 7, 9 and 11, school and system document analysis and surveys will provide data to analyse the function of the middle school teacher. The research hopes to identify and clarify the attributes of the middle school teacher, what differentiates them from other teachers within the school. It will address the organizational and training (professional development) factors that either support or hinder effective practice of the middle school teacher in the schools of the Sunshine Coast.

Since 2000 there have been significant position papers from the government and non government sectors focusing on the evolution of the middle school teacher. During this short time some schools have identified the middle school as Year 6 to 9 with specific emphasis on meeting the learning needs of early adolescents. I am seeking participants willing to be interviewed about their current experience and practice of the middle school teacher and its future developments. In addition I hope to interview students as part of a series of focus groups about how they perceive the function of the middle school teacher. In 2008 with the assistance of the document analysis and the interviews, a survey will be developed and participants invited to complete which will identify and clarify further those attributes of the middle school teacher. Invitations to participate in this project are being extended to all Principals, Administrators and teachers presently involved Years 6 to 9. Invitation to students will be limited to Year 7, 9 and 11, where I focus group of 6 students from each of the cohort groups.
The approximate number of teacher/administrator interviews required for this project is 30, five from each school with one (1) focus group of students in Year 7, 9 and 10/11. A stratified random selection process will be used to determine the interviewees from the total number of volunteers. In this process, names of the volunteers and the respective schools will be coded to ensure identities are not revealed. What will be revealed is the respective system of schools, that is, similarities or differences which might exist between government, independent and Catholic systemic schools. All who volunteer will receive communication regarding the outcome of the random selection process.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and neither the principal nor the school will be identified in my reporting on the project, or in any publication of papers that result from the findings.

It is hoped that this research will be of benefit to participants, offering an opportunity to express opinion and suggestions, a professional exchange in an open environment and providing a forum for sharing information about future directions. The inquirer is hopeful that data about the middle school teacher will increase knowledge and awareness for whole school improvement and ultimately contribute to a more effective middle school with the deployment of those teachers who have the attributes in this emerging tier/level of schooling. A significant part of the research will be a comparative analysis between the data that emerges in the interviews, the school/system documentation and surveys. It will be the interconnection and correlation between the interviews, surveys and the documentation that will become the substance of the research report.

An assurance is offered that a participant in this research is voluntary and participants/schools/systems are able to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or prejudice.

The University of the Sunshine Coast is the primary site for this research. The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the university.

Should there be any questions concerning this research project please direct them to Principal Investigator, Associate Professor Juhani Tuovinen at the above address.

If you agree to give consent for this research to be carried out in your system of schools in the Sunshine Coast region, please reply in writing by Friday 23 March 2007 to the Principal Inquirer Paul Rumble at the above address.

The University of the Sunshine Coast and I thank you in anticipation for your support and assistance in this research project – In Search of the Middle school Teacher.

Sincerely,

Paul Rumble
March 2007
17 April 2007

Mr Paul Rumble
61 Alfriston Drive
Buderim QLD 4556

Dear Mr Rumble

Thank you for your application seeking approval to conduct research titled “In Search of the Middle School Teacher” in nominated Sunshine Coast North District State Schools. I wish to advise that your application has been approved.

This approval means that you can approach the Principal at [blank] and invite them to participate in your research project. As detailed in the research guidelines:

- You need to obtain consent from the relevant principals before your research project can commence.
- Principals have the right to decline participation if they consider that the research will cause undue disruption to educational programs in their schools.
- Principals have the right to monitor any research activities conducted in their facilities and can withdraw their support at any time.

At the conclusion of your study, you are required to provide the Department of Education, Training and the Arts with a summary of your research results and any published paper resulting from this study. A summary of your research findings should also be forwarded to participating principals.

Please note that this letter constitutes approval to invite principals to participate in the research project as outlined in your research application. This approval does not constitute support for the general and commercial use of an intervention or curriculum program, software program or other enterprise that you may be evaluating as part of your research.

Should you require further information on the research application process please feel free to contact me on 5470 8901.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Innes
Executive Director (Schools)
Sunshine Coast North District

Sunshine Coast North District Office
Cornacxy Square Building
52-64 Court Street, Nambour
PO Box 709, Nambour
Queensland 4560, Australia
Telephone: 061 7 5470 8900
Facsimile: 061 7 5470 8990
Website: www.education.qld.gov.au
ABN 76 337 643 647

In search of the Middle school teacher - Appendices
Appendix D.1

243 Gladstone Road, Dutton Park,
P.O. Box 1201 Brisbane 4001 Australia
Phone: (07) 3840 0400 - Fax: (07) 3844 5101
http://www.bne.catholic.edu.au

A11.071 GR
24 April 2007

Mr Paul Rumble
61 Alfriston Drive
Buderim QLD 4556

Dear Mr Rumble

Thank you for your email regarding permission to approach a Brisbane Catholic Education school for your project on "In Search of the Middle School Teacher". Permission is granted to approach [REDACTED] within the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

I would ask you to contact the principal of the school seeking its involvement in the project.

Please note that participation in your study is at the discretion of the principal.

If you have any further queries, please contact me on (07) 3033 7427.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Mrs Geraldine Rallos
A/Research Coordinator
Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane
Appendix D.2

A11.071 GR
24 April 2007

Mr Paul Rumble
61 Afiriston Drive
BUDERIM QLD 4556

Dear Mr Rumble

Thank you for your email regarding permission to approach a Brisbane Catholic Education school for your project on 'In Search of the Middle School Teacher'. Permission is granted to approach within the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

I would ask you to contact the principal of the school seeking its involvement in the project.

Please note that participation in your study is at the discretion of the principal.

If you have any further queries, please contact me on (07) 3033 7427.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Geraldine Rallos
A/Research Coordinator
Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane
Appendix E

Letter to Principals, Administrators, Teachers & Students

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

TITLE OF PROJECT
In Search of the Middle School Teacher
The function of the middle school teacher in schools on the Sunshine Coast from the perspectives of administrators, teachers and students.

Faculty of Science, Health & Education

Ethics approval number: S/07/100

Chief Investigator:
Associate Professor Juhani Tuovinen
Director Education Programs
Faculty of Science, Health & Education
University of the Sunshine Coast
Maroochydore DC Qld 4558
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F: 07 5430 2881
E: jtuovine@usc.edu.au

Principal Inquirer:
Paul Rumble
61 Alfriston Drive
Buderim Qld 4556
P: 07 5477 7473
M: 0405 440 499
E: prumble@usc.edu.au or PaulR@ges.net.au

The aims of this research include gathering information about the function of the middle school teacher by conducting semi structured interviews, school and system document analysis and surveys that will focus on the function of the middle school teacher. The research hopes to identify and clarify the attributes of the middle school teacher, what differentiates them from teachers within the school. It will address the organizational and training (professional development) factors that either support or hinder effective practice of the middle school teacher in the schools of the Sunshine Coast.

Since 2000 there have been significant position papers from the government and non government sectors focusing on the evolution of the middle school teacher. During this short time some schools have identified the middle school as Year 6 to 9 with specific emphasis on meeting the learning needs of early adolescents. I am seeking participants willing to be interviewed about their current experience and practice of the middle school teacher and its future developments. In addition, I hope to interview students as part of a series of focus groups about how they perceive the function of the middle school teacher. In 2008 with the assistance of the document analysis and the interviews, a survey will be developed and participants invited to complete which will identify and clarify further those attributes of the middle school teacher. Invitations to participate in this project are being extended to all principals, administrators and teachers presently involved in Years 6 to 9. Invitation to students will be limited to Year 7, 9 and 11, where I focus group of 6 students from each of the cohort groups.
The approximate number of teacher/administrator interviews required for this project is 30, five from each school with one (1) focus group of students in Year 7, 9 and 10/11. A stratified random selection process will be used to determine the interviewees from the total number of volunteers. In this process, names of the volunteers and the respective schools will be coded to ensure identities are not revealed. What will be revealed is the respective system of schools, that is, similarities or differences which might exist between government, independent and Catholic systemic schools. All who volunteer will receive communication regarding the outcome of the random selection process.

It is hoped that this research will be of benefit to participants, offering an opportunity to express opinion and suggestions, a professional exchange in an open environment and providing a forum for sharing information about future directions. The inquirer is hopeful that data about the middle school teacher will increase knowledge and awareness for whole school improvement and ultimately contribute to a more effective middle school with the deployment of those teachers who have the attributes in this emerging tier/level of schooling. A significant part of the research will be a comparative analysis between the data that emerges in the interviews, the school/system documentation and surveys. It will be the interconnection and correlation between the interviews, surveys and the documentation that will become the substance of the research report.

An assurance is offered that a participant in this research is voluntary and participants/schools/systems are able to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or prejudice.

The University of the Sunshine Coast is the primary site for this research. The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the university.

If you have any complaints about the way this research project is being conducted you can either raise them with the Chief Investigator or, if you prefer an independent person, contact the Chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Sunshine Coast: (c/- The Academic Administration Officer, Teaching and Research Services, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore DC 4558; telephone (07) 5459 4574; facsimile (07) 5459 4727; e-mail humanethics@usc.edu.au

If after having some time to think about it you decide you would like to participate in this research project please complete the Participant Data Information Form and sign the Consent to Participate in Research Form and have it witnessed. Retain copies for your records and return the forms in the envelope provided. Your response by TBA 2007 would be appreciated as it is planned to commence the study shortly.

The University of the Sunshine Coast and I thank you in anticipation for your support and assistance in this research project – In Search of the Middle school Teacher.

Sincerely,
Paul Rumble
March 2007
Appendix F

Teachers, Principals, Administrators (Colour coded)

Consent to Participate in Research

TITLE OF PROJECT
In Search of the Middle School Teacher
The function of the middle school teacher in schools on the Sunshine Coast from the perspectives of administrators, teachers and students.

Faculty of Science, Health & Education

Chief Investigator:       Associate Professor Juhani Tuovinen
Principal Inquirer:       Paul Rumble

I ____________________________ (the participant) have read and understand the contents of the Research Project Information Sheet for the research project and this Consent to Participate in Research Form. I agree to participate in the research study titled ‘In Search of the Middle School Teacher’ and give my consent freely. I understand that the interviews will be audio taped and transcribed and be available for my perusal and verification. I understand that the study will be carried out as described on the Research Project Information Sheet, a copy of which I have kept. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate is my decision and will not affect my present school situation. I also realise that I can withdraw from the study/project at any time and that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. Any questions I had about this research project and my participation in it have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and participants/schools/systems are able to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or prejudice.

In addition, I understand that all information obtained from me or pertaining to me will be kept strictly confidential to the research team and that there will be no means of identifying me personally as a research participant in any publication, presentation or other means arising from the research. Further, that I will be provided with a summary of the results of the research.

Name of Participant: ____________________________________________________________
(Please PRINT)

Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________

Name of Witness: ____________________________________________________________
(Please PRINT)

Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________

Please return in envelope provided by Friday 29 June 2007
Appendix G

Participant's Data Information - Teacher

TEACHER PARTICIPANT DATA INFORMATION
(For subgroup random selection)

TITLE OF PROJECT
In Search of the Middle School Teacher
The function of the middle school teacher in schools on the Sunshine Coast from the perceptions of administrators, teachers and students.

School: ___________________________________________
Address: _______________________________________________________________________
Suburb: ___________________________ Postcode: ____________
Telephone: ______________________ Email: __________________________

1. I am a middle school teacher/Principal/Deputy/AP/Head MS in an (circle one)

2. My school is (circle one)

3. My position is (circle one)

4. Middle School teachers Indicate which Year level
If other please specify _____________________________________________

5. How many years have you served in this position? [ ]

6. CIRCLE THE BOX THAT BEST REPRESENTS YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER
   “The emerging position of the middle school teacher is a positive development in education in Australia”

   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I have read and understood the subject Information Statement, the Participant Data Information Statement and The Consent to Participate in Research Form and I understand the purpose and risks of the research.
Name: ___________________________________________ Date: __________________
Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: ________________

Please return in envelope provided by TBA 2007
Appendix H

Participant's Data Information - Student

STUDENT PARTICIPANT DATA INFORMATION
(For Focus Group random selection)

TITLE OF PROJECT
In Search of the Middle School Teacher
The function of the middle school teacher in schools on the Sunshine Coast from the perceptions of administrators, teachers and students.

School: ____________________________________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________________________________
Suburb: ____________________________________________________________________ Postcode: __________
Telephone: ____________________________________________________________________ Email: ___________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I am a student of an (circle one)</th>
<th>Ed Qld School</th>
<th>Independent School</th>
<th>Catholic Systemic School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. My school is (circle one)</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>P-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. I am in Year (circle one)</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
<th>Year 10</th>
<th>Year 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I have read and understood the subject Information Statement, the Participant Data Information Statement and the Consent to Participate in Research Form and I understand the purpose and risks of the research.

Name: ____________________________________________________________________
Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________
Parent/carer(s) Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Please return in envelope provided by TBA 2007
Appendix I
Student participants (colour coded)

Consent to Participate in Research

TITLE OF PROJECT
In Search of the Middle School Teacher
The function of the middle school teacher in schools on the Sunshine Coast from the perspectives of administrators, teachers and students.

Faculty of Science, Health & Education

Chief Investigator:  Associate Professor Juhani Tuovinen
Principal Inquirer:  Paul Rumble

I _____________________________________ (the participant) have read and understand the contents of the Research Project Information Sheet for the research project and this Consent to Participate in Research Form. I agree to participate in the research study titled ‘In Search of the Middle School Teacher’ and give my consent freely. I understand that the interviews will be audio taped. I understand that the study will be carried out as described on the Research Project Information Sheet, a copy of which I have kept. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate is my decision and will not affect my present school situation in any way. I also realise that I can withdraw from the study/project at any time and that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. Any questions I had about this research project and my participation in it have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and participants are able to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or prejudice.

In addition, I understand that all information obtained from me or pertaining to me will be kept strictly confidential to the research team and that there will be no means of identifying me personally as a research participant in any publication, presentation or other means arising from the research. Further, that the school will be provided with a summary of the results of the research.

Name of Student _______________________________ Year Level: 7 9 10 11  (circle)
(Please PRINT)

Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: ___________

Parent/Caregiver/s: ________________________________________________
(Please PRINT)

Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: ___________

Please return in envelope provided by Friday 29 June 2007
Appendix J

Interview Questions
(Semi Structured Interview)

PRINCIPALS/AP’s/HEADS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. Describe the original/ideal vision for the middle school teacher position.
2. To what extent has the ideal vision for the middle school been realised?
3. Tell me from your experience what have you observed about the needs of the middle school student?
4. What have you observed about the role/qualities/dispositions/attitudes of an ideal middle school teacher?
5. What about other aspects of the role and function of the middle school teacher in your school: are they different to teachers in the primary and senior phases of learning?
6. What has been your approach to the middle years of schooling (eg. structural organisation, curriculum)?
7. How successful has this initiative been in contributing to better social and academic student outcomes? What evidence can you point to?
8. What mechanisms do you see supporting the Middle School teacher?
9. What factors do you see that restrict the impact of the Middle School teacher?
10. Tell me about your school initiatives for the middle years of schooling (eg. timetabling, staffing, teacher teaming)?
11. Any other comments, observations or information about the middle school teacher for the Sunshine Coast Region of Schools/Brisbane Catholic Education/Independent schools? e.g. what further changes/adjustments/ supports would you envisage introducing as a result of this critical reflection?
Appendix K

Interview questions
(Semi Structured Interview)

Middle School Teachers Year 6-9

1. Tell me about your role and function as a middle school teacher in your school. Who determined such a role and function and did you have any say in it?

2. Tell me about your role as a middle school teacher and your personal and professional relationship with your colleague non-middle school teachers, both within the senior phases of learning as well as in the primary phases.

3. What middle years of schooling signifying practices do you use in your classroom (eg integrated curriculum, teacher teaming, negotiated learning etc)? Explain.

4. What benefits have you seen in terms of student learning as a result of these initiatives? What evidence do you have for this?

5. What have been some of the shortcomings of these initiatives? How might you see them being addressed?

6. What benefits have you seen in terms of teacher learning as a result of these initiatives?

7. What is it like working as you do as a member of a teaching team? Relationships? Knowledge base? Personal and professional satisfaction?

8. What hopes and dreams do you have as a middle school teacher?

9. What fears/anxieties/concerns do you have as a middle school teacher?

10. Tell me about what factors draw you towards being a teacher of the middle years and especially of young adolescent learners?

11. I invite you to comment on the relationship between the leadership of the school and the middle school teacher. (This matter and your response will be treated with confidentiality and no names will be used in my analysis of your data).

12. What factors in your school do you see as supporting the Middle School teacher?

13. What factors in your school do you see as restricting the impact of the middle school teacher and which you would like to change?

14. As a result of this critical reflection are there any other comments, observations or information that you would share with me about your role and performance as a middle school teacher for the Sunshine Coast Region of Schools/Brisbane Catholic Education schools/Independent schools?
Appendix L

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
(Semi Structured Interviews)

Student Focus Groups Year 7, 9, & 11

1. Tell me about your middle school. What do you like about it? What is the best thing that stands out from all the rest about your Middle School?

2. If there was one thing you could change about your middle school what would that be?

3. Do you think or feel that your teachers enjoy teaching you? What evidence do you have for this?

4. Is there a difference in the way the middle school teacher does things to what you were used to in the primary or other school?

5. Tell me is there one thing about your middle school teachers that stands out from all the rest that helps you learn? What is it? How would you describe it?

6. Do your middle school teachers give you a say in your learning program?

7. Tell me about your learning space (classroom): does it make you feel good/learn better? What is it about the space that makes you feel good/learn better?

8. What are the qualities of a good middle school teacher in your eyes? What special qualities do you see in your best middle-school teacher?

9. What are the things you do not want to see in your middle school teachers?

10. What is your attitude towards learning – do you like it, do you look forward to learning new things, what makes you interested in learning?

11. Do you think of teachers as learners? Can you give examples?

12. As a result of this critical reflection, are there any other comments, observations or information about middle school teachers in your school that you would like to make.