MCI04044

'You have to view the child as a person and not a commodity': Schools reinventing themselves for young adolescents

Peter McInerney

School of Education, Flinders University

and

John Smyth

Texas State University, San Marcos

Paper presented at the

Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)

Annual Conference, Melbourne, 29 November–3 December 2004

Correspondence:

Dr Peter McInerney

Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching

School of Education

Flinders University

GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, SA, 5001

Email: peter.mcinerney@flinders.edu.au

‘You have to view the child as a person and not a commodity’: Schools reinventing themselves for young adolescents

Abstract

There is alarming evidence that schooling is not working for many young adolescents—most notably those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although many factors are invoked to explain the alienation and disengagement of young adolescents, research suggests that there is a mismatch between the organisation and curriculum of the middle years of schooling and the intellectual, social and emotional needs of young people (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000). In particular, there is a lack of understanding of adolescent identity and the issues that affect young people. Drawing on a three year ARC Discovery project, this paper describes the ways in which a number of schools are engaging with and against policy discourse to reinvent themselves as more inclusive and learner-centered organisations that take seriously the issues and concerns of young people. Narratives portraits of school personnel will shed light on the cultural and structural elements of school reform in the middle years and the ways in which teachers are reinventing themselves to build ‘geographies of trust’ (Scott, 1999) and ‘capacity building’ relationships (Lingard, 2004).

Introduction

This paper is very much ‘work in progress’—a first run at some reflections from an ARC-funded project which aimed to identify the educational provisions that enable young adolescents to navigate successful pathways from school to satisfying and fulfilling lives. Our particular interest is the ways in which a number of South Australian government schools and teachers are responding to the issues of alienation, disengagement and educational disadvantage experienced by many young adolescents. To this extent, our attention is focused most specifically on the middle years of schooling—generally regarded as years 6–9. Against a backdrop of falling retention rates and concerns about curriculum relevance, we want to pursue two questions—one related to whole school reform and the other to teacher identity:

- How are schools reinventing themselves as more inclusive and learner-centred organisations? and;
- How are teachers reinventing themselves for young adolescents?

The paper is divided into five sections. Firstly, we explore the background to the research issue and the policy response. We locate the issues if alienation and disadvantage within the sociology of high schools and describe the technologies of exclusion resulting from globalization and neo-liberal reform. We raise some concerns about the adequacy of current middle school responses to these issues. Secondly, we describe research project in some

detail, including the research questions, the features of the participating schools and the research methods. Thirdly, we discuss the cultural and structural aspects of school reform in the middle years and give a specific example of an innovative approach to student initiated curriculum. Fourthly, we focus on the issues confronting teachers working with, and for, young people in the middle years. Here we draw quite extensively on excerpts from narrative portraits of middle school teachers from the project schools. Fifthly, we raise some points for discussion regarding the future directions of middle schooling.

Background to the research issue

Technologies of exclusion

Evidence from Australia and overseas suggests that schooling is not working for many young adolescents—especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds in metropolitan and rural areas (Smyth, Hattam, Canon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000; Smyth & Down, 2004). Several factors are invoked to explain the lack of success and alienation experienced by young adolescents—irrelevant curriculum, inflexible learning environments, a disjuncture between the values of home and school, high levels of poverty, lack of community infrastructure, absence of positive role models and supportive individuals to provide guidance, and poor relationships with teachers and/or peers. What is abundantly clear is that there is often a mismatch between the organisation and curriculum of schools and the educational expectations, needs and aspirations of young people. A student summed up his experience of high school as follows:

> In a typical lesson you sit there and copy stuff from the board … There's no teacher–student relationship at all where they can come in and work together to achieve a common goal which is the student learning … [There's] a corridor with classrooms, chairs in rows, a teacher and a whiteboard up front which isn't really an area which is going to engage students in learning ... There's no individuality in what you need to learn and what, and what is the best way for you to learn it. If you're not capable of sitting there with a pad and a pen and copy and doing what you've been told, then you're not, in their eyes, you're not learning … you're going to fail … The biggest problem isn't that students are failing schools … it's that the school is failing the student [although] they don't want to see it that way. The student failed school; the school never fails the student. The system is always right. The system is never wrong. (James, 25 February 2003)

According to James, the system is failing the student. Perhaps he is right. Traditional high schools have not always served adolescents particularly well. Learning is often fragmented into subjects and insulated from the emotional lives of young people. In many instances students don't have the time or opportunity to develop close relationships with teachers and

peers. Many feel lost and out-of-place in large schools where hierarchical arrangements often inhibit student voice. Technologies of exclusion operating through sorting and streaming practices and inflexible behaviour management policies tend to reinforce the practices of exclusion that are writ large in the lives of many students. Lacking the social capital of middle-class Australians, many indigenous/working class students experience the 'deepening divide' (Gilbert, 2000) of an education system which still tends to favour the rich and the powerful through the maintenance of a hegemonic curriculum (Connell, 2002), inflexible pedagogical practices and discriminatory testing regimes. This is most evident in high schools where hierarchical relations of power operate through tertiary selection processes that help to sustain stratification of educational opportunity (Tesse, 1998).

Hegemony is sustained in other ways as well. Although teachers invariably bring their unique histories to their pedagogies, their identity undergoes various reconstructions in the course of changing teaching contexts. High schools tend to be faculty-orientated and many teachers seem to show greater loyalty to their subject than to students. Newly appointed middle school teachers, who attempt to broaden curriculum perspectives and experiment with constructivist approaches to learning, often feel the pressure from conservative colleagues and curriculum accountability processes (Agee, 2004).

But the issue goes well beyond schools. Practices of inclusion and exclusion are generated within a policy context. Education in neo-liberal times is framed within a policy discourse that promotes the production of human capital and vocational skills and accords primacy to individual capacity rather than the public good (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000.) Amidst a discourse of globalisation, accountability and micro-economic reform, schools have become much more business-oriented and focused on skills formation rather than the ideal of a liberal education. At the classroom level, what and how teachers choose to teach is informed by an 'ethos of enterprise' (Du Gay, 1996) and individualism. A new language of accountability has entered the educational arena with an emphasis on testing and performance appraisal as a means of improving standards. Meanwhile, the commodification of youth culture, changing family patterns, homelessness, poverty, racism, mental illness, the medicalisation of behaviour (Slee, 1995, p. 122) and a host of cultural and social factors have added layers of complexity to the task of educating young adolescents.

Teachers occupy a contradictory position when it comes to tackling issues of educational disadvantage. One the one hand, they serve as a consistent source of emotional and social support for students but they also act as gatekeepers for institutional norms and practices. The problem is exacerbated by large class sizes, lack of professional development opportunities,

heavy workloads, inadequate counselling services and an absence of pastoral care programs. The upshot is that, in spite of the efforts of caring and committed teachers '[school] relationships remain superficial, transitory, and interwoven with … hierarchical power and institutionalised inequality' (Stanton-Salzar, 1997, p. 19).

The promise of middle schooling

It is against this background that the middle school movement has gained considerable appeal in some quarters. A rationale for middle schooling in Australia has been articulated by educational policy-makers, school reform networks and education systems for more than a decade now. Beginning with the *Report of the Junior Secondary Review* in 1992 (Eyers, Barratt & Cormack), the middle school movement has been promoted and resourced by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) (Cormack, 1996; Cumming, 1996), the National Professional Development Program (NPDP) (Barratt, 1998; Cormack, Johnston, Peters and Williams, 1998), the National Schools Network (Ladwig, Currie & Chadbourne, 1994) and a host of middle school associations. Many educators look to middle school philosophy with its emphasis on student-centered curriculum, community orientation and connectionist pedagogy as an antidote to the hierarchical model of teaching that is typical of many high schools. As a consequence of this push, we now have a number of purpose-built schools, professional associations and teacher education courses that are specifically focused on the middle years of schooling. If school promotion brochures are any indication, middle schooling has become a marketable commodity for both private and public schools.

However, in spite of the rhetoric and the organisational changes to accommodate middle schooling, it appears that pedagogical reform is a hard nut to crack. A report on literacy and numeracy in the middle years of schooling (Luke et al., 2003) identified the following issues and concerns:

- a mismatch between learning outcomes and assessment and reporting practices—in particular, a tendency to 'dumb-down' curriculum by teaching to the test;
- a preoccupation with subject content to the detriment of higher order thinking skills, critical literacies and a deeper understanding of curriculum issues;
- a lack of intellectual rigour and relevance in the choice of curriculum themes, issues and topics in some middle school programs;
- a tendency to see middle schooling as a separate phase of schooling, instead of viewing it as part of an overall developmental phase in the education of young people.

In a similar vein, Lingard (2004) claims that too much attention to structural change in schools detracts from the more fundamental problems of changing teacher practice. He argues that, unless schools and education systems engage in 'capacity building' in the form of teacher development programs, very little pedagogical change will occur at the level of the classroom. Similar concerns have been raised about the arrested development of middle schooling in the United States by Dickinson and Butler (2001), who advocate a need for a total ecology of schooling that integrates the organisational, instructional and relational domains in the middle years.

It is time that we looked afresh at the state of middle schooling in Australia. Much has changed in the economic, political and cultural landscape since 1992. At a time when the educational field is awash with learning theories and ideas from cognitive psychology, we need to take a sociological reading of what's happening inside schools and the community at large. Australia is a more culturally diverse society today, but a growing body of evidence suggests that it is also becoming a more unequal society with a large number of families suffering from high levels of poverty, social dislocation and insecurity as a consequence of economic restructuring, unemployment and the casualisation of the workforce (Fincher & Saunders, 2001; Peel, 2003). Although many Australians have benefited from the globalised economy and mass communication systems, educational disadvantage is reinforced through a 'digital divide' in the realm of information and communication technologies (Angus, Snyder & Sutherland-Smith, 2003). In these circumstances, we need to reassert the importance of social class as well as gender, ethnicity and other markers of student identity and take greater account of their impact on the educational success and failure of students in schools. A great deal of the justification for middle schooling is premised on the need to respond to the so-called 'characteristics of young adolescents' but, as Beane (1999, p. 6) argues so vehemently, we need 'to hear less talk about hormones as explaining behaviour and more about the unsavoury conditions under which too many of our adolescents live'. In other words, we need to take greater account of the collective good as well as the developmental needs of individuals.

In the context of devolving school systems and neo-liberal reforms, it appears that issues of social justice have been sidelined from the education policy agenda. However, from our observations, there are schools and teachers working against the policy discourse to build 'geographies of trust' (Scott, 1999) and 'socially just schools' (Smyth, 2004). We now turn to consider what these look like in practice.

A description of the project

The middle school project on which this study is based sought to explore the identity formation of middle school teachers and the structural, cultural and pedagogical elements of school reform in the middle years. In what could best be described as a 'multi-sited' ethnography (Marcus, 1998), the study began with a single case study in 2000 and was followed by studies of five additional schools between 2001 and 2003. Although the selected schools varied considerably in terms of their size, geographical location and socioeconomic backgrounds of students, all were actively experimenting with middle schooling (years 6 to 9) as an alternative to traditional junior secondary arrangements. A number of these schools qualified for funding under the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP). What follows is a brief overview of the organisational features of the schools which, for reasons of confidentiality, were given pseudonyms:

- Gulfview Secondary (6–12): a purpose-built middle school, incorporating four sub-schools, situated in an outer metropolitan suburb;
- Plainsville (R–8): a small DSP school incorporating middle schooling in the upper years (6–8), situated in an outer metropolitan area;
- Investigator Secondary (8–12): a large metropolitan DSP school with an architecturally-designed middle school (8–9);
- Seachange Secondary (8–12): a rural high schools with architecturally-designed middle schools (8–9);
- Broadvale Community (R–12): a large DSP school in outer metropolitan area with senior (10–12) and middle school (7–8) campuses; and,
- New Vista Community School: a multi-campus R–12 school in rural South Australia with a 6–9 middle school campus.

From the outset, the project attempted to ground the research in first-hand accounts of teachers' lives and experiences (Goodson, 1992, 1994). The kind of questions we pursued were:

- How is the school reinventing itself around an inclusive agenda in the middle years of schooling?
- Who are the teachers who work with young adolescents? Why do they do it?
- How do teachers reinvent themselves as middle school teachers?
- In what ways are they restructuring, reculturing and changing their pedagogy?
- What are the attributes of a successful middle school teacher?
- What do they see as the rewards and frustrations?

- How do they sustain the energy for this kind of work in a policy climate that appears largely inhospitable?
- What are the tensions, contradictions and dilemmas involved in middle schooling?
- In particular, how do teachers handle the policy pressure to institutionalise relationships with students?

The methods used to elicit the narratives included audio-taped conversations and semi-structured interviews with principals, curriculum coordinators, teachers, school support staff and several middle school students. In total, some 90 personnel across six schools were interviewed either individually or as part of a small group. Approximately 50 narrative portraits were developed from these interviews. Voiced research was complemented with fieldnotes and records of an extensive phase of participant observation, during which time we inhabited classrooms, staffrooms and playgrounds, attended numerous staff meetings, professional development programs, committee meetings and school assemblies, and participated in school excursions, open nights and school reporting sessions.

Schools reinventing themselves for kids

Whole school reform

How do schools reinvent themselves for young adolescents? One way of approaching this question is to consider what is required in terms of a whole school reform approach in the middle years. Harradine (1996, p. 4) suggests that whole school change involves three inter-related aspects:

- restructuring—organisational changes, such as the use of time and space, staff and student groupings, curriculum planning and the use of information technology;
- reculturing—changing beliefs, assumptions, habits, values and patterns of behaviour and relationships in school organisational culture; and,
- changes to pedagogy—adaptions and transformations of classroom approaches to teaching and learning and student outcomes.

For case studies of middle school reform based on this heuristic refer to McInerney, Smyth, Hattam and Lawson (1998) and Smyth, McInerney and Hattam (2003).

So far as the six project schools were concerned, a commitment to middle schooling was reflected in the separate facilities for middle year students, the creation of middle school leadership roles and the provision of structures, programs and resources to support middle school curriculum. Home group teachers took responsibility for two or three curriculum areas

and class sizes were kept to a maximum of approximately 25 students. Teachers had opportunities to meet in teams, plan curriculum and draw on resources from middle school cluster groups and professional development programs. In all schools there were varying degrees of emphasis on:

- developing collaborative approaches to teaching and learning;
- supporting students to become more independent learners;
- incorporating students' social and personal concerns into the curriculum;
- using student portfolios and other alternatives to competitive assessment and reporting practices;
- negotiating various aspects of curriculum with students;
- integrating information and communication technologies into the curriculum;
- drawing on community resources and inter-agency support teams to support student learning;
- interdisciplinary approaches to the development of literacy, vocational education and higher order thinking skills;
- social learning, co-curricula programs (for example, sport and the performing arts), personal health and wellbeing;
- promoting student voice and identity, for example, through action committees, student forums, class meetings and student-run assemblies; and,
- fostering belongingness and positive relationships through small learning communities, bonding activities (for example, camps and excursions), pastoral care programs, conflict resolution and peer support programs.

A specific instance: Student-initiated curriculum at Plainsville

Some project schools had pushed the boundaries further than others in terms of student centered learning. Over the past three years, Plainsville has undergone major organisational changes with the extension of schooling beyond the primary years and the provision of middle schooling in years 5 to 8. However, a more significant change has involved a whole school commitment to a student-centered curriculum and participatory forms of learning that have brought about improvements in attendance, student engagement and achievement.

The reasons behind this shift are important. By any measure, Plainsville is a disadvantaged school community. With an unemployment rate of 17 per cent (almost 10 per cent above the state average) the region has suffered more than most from de-industrialisation and economic restructuring. More than 30 per cent of families have a household income below $400 per week and only 25 per cent of families own their own home. One in five students has access to

a computer at home. Many students come from families in crisis, and they often arrive at school hungry and emotionally upset. Not surprisingly, the life experiences of these students are very limited. Because many students and families have little or no experience of a work ethic, they are inclined to have low aspirations of schooling and future pathways. We were told that less than 50 per cent of students continued schooling beyond year 8. This was a powerful factor behind the extension of schooling to year 8. Leanne, the school principal, describes what the school attempted to do as follows:

> A couple of years ago, one of the kids said to me, 'How are you going to make sure we're successful, because there's heaps of us here, and at some stage or other we are going to need to talk to each other. How will we know if we're successful?' And that's one of the places we started when we asked our kids, 'What enhances your learning? What detracts from it?' What came up under 'detract' all the time was what I would call lack of congruence and the kids said, 'You never bloody work out what you're supposed to do. You go to this teacher and they tell you that sitting down and putting your hand up is the right thing, but if you go to the next one, then it's "Have a good time", and then you go to the next one, and you just get it sorted out and it's the end of the year, and you've passed onto the next teacher. How do you ever know?' A lack of congruence was one of the big impetuses for thinking about: 'Well how do we create a place where kids don't feel like that?' It doesn't mean everyone is the same but that there are common beliefs, values and attitudes that underpin our behaviour.
>
> To begin with nobody felt they had power over anything. I mean, that wasn't what everyone was saying, but if you looked at people's behaviour, teachers were hanging on really tight, families were really angry and kids were really angry. And if you looked at why, it was because none of them thought they had any power over anything and so they were all battling with each other to get it. Initially, we made a conscious decision not to look at empowerment within a classroom because we didn't want to push people's power buttons. My theory is you can either do the chipping away routine where you say to people, 'This bit needs to be changed and that bit needs to be changed' and you just keep chipping away; or you can do immersion which is to change the world around and so the world that they've got to live in is different and then they may see the need to make those changes for themselves. We went with the second one and on reflection that was a good choice.
>
> The second thing we did from the very beginning was to say that we were going to target all three groups so, no matter what change process we were going to enter into, we would always establish a student team, a staff team and a community team. The question we asked ourselves was: How many authentic decisions do children make in our school and in our classroom? That was really our starting point and we talked about the importance of an authentic decision. So we set up a whole range of teams in relation to looking at this question

> and one of the key ones was a team which looked at out-of-class learning. The end result was that that probably ended up with 25 out-of-class learning programs.
>
> The success of these programs helped us to move onto the next stage. The kids said: 'We're making all these decisions outside of the classroom. How come we're not making any about learning?' So what I said to them was: 'You're being ripped off. The school told you that you could make decisions about bins, toilets and discos. But you haven't made any decisions about what we're really on about'; and my challenge to them was, 'If the core business of our school is about learning, how come you're not making any decisions about that? Is it because you don't want to? Is it because you don't know how to? Is it because you haven't been allowed to?' and 'How are we going to change that?'. And what it is, what I said to the kids was: 'Okay, so you keep talking about litter and bins and stuff. Is that the issue or is the issue really that the kids in the school don't value what we have and they don't respect the property?'. You know like, let's stop dealing with the end result which is paper around the yard. If you really want to change things, let's look at why the rubbish is there. Let's find out what kids think about the school. Why do they throw stuff around, or why don't they care what it looks like? Is it that they don't care, you know?
>
> And we did the same thing with the governing council; we invested a lot in them in terms of looking at the decisions they'd made. A major task the council undertook was to learn about the key competencies and then work out how to teach our community about it. They produced brochures; they developed workshops, which they ran here. I said, 'It's really good. Have you thought about offering it to other schools?'. So they sent out the mail-out to run key competency workshops in other schools and they got business and went all over the state. For two terms we've been running these workshops with kids and parents and it has had the most amazing impact. These are people who had never spoken in a meeting before and who managed to stand up in front of a group of other parents and talk about key competencies. That had an amazing impact on our culture, you know. The next time we went to do something around student-initiated curriculum, fifty hands up to be on the planning team.
>
> Our kids been all around Australia and some have been overseas. All of that has changed families' perceptions of our school. They've seen us in the paper, on television, on the radio and it changed their belief in themselves. Instead of being, 'Oh, we're a crappy school … it's like Plainsville has won all of these things and so that must mean you're actually a pretty okay community and we've got pretty okay kids. (Leanne, 1 February 2002)

Assisting students to become 'architects of their own education' (Eisner, 2002, p. 582) has been a longer term project at Plainsville, but one which has ultimately transformed the industrial model of teaching. Student-initiated curriculum, known popularly as the SIC, is the school's version of a student-centered approach to teaching and learning that lies at the heart

of the school's philosophy. In the new arrangements, all adult educators on the site are referred to as adults. An educating adult might be a teacher, a school support officer, a parent, an older student or a community member. Teams of adults work with students to facilitate and plan their learning. There are no 'self-contained', teacher-led classrooms as such. All available spaces are called 'learning areas' and students make decisions on a daily basis about which spaces inside and outside the school best suit their learning needs. Within each team, smaller groups known as talking circles ensure that each student has access to one staff member who takes a personal interest in their wellbeing and monitors their progress. Students meet in talking circles, chaired by students, at the beginning of each day and at other points during the day. Adults do not program learning for groups of students. Instead, students have their own individual learning plan for English, mathematics, 'issues' and 'out of class learning'. Prior to preparing a learning plan, students work with adults to audit their own knowledge and to make decisions about what and how they want to learn. They have a user-friendly version of the state curriculum guidelines to ensure that they address essential learnings across the curriculum. As a general rule, teachers do not engage in whole of class instruction; rather, students negotiate learning meetings with adults who have specialist knowledge of a particular topic or subject. With reference to a key competencies framework and other curriculum guidelines, students collect evidence of their learning to share with others. A permanent record of their achievement is kept in a 'learning folder'. When a student has completed a learning plan and satisfied criteria set out in the curriculum standards framework, they receive formal recognition in the form of a 'knowing card' which is signed off by an adult. Finally, when the topic is completed, they arrange to meet with an adult and three other students to talk about what they have learnt in the form of a 'round table assessment'.

'Making the curriculum fit the child' seems to be the main intent of school reform at Plainsville. Adults facilitate students' learning by: assisting them to develop organisational skills; posing challenges; encouraging them to utilise all opportunities for learning; monitoring their progress; assisting them to evaluate and report on their learning; providing them with a range of ways of learning about topics under study; and, generally assisting them to become more independent and confident learners. Greg, a beginning teacher, explained what was involved in student-initiated learning:

> Our school is very heavily focused on student-initiated curriculum—giving students a range of different choices and out-of-school learning. It's not a matter of us saying, 'Do you want to do this?' and then them coming back and saying, 'Oh, can I do this?' They elect what they want to do and it's up to the staff to provide them with the opportunities. The curriculum is

> based on the state curriculum framework even though it's student-driven. It's a matter of identifying how learning outcomes fit with the official curriculum. For example, one of our year 6/7 girls is investigating dancing bears and the unethical practice associated with that. She has worked out how she can address different curriculum areas like health, physical education, science and maths. Our students all have a copy of the state curriculum framework to help them in this process. (Greg, 7 March 2003)

In many ways Plainsville has stepped outside the boundaries of the conventional school in making the curriculum fit the students, but, as Greg explained, the school also operated within the mandated curriculum guidelines so students were not denied access to future vocational and academic pathways. The kind of pedagogical changes we have described at Plainsville involved a major rethinking of classroom practices and beliefs on the part of teachers, an issue we take up in the next part of the paper.

Becoming a middle school teacher: Teachers reinventing themselves for kids

Although a great deal of research suggests that conventional secondary schools do not cater for the needs and aspirations of young adolescents, many teachers find it difficult, if not impossible, to shake off the entrenched beliefs and practices of high schools. These have been variously described as a 'continuity of practices' (Elmore, 1987), an 'attachment to familiar routine (Eisner, 1992), 'batch processing' (Cusick, 1973) and 'an ethos of individualism' (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997). Many secondary schools are currently organised around 'passive learning of curricula designed to cover a massive amount of material' (Meier, 2002, p. 23). This preoccupation with content discourages exploration, understanding and creativity, whilst competitive assessment tasks, grading, sorting and streaming practices, work against a culture of trust.

However, in spite of these constraints, some teachers do have a capacity to reinvent themselves for students, to transform their pedagogy and think outside subject boundaries. Two of the key questions we pursued with teachers in this study were: 'How did you get become a middle school teacher?' and 'What does it take to become a successful middle school teacher?' Although a few of our informants came from primary teaching backgrounds, most were secondary-trained teachers whose experiences had been largely confined to high schools. They tended to identify themselves by their areas of subject specialisation, although some described themselves as middle school teachers. Many talked of their struggles to break free of a 'secondary headset'; to move out of a comfort zone of subject specialisation; to become student-focused rather than subject-focused; to become less reliant on prescribed curriculum—that is, to become more of a non-scripted teacher (Gutierrez, Larson & Kreuter,

1995); to share power with students and negotiate curriculum; to move from the isolated world of their own classroom to a team teaching situation; to work collaboratively with colleagues in planning curriculum; to engage more in relational learning; and, to adopt a more integrated approach to curriculum.

What did our informants tell us about what is required to become a successful middle school teacher? What are some of the contradictions, dilemmas and tensions associated with teaching in the middle years?

Learning from colleagues

Teachers told us that you have to be flexible. You have to be willing to teach across curriculum boundaries, to work as a member of a team and to learn from colleagues. You have to be prepared to teach in a public space. It helps when the school has a culture that encourages collaboration and structures that enable teachers to plan and teach as part of a team. Peter's remarks are quite insightful:

> Being in a middle school setting, teachers have an opportunity to learn from colleagues. There's a sense of seeing yourself as a public self as a teacher. If you go in your classroom and the walls are up it's a very private environment and there's a sense that you're a private self—you've got control over this space if nowhere else in the world. I like the way middle schooling encourages this sense of public self. You see what other teachers are doing. You know that you are being seen and the feedback that you get is not like performance management. It's just comments—it's just the way we work with people. It's a very nice dynamic that starts to happen. Teaching is not a science—it's more of the art idea of teaching and things that you pick up through practice. (Peter, 6 September 2000)

Relationships

Overwhelmingly, teachers kept talking up the importance of relationships. They told us: You have to get to know kids as people before you can successfully engage them in any meaningful learning. You have to have to like kids and respect them. You have to treat them as people, not commodities. You have to reveal something of your personal self beyond that of a subject specialist. Barbara explained how her relationship with a group of disengaged girls changed dramatically when she got to know them as people.

> I had a bunch of kids in my history class who were just ghastly; they were *awful* and I really didn't know what to do and I was at my wits end with them. Then I said to two of the really tough kids one day: 'Do you do any babysitting?' and they were: 'What! Us!' and I said 'Yeah'. Anyway they came around and looked after my kids and after that they'd sort of

> rock up on the weekend with various boyfriends and take the girls out to a park. But the whole attitude of the class sort of changed towards me because they saw me as someone who gave them a chance to show that they could be responsible. So when I left the school at the end of that year, they gave me a gold bracelet that they'd all saved up for and that was really, really touching, with the name of the class engraved on the back of it. … Relationships are the most important thing about middle schooling. You can't teach kids unless you've got some idea of who they are as people. (Barbara, 25 March 2003)

Barbara was a politically engaged teacher and a strong advocate for students who did not fit the system. She and her colleagues went the extra yards in terms of providing additional instructional support for students whose lives were fractured by family traumas and hardships. This often extended to ameliorating the most damaging impact of behaviour management policies on students.

Teachers like Peter were adamant that little learning could take place unless they got to know and respect their students.

> Good middle school teachers like the kids. They enjoy being there. They're prepared to be non-judgmental, not to see the stereotype role of the teacher as authority. Half of my students were on negotiated curriculum plans when I came here; three attract individual support and I have a group of girls who are real high fliers. I didn't know how it would all pan out but it's a sense of wanting to get to know them and to work with them. I know it can sound like a warm fuzzy kind of approach but, as Ted Sizer says, 'I cannot teach a kid that I do not know well'. It's taking that thinking and making it a cornerstone of practice, not just an optional extra, that good teachers have. Middle schooling requires a different sort of practitioner. It's not like the old days of teachers as facilitators. It is much more to do with relationships. I have seen it in my own home group with truants who have suddenly turned that around. Teachers who are able to develop good relationships with their students get much more out of them. When you get a relief teacher, all hell is likely to break loose. Kids are at the stage in their development where the social skills aren't enormously successful. There are some tough kids in our sub-school that I can deal with. Once they know you they will improve dramatically both in terms of learning and socialisation. Socialisation is the first thing—they've got to want to be here. They have to respect the teacher; otherwise no learning takes place. (Peter, 6 September 2000

Bringing the community into the school

Our informants talked about the importance of understanding the backgrounds of their students and engaging with parents and the wider school community:

> Bringing the community into the school and engaging them in school is very important for us. A lot the parents have had a bad schooling experience themselves so their views on school and their attitudes on sending students to school are completely different from what my parents were in sending me to school. Some parents are not really fussed whether their kids are at school or not, so it's trying to change the attitudes and get them involved in school. We have barbecues and take them through the learning areas and show them first hand what we're doing. You hear a lot of positive remarks from parents coming to school saying, 'Oh, so-and-so is doing this,' and they're really happy about it. So it's about changing attitudes which is a *big* thing for some of the families, getting them wanting, coming back to the school rather than just sort of pushing the students out of the home into school and not knowing what they do. (Greg, 7 March 2002)

> Being in a country school I get to know the parents. Take my naughty boys; I just have a *really* good relationship with their mothers. You know, I'll just ring up and say, 'Hi there, it's me again,' and she'll say, 'Oh no, what has he been doing now?'. It's not a formal thing, you know. I can go to Woolworth's after school and see Michelle and she'll say, 'Dare I ask how B's been?'. And you know you've got that kind of rapport with them and that's fantastic. If there is a major issue, I know that I'm not going to have to build some kind of relationship with the parent because it's already there. A lot of them already have the mentality of, 'Yeah, they'll have her next year'. They might feel good or bad about that but at least they already know and they know that whatever relationship they've got with me this year can carry on into next year as well. Again, you're not rebuilding all that stuff next year. (Lucy, 22 October 2003)

Confronting the complexity of students' lives often meant that teachers had to engage in a good deal of emotional labour.

> Some of the children [at our school] are reasonably volatile. About 18 per cent of the students here at any one time are coming from emergency housing facilities. A lot of them have seen just about everything in regard to domestic violence, substance abuse and issues of the like. I guess it's hard to understand how the children must feel when suddenly their family is torn apart and they're taken with mum or whatever, or dad I guess in some cases. They've literally got no place to go except for these shelters and emergency housing. Some of the children turn up at those with no more than the shirt on their back and they have literally no possessions, no money and in some cases they don't know where the next meal is coming from. And so I guess they bring these worries with them [to school] and they're probably foremost in the children's minds over learning. (Mark 11 February 2003)

Curriculum

Developing good relationships with students and parents may be a foundation for learning, but middle school teachers have to learn how to develop curriculum in concert with their colleagues and students. Many teachers spoke of the need to experiment with new ideas—to 'push the boundaries' or 'live on the edge'. They recognised the importance of a connectionist pedagogy (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997), but they were also mindful of the need to maintain curriculum rigour and ensure that students developed critical thinking skills and knowledge that prepared them for the senior years of schooling. Whilst this did not necessarily mean abandoning areas of subject specialisation, it did mean taking the time to explore 'the unsettling immediacies of the moment' (Meier, 2002, p. 22), rather than slavishly following a preordained syllabus or text.

Theresa's path to middle school teaching began in outback Australia where she challenged conventional secondary teaching arrangements and began to experiment with integrated studies and student-centered approaches to science. Here she talks about the importance of relational learning and values education with particular reference to social justice and ecological sustainability.

> I taught physics and maths for ten-and-a-half years in an outback town. I had a bit of a talent for working with difficult kids so if a teacher came along who wasn't as good at working with mixed groups of kids I'd tend to pick them up and run courses that were called maths and society and multi-strand science. I could work more flexibly with students than many of my colleagues. I was on all sorts of boards and I was always in trouble for pushing the boundaries. Yeah, I was 'that mad woman from the outback'. Instead of just doing more topics, I actually taught them about enquiry-based learning using the community. It wasn't just that they learnt how to learn from textbooks; they learnt how to frame their own projects; how to use members of the community; how to communicate; and, how to write reports. I was a bit of a greenie so we did a lot about water pollution, the use of fertilisers and overgrazing.
>
> Two really important things for me are resilience and empathy. Caring for ourselves is a really important resilience tool and that's about being as successful as you can be and taking enough care of yourself to battle life's storms and to take responsibility for your own stuff. Caring for each other and caring for this world is about growing empathy. The kids are going to give the money from their recycling project to Amnesty International because this year is the International Year for the Rights of the Child with Amnesty. That's how they sold their campaign this year and they were talking about that just before the war against terrorism. I wanted the kids to have something powerful that they could do where they felt they were making a difference for children in other countries

> and standing up and saying, 'Well, I don't think that children should bear arms and I don't think that children should be exploited for commercial gain.' (Theresa, 26 August 2003)

Teachers told us that one of the most demanding tasks was negotiating curriculum with students. Lauren, a middle school coordinator acknowledged that her primary teaching background was an asset when it came to this process. Here she describes her version of a James Beane approach to integrated curriculum (Beane, 1993):

> How do we negotiate? Well, we go through the process in which we get the kids to reflect on their concerns about themselves before looking at broader issues. I start off by getting the kids to think about it for themselves at home. I tell them, 'You need to come up with half-a-dozen questions about yourself: things that you're really concerned about that you think are important', and then we get together and they work with a partner that they're prepared to share that information with. We always tell them that if there's something they've written down they don't want to share, that's fine—there's no compulsion. They share with a partner and look for commonality. Then they get into a larger group of four to six and they do the same process. Kids come up with great self questions, like: What are my chances of being employed in the future and what are my best choices that I could make at school? What sorts of things can I do to improve myself? Are the things that I value respected in schools? Why do adults get more air time than students? The whole sub-school of five classes worked through this process. Beforehand, we did an in-service with the whole staff and I then did a more intensive in-service with my own sub-school. We talked about the reasons for negotiating curriculum and how you gather and collate information to get a whole sub-school picture.
>
> When we negotiate with the students we don't overlook the formal curriculum requirements. What we do is look at the key things the kids want to cover and match these against our curriculum framework. We ask ourselves, 'Okay, if we've got eight areas of the curriculum, how can we incorporate their ideas into the content of what we're going to cover? How can we make sure that we address the essential learnings and key competencies? What explicit skills do we need to teach the kids? So we then start looking at the subject areas. And we said, 'Okay, let's take science. What sorts of things can we do? Well, we've got volcanoes, we've got earthquakes, we've got all of the seismographic scientific work'. (Lauren, 18 March 1997, 25 October 2002)

As Lauren's comments suggest, negotiating curriculum did not mean resorting to laissez-faire pedagogy. On the contrary, teachers saw that they had an essential role in making sure that there were no gaps in the mandated curriculum. Teachers said they had to be proactive

in expanding students' horizons, especially when it came to critical literacy. Greg put it like this:

> Learning about social issues is very important in middle schooling. Not a lot of our kids watch the TV news or read the newspapers. You know a student told me the other day: 'Well, what is September 11? Is it when some plane crashed?'. You've got to actually sit down and talk about the things that have gone on. They hear talk about war and things like that but it's more empowering for them to know who's pulling the strings or why we're going into war. We put the TV on for them yesterday afternoon to learn about that. You've obviously got to give them a chance to express themselves, but you've also got to show them what is actually happening because some of them don't actually see it. (Greg, 7 March 2003)

Teachers like Macca were even more adamant about their role in the learning process. Although a strong advocate for middle schooling, Macca described himself as a traditionalist and rejected some fashionable ideas about ownership and negotiation of curriculum. Yet in other ways he revealed himself as an inventive teacher, who placed a lot on personal relationships and the value on hands-on learning.

> Good teaching has got to be about establishing relationships between the student and the teacher. I've lived in small places or worked in small communities for a long time and so it's quite natural for me to want to know about the kids in my class. The way to kids' brains is through their hearts. I have a belief that you can teach anything to anybody at any time, providing you can get them on side. I think I'm a traditionalist. I'm not sure that I'm ready to involve the kids in developing the curriculum. I kind of think the curriculum belongs to me because I'm employed by society to teach the kids, and while I might instinctively know what's going to interest them, I don't believe that I should only teach those things that they want to learn about. Kids of the age group that we're talking about are interested in their bodies, so we'd be silly to ignore that, in science for example, and delay physiology until they were fifteen. We'd be much better off to teach our science courses related to physiology because that's what they are, they are self-centered little dears and they really want to know about themselves and their bodies and how they work. It's our job to teach it because that's what we're paid to do. I think there are other ways that I can get kids to negotiate and make group decisions, rather than messing about with what I see as my business. (Macca, 21 October 2003)

Macca's remarks highlight one of the dilemmas confronting teachers as they seek to develop democratic relationships with students whilst not letting go of a professional responsibility to teach. Kaplan (2000) argues that a good teacher has to learn to balance the personal and impersonal dimensions of contact with young people so as to maximise learning. Perhaps

Macca had tilted the balance a little towards the impersonal, but he clearly saw that he had a responsibility as a mature person to provide students with an agenda and to correct them where necessary.

The question of how far teachers should direct student learning leads us to a consideration of the dilemmas and tensions involved as teachers attempt to reinvent themselves for young adolescents.

Tensions and dilemmas

Not all teachers feel comfortable in a middle school environment. In the next portrait we get some insight into the trials and tribulations of a teacher who finds himself teaching outside a zone of comfort. Michael is an angry and frustrated teacher. Coming from a traditional high school to Gulfview Community School he finds himself having to teach a range of subjects that fall outside his field of expertise. As he looks around for support and direction he finds little of the curriculum leadership and teaching resources that he has come to associate with subject faculties. In an unfamiliar sub-school environment he cries out for textbooks, worksheets and teaching programs to prop up his practice. In his frustration he voices concerns (perhaps quite legitimate ones) about a lack of curriculum consistency and inappropriate timetabling and staffing practices.

> When I came here they said: 'You'll be expected to teach across curriculum areas. What other subjects would you like to teach?' And so I was given a choice. My areas of expertise are physical education (PE), geography and society and environment (S&E). But when I was given my timetable for the next year, it included maths, English and science—subjects that I never taught before and I'd never had my list. The deputy moved some things around so that I lost my science class. He said, 'Would you prefer to lose your 9 science and pick up say, a year 7 and 9 English? Is that easier for you?'. I thought, 'It's got to be easier than teaching year 9 science. I mean, I'm not even sure how to light a Bunsen burner.'
>
> Fortunately for me, my wife is a maths and science teacher and if it wasn't for her, me going home and saying, 'Um, what's "whole numbers?" Is that a topic?' 'Yes, that's a topic.' 'Oh, what's involved in that?' 'Well, here are some worksheets.' 'Thanks, dear.' 'Here's a textbook, which we use,' and I've got her textbooks and handouts. I don't know if there's a maths coordinator here. At my last school we had a maths faculty and a senior. Everything that you wanted was in the mathematics room. I don't know if there's something like that here but nobody has ever pointed it out to me. There are no textbooks. For your middle school photocopying, you're given 300 sheets for the term and I used them up in two days. Fortunately, somebody gave me a senior school number because I teach year 10 physical

> education. … Our school is not catering for the needs of kids in middle school. If my daughter was in my English class, I'd be up-in-arms. If she was in my maths class, I'd be going, 'Oh my god, that's terrible'. (Michael, 25 October 2002)

Although it may be tempting to blame Michael for a somewhat inflexible approach to teaching, we can also empathise with his situation; after all, 'it is difficult to be pedagogically graceful when you are lost in unfamiliar territory' (Eisner, 1992, p. 611). But more importantly, Michael's dilemma raises serious questions for schools and education systems about the fate of students caught up in staffing problems of this kind. Anecdotally, it seems that many students—especially those in remote regions—are being taught by teachers who lack the necessary qualifications and subject expertise required in the middle and senior years.

Learning to teach outside an area of expertise can be very challenging. Notwithstanding the possibility of in-school support from colleagues, even the most experienced teachers can struggle to gain some measure of respect and credibility. However, Lucy is prepared to wear some discomfort because she believes in the value of developing personal rapport and long-term relationships with her students.

> The struggle is probably more of a reflection on me, given that I graduated a million years ago with a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Education with such wonderful topics as Icelandic Sagas and Scott Fitzgerald. The struggle for me has been the whole debate about expertise. I have *many* days where I feel like I am a millimetre in front of the kids in terms of what I know … I just think getting to know kids really, really well and having relationships with them, as well as teaching whatever you have to teach them, is just crucial for this age. I know there are days when I could *scream* at every single child in my year 8 class but I can still walk out of there and know that the next time I see them they'll say, 'Hello, how are you?' and we'll actually have some kind of rapport. Sometimes I feel like I am just a mother the whole time with these kids, you know. I'm just a mother that tells them off and the next minute I'm looking at their sore finger or whatever. But I feel that is *very* important and even though I find them *incredibly* hard work, I know already I would like to take them through next year because of that rapport I've got with them. I know that if somebody else picks them up they're going to be back to square one just trying to create some rapport before you can even *think* about getting any work out of them. My boys have gone up to the primary school and run skate board competitions and kept journals and had to write letters and do all those kinds of things. It's worth it even if you have to mop up because so-and-so swore on the microphone and the neighbours over the road heard it and complained to the primary school. (Lucy, 22 October 2003)

Another tension arises from curriculum integration. Peter, an experienced English coordinator, was convinced of the merits of many middle school practices but cautioned against an uncritical acceptance of integration as the defining feature of middle schooling. He drew our attention to what he described as 'the creative tensions between the published and indigenous curriculum' and the need to maintain curriculum rigour in supporting students to make a transition from the middle years to the senior years of schooling.

> There is a tension around subject integration and thematic approaches to learning and I don't know too many schools that are doing it very well. I worry that literacy is sometimes subsumed under the banner of English and literary studies are neglected. We often get teachers in the middle school teaching outside their subject expertise and this can create problems in behaviour management. The idea that 'anyone can teach English' is very unhelpful. We all need to take responsibility for literacy, but that does not mean that we don't need specialist English teachers. I think we have to be careful what we do with integration. Integration is not necessarily a good thing. It works best when it is a deliberate strategy for doing something. What people criticise is not integration per se but bad integration; for example, the idea that we are all going to do fish … in art we'll draw a fish … in home economics we're going to cook a fish … and in English we are going to write some poems about fish. Good integration has an authentic outcome; for example, in the fish theme a better outcome might be to build a fish tank for the foyer. The key is in the planning. We have to avoid the 'Mickey Mouse' stuff that gives integration a bad name. The sense of having a purpose and keeping a check is important. The SACSA framework is useful because it is a good reference point for curriculum development. But curriculum mapping needs to be done in terms of the school context as well.
>
> I don't think that integration should just become the model for middle schooling. It should be part of a bag of strategies. Sometimes it is necessary to teach English skills in isolation from integrated themes. Each curriculum area needs to be aware of what skills they want to protect and nurture. I don't think any subject is well served by just keeping kids busy on a particular topic or theme. High school middle schooling is different to the primary school. We have a responsibility to move the kids towards various subject disciplines so that they are well prepared for senior school studies. Having a specialist who is willing to work with students in different ways is very much what I regard as a useful model. However, I don't think we should feel the need to resolve all the tensions. The tension between the published and indigenous curriculum, for example, can be quite a creative one, as can that between the specialist and generalist view of curriculum. (Peter, 6 September 2000, 6 November 2000)

Teachers like Peter told us that being a successful middle school teacher is not just about transplanting a primary school methodology into a secondary school classroom. It is rather

more sophisticated than this. Being able to relate to students is important but teachers need to have curriculum knowledge and expertise that will expand students' horizons, develop critical thinking skills and enable them to pursue vocational and academic pathways in the senior years of schooling. Moreover, as Beane (1993) argues, developing an authentic integrated curriculum does not mean abandoning the knowledge and skills from subject disciplines. When knowledge is repositioned in the context of themes, issues or concerns, teachers with expertise in curriculum areas become significant resources for their colleagues. From this perspective, disciplines of knowledge subject (and subject specialists) can viewed as a useful and necessary ally in helping students to make sense of their world.

Teachers reminded us that trying to organise schooling for young adolescents is easier said than done. Powerful structural forces work against innovation in high schools, not the least of these being the competitive academic curriculum. They spoke of:

- a lack of congruence between constructivist approaches to curriculum and school assessment and reporting practices based on grades and narrow educational outcomes;
- an overcrowded curriculum and lack of coherence across R–12; and
- a tendency towards managerialist leadership at the expense of pedagogical leadership in middle school.

Most of our informants encountered varying degrees of resistance from their senior school colleagues and they had to constantly keep affirming the merits of integrated curriculum and cooperative approaches to learning. Getting access to resources was often a problem, especially when so much bureaucratic and fiscal power was fused into faculties rather than sub-schools or year level teams.

Discussion

This paper has raised a number of issues for those engaged in school reform in the middle years, not the least of these being the extent of system support for the very notion of middle schooling itself. In the move towards devolution there has been a whittling away of centralised curriculum support for schools. Middle schooling is no longer a major curriculum priority in some states and territories and professional development depends very much on local will and regional initiatives. The result is a very uneven approach to the whole question of teacher development and middle school reform. Even in schools which

have a strong commitment to middle schooling, a good deal of productive work can be undone through unsupportive staffing policies and practices. The problem is further exacerbated by a lack of career pathways for specialist middle school teachers.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that the task of addressing educational disadvantage cannot be achieved solely through school reform in the middle years. It requires a much larger commitment by state and Commonwealth governments to bring together education, health, housing, disability, welfare and other services to support the work of schools as they seek to establish more socially just outcomes for young adolescents. By forging links with youth organisations and community action groups, educators and school communities are more likely to develop the necessary political clout to combat inequalities and work for progressive social change.

References

Agee, J. (2004). Negotiating a teaching identity: An African American teacher's struggle to teach in test-driven contexts. *Teachers College Record, 106*(4): 747 – 774.

Angus, L., Snyder, I., & Sutherland-Smith, W. (2003). Families, cultural resources and the digital divide: ICTs and educational (dis)advantage. *Australian Journal of Education, 47*(1): 18-39.

Barratt, R. (1998). Shaping Middle Schooling in Australia: A Report of the National Middle Schooling Project. Deakin West, ACT: ACSA.

Beane, J. (1993). Problems and possibilities for an integrated curriculum. *Middle School Journal, 25*(1): 18-23.

Beane, J. (1999). Middle schools under siege: Responding to the attack. *Middle School Journal, 30*(5): 3-6.

Connell, R. (2002). Making the difference, then and now. *Discourse, 23*(3), 319-327.

Cormack, P., Johnson, B., Peters, J., & Williams, D, (1998). *Authentic Assessment: A Report on Classroom Research and Practice in the Middle Years*. Deakin West, ACT: ACSA.

Cumming, J. (1996). *From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in the Middle Years. Volume 1—Key Findings and Recommendations*. Canberra: ACSA.

Cusick, P. (1973). *Inside High School.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Dickson, T., & Butler, A. (2001). Reinventing the middle school. *Middle School Journal, 33*(1), 7-13.

Du Gay, P. (1996). *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London: Sage.

Eisner, E. (1992). Educational reform and the ecology of schooling. *Teachers College Record, 93*(4), 610-627.

Eisner, E. (2002). The kind of schools we need. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(8), 576-583.

Elmore, R. (1987). Reforming and the culture of authority in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 23*(4): 60-78.

Eyres, V., Cormack, P., & Barratt, R. (1992). *Report of the Junior Secondary Review: The Education of Young Adolescents in South Australian Government Schools*. Adelaide: South Australian Education Department.

Fincher, R. & Saunders, P. (Eds.) (2001). *Creating Unequal Futures? Rethinking Poverty, Inequality and Disadvantage*. Allen & Unwin: Sydney.

Gilbert, P. (2000). The deepening divide?: Choices for Australian education. *Australian Educational Researcher, 27*(1), 31-46.

Goodson, I. (1992). Sponsoring the teacher's voice: Teachers' lives and teacher development. In A. Hargreaves & M. Fullan (Eds), *Understanding Teacher Development* (pp. 110–121). New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Goodson, I. (1994). Representing teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 13*(1): 111-117.

Goodman, J., & Kuzmic, J. (1997). Bringing a progressive pedagogy to conventional schools: Theoretical and practical implications from Harmony. *Theory into Practice, 36*(2); 79-86.

Gutierrez, K., Larson, J., & Kreuter, B. (1995). Cultural tensions in the scripted classroom: The value of the subjugated perspective. *Urban Education, 29*(4): 410-442.

Harradine, J. (1996). What research tells us about school reform. *National Schools Network Newsletter*, *2*(2): 4-5.

Hayes, D., Lingard, B., & Mills, M. (2000). Productive pedagogies. *Education Links, 60*: 10-13.

Hickey, C., & Keddie, A. (2004). Peer groups, power and pedagogy: The limits of an educational paradigm of separation. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 31*(1): 57-77.

Kaplan, A. (2000). Teacher and student: Designing a democratic relationship. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 32*(3): 377-402.

Ladwig, J., Currie, J., & Chadbourne, R. (1994). *Towards Rethinking Australian Schools: A Synthesis of the Australian National Schools Network Project*. Ryde, NSW: National Schools Network.

Lingard, B. (2004). Capacity Building in Middle Schooling—Aligning the Message Systems. Paper delivered at the Second International Middle School Conference, Adelaide.

Luke, A., Elkins, J., Weir, K., Land, R., Carrington, V. et al. (2003). *Beyond the Middle: A Report About Literacy and Numeracy Development of a Target Group of Students in the Middle Years of Schooling*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and the University of Queensland.

Marcus, G. (1998). *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*. Princeton, JJ: Princeton University Press.

McInerney, P., Hattam, R., Smyth, J. & Lawson, M. (1998). *Middle Schooling from the Ground Up: Seaford 6-12 School.* Adelaide: Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching.

Meier, D. (2002). *In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Peel, M. (2003). *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australians in Poverty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, J. (1999). Geographies of trust, geographies of hierarchy. In M. Warren (Ed.) *Democracy and Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Slee, R. (1995). *Changing Theories and Practices of Discipline*. London & Washington: Falmer Press.

Smyth, J. (2004). Social capital and the 'socially just school'. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25(1): 19-33.

Smyth, J. & Down, B. (2004). *Enhancing school retention: Building 'geographies of trust' and 'socially just schools'*. Paper presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Melbourne.

Smyth, J., Hattam, R., Cannon, J., Edwards, J., Wilson, N., & Wurst, S. (2000). *Listen to Me, I'm Leaving: Early School Leaving in South Australian Secondary Schools*. Adelaide: Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching; Department of Employment, Education and Training; and, South Australian Senior Secondary Assessment Board.

Smyth, J., McInerney, P., & Hattam, R. (2003). Tackling school leaving at its source: A case of reform in the middle years of schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 24*(2): 177-192.

Smyth, J., Dow, A., Hattam, R., Reid, A., & Shacklock, G. (2000). *Teachers' Work in a Globalizing Economy.* London: Falmer Press.

Smyth, J., Hattam, R., with Cannon, J., Edwards, J., Wilson, N., & Wurst, S. (2004) *'Dropping Out', Drifting Off, Being Excluded: Becoming Somebody Without School*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Stanton-Salazar, R. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths. *Harvard Educational Review, 67*(1), 1-40.

Teese, R. (1998). Curriculum hierarchy, private schooling and the segmentation of Australian secondary schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 19*(3): 401-417.