



IAN AXFORD
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FELLOWSHIPS
in
PUBLIC POLICY

Middle Years Teacher Credentialing in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Prepared by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

New Zealand has earned an international reputation for excellence in education and consistently scores within the top four OECD countries on various academic measures. At the same time, however, New Zealand demonstrates relatively high early school leaving rates and low tertiary attendance rates. *Schools Plus* is a recent government policy aimed at raising the compulsory schooling age from 16 to 18 in an attempt to address these two issues, thus fostering the country's ability to become an 'intellectual economy.' *Schools Plus* recommends innovative and important ways to keep senior secondary students in school, yet data on New Zealand youth illustrate that many students who disengage from schools do so during the middle schooling years, Years 7 – 10.¹

The majority of young adolescents perform well in New Zealand schools, regularly scoring high on national and international measures of academic achievement.² Internationally, Year 9 students have achieved significantly above average of the 46 participating country means in science and mathematics for the past eight years.³ At the culmination of students' tenure in the middle years, most students performed "very creditably compared to their international peers. In scientific literacy only two countries performed statistically better than New Zealand. In reading literacy just three countries performed statistically better, and for mathematical literacy five countries."⁴

In contrast, absenteeism, truancy, stand-down, attitudinal and engagement data from seven sources⁵ indicate that some students' perceptions of school become increasingly negative over the middle years, suggesting that a portion of students make the choice to leave school early far sooner than the senior secondary years. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the *Schools Plus* policy, therefore, schools must understand and respond to the needs of their young adolescents, keeping them involved, engaged and wanting to stay in school beyond Year 10. If educationalists wish to discourage students from leaving school early, these students must both achieve well and feel engaged in their work. Achievement and engagement play important, interdependent roles in attaining the goals of *Schools Plus*.

How, then, might one improve engagement in the middle years? The primary debate in New Zealand and elsewhere about how to best educate middle years learners has centred thus far on school type and where these learners should be educated. Yet research indicates that the teacher, and not the school type, makes the difference to student outcomes.⁶ Although the *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) identifies Years 7-10 as a distinct learning pathway with its own unique attributes, there is no specialised

¹ For the purposes of this study middle schooling is defined as the education of young adolescents Years 7 through 10 regardless of school type.

² Chamberlain (2007); Durling (2007); Ramsey (2007)

³ Durling (2007)

⁴ Ramsey (2007), p. 7

⁵ Adolescent Health Research Group (2003); asTTle; Cox and Kennedy (2008); NEMP; NZCER Engagement Survey; TIMSS; Wylie (2004); Wylie and Hipkins (2006)

⁶ Mac Iver and Mac Iver (2006); Weis and Kipnes (2006)

preparation to teach in those years, in contrast with other learning pathways in the NZC. Instead, those who want to teach in the middle years enrol in either primary or secondary programmes.

The reported decrease in some students' engagement from Year 7 to Year 10 raises questions about the nature of their schooling experience and the degree to which this group's needs are met in classrooms. If students' disengagement indicates a lack of fit between learning needs and learning opportunities, what policies and practices might New Zealand adopt to help teachers to work more effectively with this age group?

The purpose of this policy study was to examine the intersection between teacher credentialing⁷ and the education of young adolescents, from the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The primary research question and related sub-questions are as follows:

- Do teachers of Years 7-10 require specialised skills, knowledge and values?
 - If so, what are these?
 - What options should exist for teachers to acquire them?
 - To what extent should such skills, knowledge and values be required of teachers at that level?
 - What barriers exist to such change in policy and practice?

Stakeholder perspectives on the question of specialised preparation for teachers of the middle years were revealed through a combination of document review, five months of participant observation, and over seventy hours of interviewing principals, teacher educators, researchers and other educationalists.

Key Findings

Research Question 1

Do teachers of Years 7-10 require specialised skills, knowledge and values? If so, what are these?

- **Finding**

The vast majority of stakeholders concurred that there is a specialised set of knowledge, skills and values held by effective middle years teachers.
- **Summary**

Most stakeholders identified the importance of both general and developmentally appropriate principles of good teaching, although the former emerged as the more deeply rooted cultural perspective. However, a vast majority of stakeholders agreed that effective middle years teachers require a greater focus on relationship than is emphasised in secondary preparation and a deeper knowledge of subject area than primary preparation allows, due to the

⁷ For the purposes of this study teacher credentialing is defined as the processes involved in teachers' progression to full registration, including teacher preparation and provisional registration.

increasing sophistication of the subject matter and the growing cognitive abilities of the youth in their classrooms.

In particular, stakeholders identified the following knowledge, skills and values as important:

- The ability and desire to form supportive and authentic relationships with young adolescents;
- An understanding of the developmental nature and needs of young adolescents and how to connect those to pedagogy;
- In-depth content knowledge, especially in numeracy, above and beyond what primary preparation can offer;
- An ability to foster learning through inquiry and integrative curriculum over traditional secondary school methods;
- A belief in balancing a focus on subject matter with a focus on the whole learner;
- A skill in differentiating instruction and assessment; and
- A commitment to working with the age group.

Research Question 2

What options should exist for teachers to acquire this set of knowledge, skills and values?

- **Finding**
Specialised preparation for teaching in the middle years is a desirable pathway toward improving student outcomes.
- **Summary**
Most study participants viewed specialised preparation for middle years teaching as an effective way to address a number of educational issues, including student engagement and achievement in the middle years and beyond. Intermediate principals expressed greatest interest in having teachers prepared specifically for this age group. This was less desirable to, although not opposed by, secondary principals.

Most respondents preferred this preparation as a specialisation added onto primary or secondary training, most viable in a fourth year or post-graduate format. Many also identified ongoing professional development in this area as important. A smaller portion of respondents felt that middle years teacher preparation should be a stand-alone programme. A vocal minority advocated for evidence-based teacher preparation, regardless of level, as the change that would affect student outcomes and could result in radical transformation of the education system in New Zealand.

Research Question 3

To what extent should such skills, knowledge and values be required of teachers at that level?

- **Finding**
Current teacher registration practice is preferable to stage-specific teacher registration.
- **Summary**
Most stakeholders felt principals and boards should continue to control decisions about hiring based upon the experience and expertise of the candidate. The majority of study participants opposed a change in teacher registration. They preferred the flexibility afforded by the current general teacher registration system and perceived a stage-specific system as undesirable and unnecessarily restrictive.

Research Question 4

What barriers exist to such a change in policy and practice?

- **Finding**
Stakeholders perceived that several barriers exist to the advancement of specific teacher preparation for the middle years, although analysis revealed barriers may be more perceived than actual.
- **Summary**
Cultural, historical, political, procedural and structural conditions all contribute to the current lack of specialised middle years teacher preparation in New Zealand. The barriers include:
 - A perceived lack of Ministry of Education priority on the middle years;
 - A historical tendency to divide the tiers of schooling into primary and secondary, as evidenced in reports, legislation and policy;
 - A strong teachers' union presence divided along primary and secondary lines;
 - A relative lack of identity for middle years schooling given as many as six different school types; and
 - Tertiary institutions' concern about overall programme time and financial viability

Analysis revealed several of the largest barriers may be more perceived than actual, due to stakeholder assumptions and lack of communication about the issues.

Key Recommendations

1. Heighten awareness of Years 7-10 as a key area.
 - a. Ensure all Ministry of Education documents that discuss primary and secondary education also include the education of young adolescents in Years 7-10 as a distinct learning pathway, as identified in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), p. 41.
 - b. Establish a website or links to New Zealand-specific middle years research and development.

2. Expand the role and function of the Middle Years Steering Group to engage stakeholders and maintain focus on research and policy for Years 7-10.
3. Review policy settings related to promoting engagement in Years 7-10 (e.g. school counsellor provision; class size ratio).
4. Create new policies and programmes that are evidence-based and increase positive student outcomes in Years 7-10.
 - a. Ensure the following knowledge, skills and values are addressed in the preparation of teachers of young adolescents in all primary and secondary teacher education programmes:
 - The ability and desire to form supportive, authentic relationships with young adolescents;
 - An understanding of the developmental nature and needs of young adolescents and how those connect to pedagogy;
 - In-depth content knowledge, especially in numeracy, above and beyond what primary preparation can offer;
 - An ability to foster learning through inquiry and integrative curriculum over traditional secondary school methods;
 - A belief in balancing a focus on subject matter with a focus on the whole learner;
 - A skill in differentiating instruction and assessment, to enable students to progress at different rates; and
 - A commitment to working with the age group.
 - b. Conduct a pilot of evidence-based middle years teacher preparation.

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INTRODUCTION

U ki te ako, tu tangata ai apōpō

*Excel in teaching so our learners will excel in the future*⁸

With the words above the New Zealand Teachers Council highlights the significance of the teacher in students' long term learning and achievement. In fact, New Zealand's strong emphasis on quality education has earned the country a global reputation for innovation and effectiveness in schooling. From Sylvia Ashton Warner's early work with Māori youth to Marie Clay's groundbreaking initiatives in literacy, the country's educational history is rich with contributions acknowledged worldwide.

Currently, some of the country's youngest learners benefit from the 20 Hours Free Early Childhood Education policy. At the other end of the schooling sector, senior secondary students are the target of the newly unveiled policy initiative *Schools Plus*, aimed at keeping students in school longer by raising the compulsory schooling age from 16 to 18.⁹

These two policies are representative of New Zealand policy-makers' long history of focused attention to education. Yet one schooling group has remained largely invisible in the policy context in the country: those in the middle. Beyond an ongoing debate regarding school building types, emerging adolescents¹⁰ in the middle years have seen few policy initiatives aimed specifically at improving their education.

Not surprisingly then, New Zealand's Education Review Office has referred to the middle years of schooling as "the forgotten years."¹¹ The Australian Educational Research Council recently called those years a "black box" in its review of research literature.¹² When asked where teachers of young adolescents fit into the current teacher preparation and registration system, one Teachers Council representative explained, "They almost don't."¹³ And many teacher educators across New Zealand's tertiary institutions concur that greater emphasis on teaching young adolescents would improve teacher preparation, noting, as one teacher educator stated, a focus on the age group is "currently embedded in the other programs. And the danger of embedding something is that it can get overlooked."¹⁴

One intermediate school principal summarised the issue thus:

There's no easy answer. It's an age group that's been left out. We focus on the exam years at the top and the early entrance years. It's time that that got changed, because this is when we're losing them. And they've got to have good teachers to start with.¹⁵

⁸ New Zealand Teachers Council, Wellington, New Zealand

⁹ <http://tetahuhu.moe.govt.nz/ourOrganisation/MinistryOverview/OurProjects/SchoolsPlus.aspx>
Retrieved 2 June 2008

¹⁰ Emerging adolescents are generally characterised as aged 10-15 and are described by a number of terms, including young adolescents, transescents, and early adolescents.

¹¹ Durling (2007)

¹² Dinham and Rowe (2007)

¹³ Ken Wilson, New Zealand Teachers Council, personal interview, 28 March 2008

¹⁴ Linda Dodd, Victoria University, 20 March 2008

¹⁵ Andrea Knight, Heaton Intermediate Normal School, 25 March, 2008

Despite this relative lack of policy emphasis, national and international assessment programmes¹⁶ illustrate that the academic achievement of many middle years students remains quite strong, in no small part due to the substantial efforts of principals and teachers of Years 7-10. Numerous schools work hard to address the unique nature and needs of young adolescents and craft challenging, rigorous and meaningful learning experiences. Evidence of this emphasis can be found on school websites, in conversations with principals and teachers in schools, in the deep focus of many young adolescents in New Zealand classrooms, and in the international academic achievement scores of this age group. Clearly this work results in strong academic outcomes for many students.

To complement this academic focus, many New Zealand educationalists attend carefully to the social and emotional development of students. The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) outlines a vision for young people that includes many aspects of social and emotional development, calling for schools to help students become positive in their own identity, motivated and reliable, and resilient. Students "will continue to develop the values, knowledge and competencies that will enable them to live full and satisfying lives."¹⁷ In fact, three of the five key competencies identified in the NZC relate directly to socio-emotional development: Managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing.

Specific to this age group, the New Zealand Association for Intermediate and Middle Schooling (NZAIMS) has long been an advocate of developmentally responsive schooling. The Association has emphasised the importance of pastoral care along with an academic focus. The NZAIMS' strategic plan calls for teacher-student relationships that are "not pre-empted by academic demands divorced from the students' social and emotional needs"¹⁸ and for schools to support "the needs and known challenges of students' growth and social development while in the middle years of schooling."¹⁹

While the success of many young adolescents in New Zealand schools indicates a clear pay-off for the schools' hard work, the principal's earlier assertion that the middle years are "when we're losing them" is borne out by attitudinal and engagement data that suggest a sub-set of students feel less engaged, empowered, and supported.²⁰ Data drawn from a number of studies highlight issues associated with participation and engagement in schooling. Several New Zealand measures suggest that some students become increasingly disengaged from school as they progress through Years 7-10. As New Zealand encourages its teachers to "excel in teaching so our learners will excel in the future,"²¹ greater attention to the educational needs of students in the middle has the potential to inform policy and help teachers and principals further improve practice.

¹⁶ e.g. NEMP, TIMSS, PISA

¹⁷ Ministry of Education (2007b), p. 8

¹⁸ NZAIMS (2006), p. 2

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.9

²⁰ NEMP, asTTLe, TIMSS, Adolescent Health Research Group (2003), Wylie (2004), Wylie and Hipkins (2006), NZCER Engagement Survey

²¹ New Zealand Teachers Council (reference?)

In this policy study I applied the lens of teacher credentialing to examine the current state of middle years teaching in New Zealand. The objective of this research was to examine the intersection between teacher credentialing and the education of young adolescents, from the perspectives of principals, teacher educators and other educationalists in Aotearoa /New Zealand.

The purpose of this report is three-fold:

- To promote dialogue and collaboration among various New Zealand stakeholders, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of schooling in the middle years.
- To provide current, useful information to New Zealand policy-makers who are not experts on schooling for young adolescents, but who are interested in learning more about its relationship to the goals of *Schools Plus* and *Ka Hikitia*, and its implications for policy making.
- To educate US policy-makers about how another country with similar needs is working to address this policy gap.

Various chapters within the report serve different purposes and will be useful to different audiences as a result:

- In Chapter One I describe the policy context of *Schools Plus* and *Ka Hikitia* within the Ministry of Education in relation to the governmental goal of economic transformation. I present data on young adolescent schooling outcomes that suggest attending to the middle schooling years is a critical strategy towards attaining the goals of these two key government policies.
- Chapter Two provides a historical context for the middle schooling approach and makes the case for the teacher, rather than the school type, as a major influencing factor. Chapter Three lays out a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between school practices and young adolescent needs, and includes an emerging evidence base for schooling for that age group. And in Chapter Four I sketch a broad overview of the teacher credentialing process in New Zealand in relation to schooling for young adolescents.
- Chapter Five details the methodology employed in this inquiry and provides core findings identified in stakeholder interviews in the form of participant quotations. In it readers may review respondents' words in relation to identified themes. I conclude by summarising key findings and linking them to recommendations for policy and future research.

1 MIDDLE YEARS SCHOOLING AS KEY POLICY LEVER

As New Zealand positions itself for economic transformation by “creating a knowledge-led, innovative economy,”²² keeping students engaged and in school is a critical tactic. The Ministry of Education addresses this goal through its drive to create a “world-leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century.”²³

In many ways, New Zealand schools have been very effective in their work toward this mission. They have earned an international reputation for excellence and rank consistently high when compared to other countries. Out of thirty Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, for example, New Zealand students typically perform within the top four in mathematics, science and reading.²⁴

International measures of student achievement such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) support the view that in most respects the New Zealand schooling system ranks among the best in the world. It equips most students to contribute to society, and to the economy, as adults.²⁵

While the NZ schooling system equips most students to contribute in these ways, one particular obstacle to positioning the country for a knowledge-led economy is the problem of early school leavers and the related issue of relatively low tertiary attendance. Close to thirty percent of all New Zealand students leave school prior to age seventeen and forty percent leave with less than level 2 of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). For Māori learners these statistics are even more concerning, with over half of Māori boys nationally leaving school without qualifications.²⁶ New Zealand rated 29th out of 35 OECD countries in participation rates of 15-19 year olds in education and training, rating 74% compared to the OECD average of 82%.²⁷

It is clear that “people with higher levels of education on average are more likely to participate in the labour market, face lower risks of unemployment, have greater access to further training and receive higher earnings.”²⁸ Two recent, high profile government policies aim to address the problem of early school leaving, among other issues: *Schools Plus* and *Ka Hikitia*.

***Schools Plus* and Senior Secondary School Engagement**

To address the issue of early school leaving, and the subsequent national economic challenges that ensue, the Cabinet Policy Committee considered papers on *Realising*

²² Maharey (2006), p.? (was a speech- no page number)

²³ Ministry of Education (2006), p. 11

²⁴ Ministry of Education (2008)

²⁵ Education and Science Committee (2008), p. 5

²⁶ Ministry of Education (2007a); (2007c)

²⁷ <http://www.schoolsplus.govt.nz/> Retrieved [3 May, 2008]

²⁸ Ministry of Education (2007e), part 4, p.83

Youth Potential: A Vision for Success through Education in December 2007. These included key proposals for the transformation of secondary education in New Zealand. The Committee charged the Minister of Education with submitting a new paper to examine in detail the context and actions of such transformation.²⁹ *Schools Plus* was a direct result of those efforts.

Schools Plus is an ambitious and robust strategy for retaining senior secondary school students by increasing the compulsory schooling age from 16 to age 18. The strategy calls for greater flexibility within the curriculum and schooling sector. This would facilitate students' selecting from multiple pathways and participating in various combinations of education and training provided by schools, employers, industry training organisations and private providers.³⁰

Creating greater flexibility and choice in order to retain more senior secondary students responds to the crucial role student attitude and engagement play in school success. A majority of secondary school principals surveyed identified disengagement as the biggest reason for students' school departure, and 72% of early school leavers reported that they would have stayed if they only had to participate in subjects they liked.³¹ 91% of secondary school principals agreed that there are typical warning signs of students at risk of early school leaving; high among them are truancy (67%) and disruptive behaviours (35%). The behaviours of early school leavers provided corroborating evidence, with "most early leavers being truant at least weekly (72%), and most going to school/classes late (70%)."³²

***Ka Hikitia* and Māori Student Engagement**

The problem of early school leaving is disproportionately large for Māori students. Also aimed at improving student outcomes, *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success*³³ is the key policy document within the Ministry of Education intended to "enhance the ministry's ability to make a positive contribution to successful outcomes for Māori, alongside the contributions from others."³⁴ Noting, as *Schools Plus* does, that economic transformation requires a highly skilled and well-educated work force, *Ka Hikitia* recognises the importance of engaging young people in learning. Such engagement is an important means toward ensuring more Māori students reach Years 11-13 and subsequently move on to tertiary education.

The academic achievement of Māori students has seen relatively steady improvement over the past few years, although Māori achievement in literacy and numeracy in English medium schools is still below average.³⁵ Disparities between Māori and Pākehā learners declined between 2002 and 2006 and the achievement of Year 8 Māori students, in particular, showed substantial improvement.³⁶ At the same time, the decrease in engagement from Years 7 to 10 remains particularly stark for Māori

²⁹ Chair, Cabinet Business Committee, Office of the Minister of Education (2007)

³⁰ <http://www.schoolsplus.govt.nz/> Retrieved 3 May, 2008

³¹ TNS and Monarch Consulting (2006), p. 48

³² *ibid.* p.12

³³ Ministry of Education (2007a)

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 7

³⁵ ERO (2007)

³⁶ Ministry of Education (2007c), p. 99

learners, who demonstrate the lowest level of engagement of all ethnicities, with the decrease being “much more apparent at Years 9 and 10 than Years 7 and 8.”³⁷ A similar concern is highlighted in the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s Annual Report on Maori Education:

The latest attendance, engagement and achievement data for Māori students shows that many students, particularly Māori boys in Years nine and 10, feel disengaged from the education system, are vulnerable to not reaching their potential and leave school early... Māori students were three times more likely to be stood-down, suspended, excluded or expelled than their Pākehā peers and four times more likely to be frequent truants.³⁸

This disengagement translates into disproportionately high rates of early school leaving for Māori students. In 2006, 53% of Māori boys left school without qualifications³⁹ and 20% of Māori students left school before their sixteenth birthday, more than three times the rate for non-Māori learners.⁴⁰

As a policy document *Ka Hikitia* places a strong emphasis on the upper end of the middle schooling years as a critical time of intervention, with the awareness that Years 9 and 10 are “a particularly vulnerable time for Māori students.”⁴¹ *Te Kotahitanga*,⁴² a project focused on improving outcomes for Māori students in mainstream high schools and reducing educational inequity, also identified Years 9 and 10 as a key intervention time. *Te Kotahitanga* highlights the particular needs of Māori learners, working directly with teachers and schools to change pedagogy. The initiative invited students to describe “how teachers, in changing the ways they related and interacted with Māori students in their classrooms, could create a context for learning wherein these students’ educational achievement could improve.”⁴³ Other research with Māori students in the middle years⁴⁴ has underscored several of the findings of the *Te Kotahitanga* initiative. These include young adolescent Māori students’ strong preferences for meaningful relationships with teachers, discursive and active learning, and individualisation.

Middle Years Intervention as Key to Student Engagement

The problem of early school leaving is not specific to New Zealand. In the United States, for example, the average graduation rate is estimated at only 70%. In urban settings in the US this number is even lower, as one study illustrated:

Only about one-half (52 percent) of students in the principal school systems of the 50 largest cities complete high school with a diploma. That rate is well below the national graduation rate of 70 percent, and even falls short of the average for urban districts across the country (60 percent). Only six of these

³⁷ NZCER, letter to schools participating in the Student Engagement Survey

³⁸ Ministry of Education (2007c), p. 94, p. 96

³⁹ Ministry of Education (2007a); (2007c)

⁴⁰ Education and Science Committee (2008), p. 20

⁴¹ Ministry of Education (2007a)

⁴² Bishop et al. (2001)

⁴³ Bishop, Berryman, Powell, and Teddy (2007), p.1

⁴⁴ Nelson (2006); Nelson, Christiansen and Cleary, in press

50 principal districts reach or exceed the national average. In the most extreme cases (Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, and Indianapolis), fewer than 35 percent of students graduate with a diploma.⁴⁵

‘Dropping out’ of school is widely considered one of the most long-standing global educational problems, but one of the least understood,⁴⁶ with grave implications for societal and economic health.

The evidence of early school leaving appears in senior secondary school, yet the roots of some students’ decisions to depart run much deeper. Four powerful predictors of early school leaving in the US can appear as early as emerging adolescence: attending school 80% or less of the time; receiving a poor final behaviour mark; failing maths; and failing English. Students with one of these factors in the 6th grade have no more than a 10% chance of on-time school completion and no more than a 20% chance of graduating one year late. These chances decrease as a student’s acquisition of these factors increases.⁴⁷ That such predictors are revealed as young as 11 years of age is a strong indication of how early some students begin to fall off the track of successful school completion. A New Zealand-specific evidence base illustrates a shift in the way some students think about school, with a notable potential for decrease in student engagement in the middle years.⁴⁸

Defining Engagement

Student engagement is a term used often in contemporary education circles and means a variety of things to various people. A complex concept, student engagement is often measured by truancy, stand-downs and exclusions. Others measure it by observing students’ time-on-task behaviour, attentiveness and completion of assigned work. And some measure engagement as a feeling by students that they want to come to school, believe that adults and peers want them to be there, and feel a sense of institutional affiliation. Still others consider engagement as enthusiasm; question-raising; contributing to group activities; and helping peers. Engagement is also thought of as related to prominent psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi’s concept of ‘flow,’ in which one is deeply immersed in what he or she is doing and feels a sense of energised focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity.⁴⁹

A wide range of data collected in New Zealand schools are considered by different groups to measure engagement. The National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Youth2000, New Zealand Council for Educational Research’s (NZCER) Student Engagement Survey, and Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTLe), for example, all collect student attitudinal data that illustrate students’ feelings about various aspects of school, including classwork, homework, teachers, and climate.

⁴⁵ Swanson, (n.d.)

⁴⁶ Smyth and Hattam (2002)

⁴⁷ Balfanz (2007)

⁴⁸ NEMP, asTTLe, TIMSS, Adolescent Health Research Group (2003), Wylie (2004), Wylie and Hipkins (2006), NZCER Engagement Survey

⁴⁹ Csíkszentmihályi (1997)

These data illustrate the degree to which students want to be in school, a desire intricately linked to the goals of *Schools Plus*, *Ka Hikitia*, and the mission of the Ministry of Education. Overall, “students with positive attitudes tend to achieve better, so it is a concern that some become less positive about learning as they get older.”⁵⁰ These data provide compelling evidence that Years 7-10 can be an important point of intervention for later school success and completion.

Academic Achievement in the Middle Years

Overall, the academic achievement of most New Zealand young adolescents has been steady and positive. Internationally, Year 9 students have performed significantly above average of the 46 participating country means in science and mathematics for the past eight years.⁵¹ At age 15, the culmination of students’ tenure in the middle years, students performed “very creditably compared to their international peers. In scientific literacy only two countries performed statistically better than New Zealand. In reading literacy just three countries performed statistically better, and for mathematical literacy five countries.”⁵²

Nationally, data from asTTLe between 2000 and 2004, and NEMP revealed that “student achievement increases in all subject areas from primary to middle schooling (and that) some of the largest gains in reading, writing and mathematics achievement occur during the middle school years.”⁵³ Research on student transitions into secondary schools also demonstrated that, in the majority of cases, students’ asTTLe test results revealed sound or good achievement gains during the middle years of schooling.⁵⁴

Dr John Hattie elaborated on more recent asTTLe data, explaining that, “In reading in [the] last three years of primary school, no matter what school type they’re in, it’s flat. In math there are reasonably steady gains and in writing – six years ago it was zero. But they’ve invested a tremendous amount in that and there are pockets now of success.”⁵⁵ Indeed, “according to asTTLe, the average increases in achievement in writing were noticeably steeper over Years 8, 9, and 10 compared with earlier and later years.”⁵⁶ Overall in the middle years, as Dr Terry Crooks summarised, “the achievement holds up pretty well through to that point.”⁵⁷

While such academic achievement is largely good news, the middle years are no exception to what some have called “New Zealand’s greatest policy issue.”⁵⁸ the disproportionately wide spread of achievement between New Zealand’s top and bottom students. “The large gap between the low achievers and the rest, combined with the comparatively large number of low achievers, causes this group to be referred to as ‘the long tail.’”⁵⁹ This disparity appears, for example, in a longitudinal

⁵⁰ Ministry of Education (2007f), p. 22

⁵¹ Durling (2007)

⁵² Ramsey (2007), p. 7

⁵³ Durling (2007), p.4

⁵⁴ Cox and Kennedy (2008)

⁵⁵ John Hattie, University of Auckland, Personal Interview, 5 June 2008

⁵⁶ Satherley (2006), p.13

⁵⁷ Terry Crooks, National Education Monitoring Project, Personal Interview, 18 April 2008

⁵⁸ New Zealand Teachers Council Representative, Personal Interview, 28 March 2008

⁵⁹ Education and Science Committee (2008), p. 5

study of approximately 500 students, in which Pākehā children demonstrated higher average scores in mathematics, writing and reading than Māori, after taking family income into account.⁶⁰ The later section entitled *Focus on Māori Learners* provides greater detail on this topic in relation to the middle years learner.

Attitude and Engagement in the Middle Years

The majority of young adolescent learners achieve well in New Zealand schools, yet the degree to which some students feel engaged, empowered, and supported tells a somewhat different story. A portion of students become increasingly dissatisfied with school across the middle years. Student attitudinal and engagement data from seven different measures and studies illustrate that some learners' views of school, teachers, subject matter and school work become increasingly negative across the middle years.⁶¹

Research has suggested that from age 10 to age 12, “students’ engagement in school begins to decrease, with lower proportions of students enjoying learning and higher proportions of students getting into trouble.”⁶² A recent national survey indicated that:

Student engagement appears to decrease from Year 7 to Year 10. There is a definite drop off between Year 8 and Year 9 and this appears to happen whether the students are in the same school or have moved schools.⁶³

It is tempting to try to address the disengagement issue by attending to school type, however disaggregating data such as these has not revealed significant differences by structure. Further, the relatively small number of restricted composites and Years 7-13 secondary schools make such comparisons highly problematic.

Part of the engagement challenge lies in the relationships cultivated within classrooms. Student-teacher relationships in some cases decline substantially during these years. Fewer students report that teachers help them to do their best, treat them fairly, praise them and listen to them in the middle years. And students’ perspectives on school work become equally negative, as more students fail to find a connection between their learning and their future.⁶⁴

Further evidence of this decrease in engagement is the fact that absenteeism, suspension and exclusion from school are most common during Years 7 through 10,⁶⁵ a time when behavioural and social problems can also escalate.⁶⁶ This lack of school engagement is evident in the *Competent Children, Competent Learners* study, which related absenteeism and risky behaviour to patterns of disengagement in learning and identified that one third of their research sample at age 14 did not find school engaging.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Wylie (2004); Wylie and Hipkins (2006)

⁶¹ NEMP; asTTLe; TIMSS; Youth2000; *Competent Children, Competent Learners*; NZCER Engagement Survey; Cox and Kennedy (2008)

⁶² Durling (2007), p. 51

⁶³ NZCER Engagement Survey

⁶⁴ Wylie (2004); Wylie and Hipkins (2006)

⁶⁵ Ng (2006)

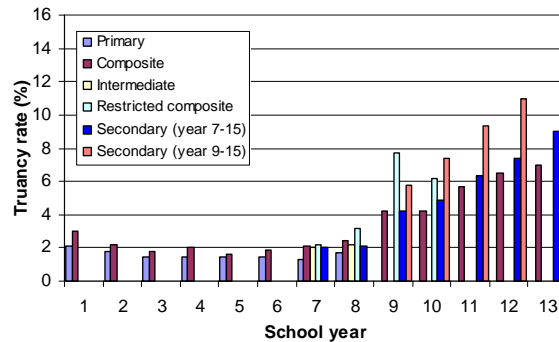
⁶⁶ Dinham and Rowe (2007), p.17

⁶⁷ Wylie and Hipkins (2006), p. vi

Durling’s statistical analysis of student behaviour data shows an increase of truancy and suspension rates across all types of school structures serving middle years students. Again, caution should be used in interpreting data by school type, given the relatively low numbers of certain types of schools.

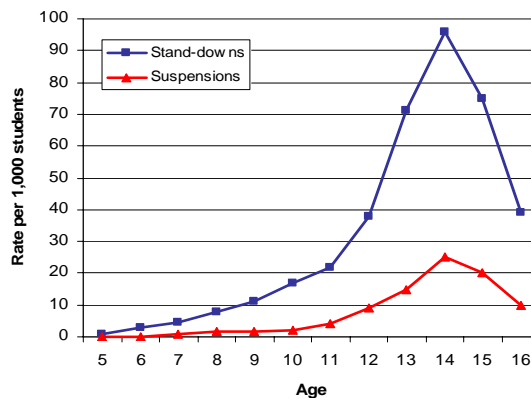
The onset of increased truancy rates begins in Year 9, in the middle schooling years. For the school types in which a school transition does not occur at this time (composite, restricted composite and Year 7 to 15 secondary schools) a rapid increase in truancy rates is also observed suggesting other factors contribute to increased truancy rates.⁶⁸

Figure 1. The percentage truancy rate by year level and school type⁶⁹



The suspension rate is very low up until the age of 10 and then from age 11 (Year 7) the rate increases rapidly up to its maximum at age 14 (Year 10). Once again beyond age 14 the rate begins to decrease.⁷⁰

Figure 2. Age standardised stand-down and suspension rate by age in 2006⁷¹



This issue is reflected in the words of one University of Otago faculty member who described the middle years as a time when, “We have to get kids engaged in learning. To ensure they see learning as valuable. Right now you get a lot of kids coming into Years 9 and 10 who are just waiting until they’re old enough to leave.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Durling (2007), p.24

⁶⁹ Durling (2007), p. 24

⁷⁰ Durling (2007), p. 25

⁷¹ Durling (2007), p. 25

⁷² Glenis Sim, University of Otago, personal interview, 16 May 2008

Overall, the data suggest that between Years 9 and 10 a challenging combination occurs: the greatest decrease in the proportion of students who report liking school a lot, trying hard to do their best, and getting along well with their teachers⁷³ couples with a decline in positive attitudes towards maths, reading and writing.⁷⁴ By age 14 students are more likely to be “bored... restless, tired of trying, and getting into trouble but less likely to enjoy learning.”⁷⁵

Because of the crucial relationships between engagement, academic achievement and early school leaving, the disengagement of middle years learners is problematic. For Māori and non-Māori alike, increasing student engagement in learning is a critical step toward improving the lives of New Zealanders and the economic health of the country. Even those students who struggle with learning stay in school when they feel engaged with the work and affiliated with those around them.⁷⁶ Those students who disengage from school typically do so prior to senior secondary school. Focusing on improving student engagement in the middle years, therefore, is a crucial step towards the successful implementation of the *Schools Plus* and *Ka Hikitia* policies, towards a healthy and robust intellectual economy, and towards the healthy maturation of the next generation of New Zealanders.

⁷³ Adolescent Youth Research Group, 2003

⁷⁴ Cox and Kennedy (2008), p. 3

⁷⁵ Durling (2007), p.51

⁷⁶ TNS and Monarch Consulting (2006)

2 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The attitudinal decline and decreasing engagement of a portion of New Zealand's middle years students raises questions for educationalists and policy-makers alike. What is the current status of middle years schooling and how has it evolved over time? What ultimately makes the difference in young adolescents' achievement and engagement? The complexity of a middle years identity in New Zealand and the crucial role of the teacher both provide important context for understanding Years 7-10.

Historical and Comparative Contexts

Most contemporary Western industrialised societies view early adolescence as a time of great change.⁷⁷ Youngsters aged 10 to 14 are thought to be working toward identity development, trying on myriad selves along the way. They are caught between childhood and adulthood, struggling for independence and responsibility, yet still requiring the support and reassurance of caring adults. They are also faced with choices, many of them risky, that will shape their lives for years to come. Because early adolescence is characterised by tremendous variation in development – cognitively, physically and socio-emotionally – schools serving students in these middle years confront unique challenges daily.⁷⁸

Since the 1890s the debate regarding how to best educate these young adolescents has been laden with tension, philosophical difference and political rivalry in both New Zealand and the United States,⁷⁹ when the first common schools for the age group were introduced a half a world apart. Do learners in the middle years have unique developmental needs? Should they be included in full primary schools? Are they better served in secondary schools? Do they require their own intermediate or middle school structure?

During the century that followed, both New Zealand and the US implemented a variety of schooling structures – intermediate, junior high, middle, full primary and elementary, among others – as they attempted to answer these questions and meet the schooling needs of this age group. In New Zealand the intermediate school emerged as a dominant structure for Years 7 and 8. It has since survived multiple calls for review and recapitulation although a number of intermediates have closed as a result. Nevertheless the intermediate school remains the structure through which the majority of the country's Years 7 and 8 students are educated.⁸⁰

The question of how and where young adolescents should be educated continues. Lounsbury asserted that the evolution of middle grades education is the longest running educational reform movement in the United States.⁸¹ Some have called the intermediate school New Zealand's most reviewed area of schooling.⁸² Proponents of

⁷⁷ Lipsitz (1977); Stevenson (2001)

⁷⁸ Stevenson (2001); Jackson and Davis (2000)

⁷⁹ Hinchco (2004); Lounsbury (1984); Neville-Tisdall (2002); Nolan and Brown (2002)

⁸⁰ Durling (2007)

⁸¹ Lounsbury (1984)

⁸² Watson (1964); Hinchco (2004)

a middle schooling model in both the US⁸³ and New Zealand⁸⁴ advocate vigorously for a unique pedagogy for these learners, yet both groups do so within political structures that have not historically identified middle schooling as a distinct stage of education.

The Struggle for Recognition

The US federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was first passed in 1965 and funds primary and secondary education, while subsuming the middle level into the other two tiers. That the ESEA has been reauthorized every five years since without change to the language or consideration of its implications is testimony to the lack of US policy-makers' attention to the age group. The proposed Success in the Middle Act (H.R. 3406), under review in 2008 by the US House of Representatives, represents an historic moment as the first time middle schooling has been named in US legislation.

Similarly, the middle schooling initiative in New Zealand has strong grass roots proponents yet also struggles to cement a national agenda and gain acknowledgement in the policy arena. The Education Act of 1877 and the Education Reserve Act of 1877 firmly established primary and secondary schooling respectively in the country. Although the term “middle school” was used a mere three years later by the O’Rorke Commission,⁸⁵ likely as a means toward exploring enhanced educational efficiency,⁸⁶ the Acts remained the guiding structure for subsequent educational policies.

Table 1: Contributors to Lack of Societal Recognition of Middle Years Schooling in New Zealand

Cultural	A cultural perspective that identifies principles of effective teaching generally rather than developmentally
Historical	A historical tradition of dividing stages of schooling into primary and secondary, as evidenced in legislation and policy.
Political	A strong teachers’ union presence divided along primary and secondary lines
Procedural	A teacher registration system that registers teachers generally rather than by stage of schooling
Structural	A schooling system that educates the country’s young adolescents in six different schooling types

There are several contributors to the general lack of societal recognition of the middle years in New Zealand, as illustrated in Table 1. The two influential national teachers’ unions, New Zealand’s Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) and New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), are highly influential in the schooling policy sector. The PPTA in particular has voiced strong opposition to the building of middle schools.⁸⁷ Further, the process by which teachers are registered is not divided by schooling

⁸³ e.g. National Middle School Association

⁸⁴ e.g. New Zealand Association for Intermediate and Middle Schooling

⁸⁵ Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR) (1880)

⁸⁶ Hinchco (2004)

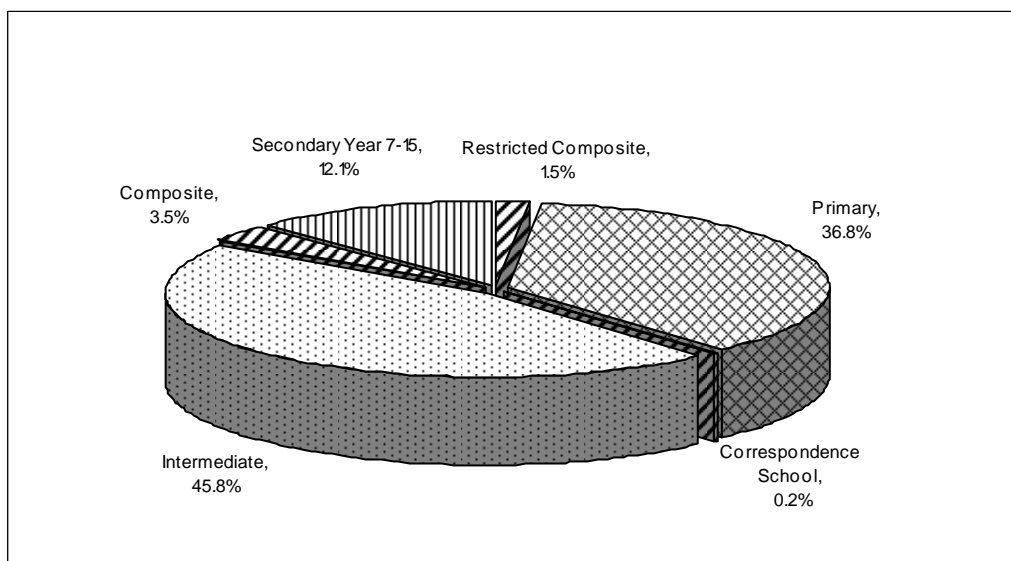
⁸⁷ <http://www.ppta.org.nz/cms/imagelibrary/100131.doc> Retrieved 16 April, 2008

stages and, coupled with a cultural perspective that tends to categorise general, rather than developmental, principles of effective teaching, a middle years identity has been challenging to establish. Finally, the provision of middle years schooling across six different school types in a context of school choice has created divisiveness and disagreement about where young adolescents are best served.

Current Middle Years Student Distribution

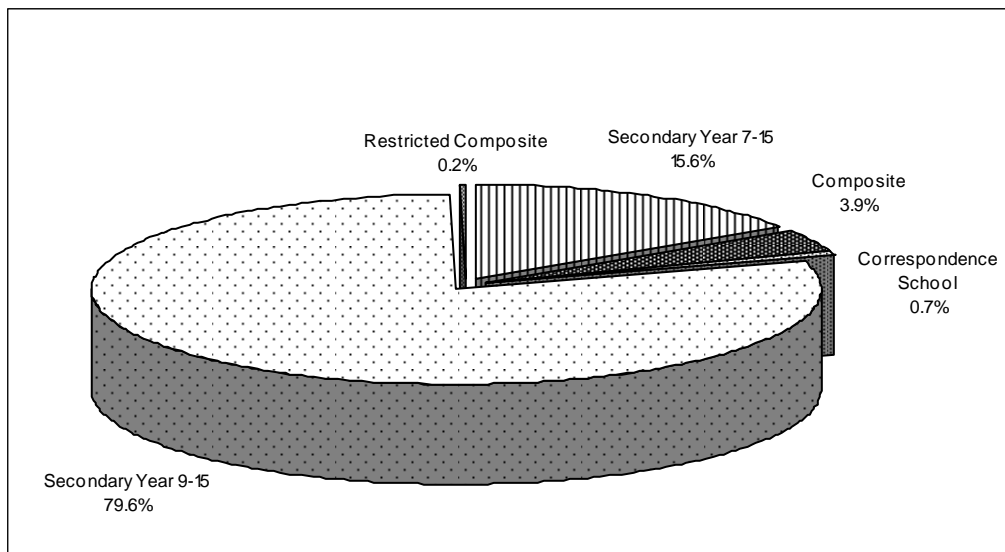
As in many US states, New Zealand's young adolescents are spread out across different school types: full primary (Years 1-8); intermediate (Years 7-8); restricted composite (Years 7-10); composite (Years 1 to 15); and secondary (Years 9-15 and 7-15).

Figure 3. The distribution of students in years 7 and 8 by school type in 2006⁸⁸



⁸⁸ Durling (2007), p.7

Figure 4. The distribution of students in years 9 and 10 by school type in 2006⁸⁹



As depicted in Figures 3 and 4, the majority of New Zealand learners in Years 7 and 8 are educated in full primary and intermediate schools; most students in Years 9 and 10 are found in secondary schools. These numbers have changed slightly over the past five years. From 2003 to 2006 the number of Year 9 and 10 students enrolled in Year 9-15 secondary schools decreased from 82% to 79%, a shift largely attributed to the decrease in number of 9-15 secondary schools and increase in Year 7-15 secondary schools over the same period.⁹⁰

This division is indicative of the predominant debate over the past century in both New Zealand and the US. Educationalists have questioned the type of school building best suited to these learners and the ideal age range of the learners therein. This debate, however, has been largely unproductive in improving learning outcomes for emerging adolescents.

School Type or Teacher Practice?

The School Structure Debate

Internationally there is a lack of solid information regarding the relationship between school type and students' engagement. Attempts to link school building type with achievement have been complex and uncertain at best.⁹¹ In the US, Weiss and Kipnes found few differences between middle and K-8 (full primary) schools, stating that even with substantial differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of students in the two school types, altering school structure is "likely to have little effect on students' performance or well-being" and that their results clearly indicate that "efforts to improve [student] outcomes through changes in schooling form are unlikely to succeed."⁹² Research increasingly suggests that the answer to engaging young adolescents is not found within the question of school type.

⁸⁹ Durling (2007), p.9

⁹⁰ Durling, 2007

⁹¹ Weiss and Kipnes, 2006, Byrnes and Ruby, in press, Mac Iver and Mac Iver, 2006

⁹² Weiss and Kipnes, 2006, p. 267

Subsequently, a renewed focus on middle years teaching rather than school type has emerged within New Zealand over the past few years. The issue of age-appropriate pedagogical approaches identified recently by then New Zealand Minister for Education is an important one, as it is what teachers know, do and value that have been shown by many studies to be more significant in influencing student achievement than structural arrangements.⁹³

Many stakeholders agree that it is time to “focus less on the structure of the schooling system and more on what happens inside the classroom...”⁹⁴ Research is increasingly clear that student engagement and achievement come largely from the choices teachers make about what and how to teach. Dr John Hattie summarised the importance of the teacher over the school type thus:

I keep hearing this debate in New Zealand for more middle schools and you're just ignoring the fundamental problem. It's not about structures. It's about what you do with these kids. If you had a teacher who challenged the kids, no matter what structure, we'd survive.⁹⁵

In its discussion of improving the Māori student experience, the Ministry of Education reminded schools that, “Research suggests some of the most powerful ways to counter student disengagement include...teachers who are focused on meeting students' needs.”⁹⁶ Teachers exert the primary impact on the quality of teaching and learning within schools.⁹⁷

The Teacher-Student Relationship

Relationships with teachers feature as a central aspect of student engagement within New Zealand's data on school success. Forty-five percent of early school leavers, for example, perceived that their teacher wanted them to leave school, indicating a lack of institutional affiliation and sense of belonging on the part of these youth. By contrast, only 16% of principals perceived some teachers as wanting students to leave.⁹⁸ Regardless of the external validity of their perceptions, these students felt unsupported by teachers and unwelcome in school. This perception gap between the two groups is testimony to the substantial work that remains to be accomplished in creating trusting relationships in schools.

One study of higher achieving middle schools identified trusting relationships as an essential component of effectiveness. “Relationships characterized as trusting and respectful lie at the foundation of a set of successful practices made possible and nurtured by a supportive climate and culture.”⁹⁹ This same study revealed that teachers and administrators in middle schools that demonstrate higher than average student achievement “perceive students' emotional and social well-being as having a

⁹³ Dinham and Rowe, 2007

⁹⁴ Maharey, 2006

⁹⁵ John Hattie, University of Auckland, personal interview, 5 May 2008

⁹⁶ Ministry of Education (2007c), p. 96

⁹⁷ Darling-Hammond (2000)

⁹⁸ TNS and Monarch Consulting (2006), p.1

⁹⁹ Wilcox (2008), p.30

significant impact on teaching and learning and thus make every effort to help every student find a connection to school...’’¹⁰⁰ Concomitantly, New Zealand’s Education and Science Committee of the Forty-Eighth Parliament acknowledged this year that, “The ability of teachers to establish individual relationships with every student underpins personalised learning.”¹⁰¹

Positive relationships with teachers play a role in keeping students in school longer and helping them succeed. Research has demonstrated that the multi-age team¹⁰² allowed for longitudinal relationships and resulted in the positive outcomes of higher self esteem and group bonding.¹⁰³ In other research, self-report data indicated, “Teachers practising long term teacher student relationships perceived substantial benefits (e.g. classroom management, accurate diagnosis of student needs, development of a sense of community among students and teachers.)... Parents reported similar attitudes.”¹⁰⁴

A teacher's ability to connect with students on a personal level is a factor in student retention. “Principals, teachers and students identified that not all teachers have the ‘soft’ skills required to connect meaningfully with their students, particularly relationship building.”¹⁰⁵ These include finding out what the student deems important, what is occurring in students’ lives, understanding adolescents via social media (e.g. text, podcasts, social networking sites), and honing communication skills and supportive behaviours. “Over half these early leavers say that they would have stayed at school if they had more support from teachers to stay (57%).”¹⁰⁶

New Zealand educationalists have expressed concern that many newly qualified teachers lack the cultural knowledge, skills, and understandings to form effective relationships with children and young people, their families, and whānau.¹⁰⁷ The ability of the teacher to form positive and supportive relationships with learners is a pivotal factor in students’ engagement in school. Teacher quality, then, is an important potential lever for improvement.

Teacher Quality as Policy Lever for Change

If student engagement in the middle years is not about what type of school one attends, the question of a middle years identity becomes increasingly complex. Given that the middle years of schooling are a critical intervention opportunity for increasing student engagement and thereby reducing potential early school leaving later on,¹⁰⁸ how can schools increase student engagement during these years? How do schools build institutional affiliation within their young adolescent populations? How might schools foster positive relationships between learners and teachers? More and more

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p.16

¹⁰¹ Education and Science Committee (2008), p.16

¹⁰² A schooling structure enabling students of different ages to remain with the same teacher for more than one year.

¹⁰³ Daniel (2007)

¹⁰⁴ George and Lounsbury (2000), p.39

¹⁰⁵ TNS and Monarch Consulting (2006), p. 11

¹⁰⁶ TNS and Monarch Consulting (2006), p. 11

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Education (2007b), p. 21

¹⁰⁸ Balfanz (2007)

evidence points to the effect of the teacher, in terms of teacher qualification or “what teachers know and can do,” on the lives of learners.¹⁰⁹

Research is increasingly clear that the most influential point of leverage on student outcomes, in partnership with parents and caregivers, is *quality teaching*:

What happens in classrooms through quality teaching and through the quality of the learning environment generated by the teacher and the students is the key variable in explaining up to 59%, or even more, of the variance in student scores.¹¹⁰

Conducting five separate, decade-spanning studies on middle schooling practice, Lounsbury and colleagues found that:

These five studies reconfirmed a central truth: *The teacher makes the difference*. It is not the grade organization, interdisciplinary teaming, or anything else that is *the* essential factor in improving middle schools, it is the quality of the classroom teacher.¹¹¹

Further research revealed that:

Teachers who participated in specialised middle grades teacher education programs and are teaching in schools that have teaming and high levels of common planning time are more likely to be involved in effective team and classroom practices. Subsequently those teachers have the potential to effect greater gains in student learning, as defined by student achievement scores.¹¹²

A teacher’s education - both initial and ongoing - is therefore a crucial arena through which to effect change in schools. The ways in which teachers are educated or trained to “cause learning”¹¹³ are an important part of changing the culture of schooling. Ministry of Education guidelines, procedures and priorities pertaining to teacher quality, therefore, are key policy levers for school change and, subsequently, student learning.

The question of appropriate teacher credentialing for the middle years is complex. Years 7-10 straddle the primary and secondary levels and ownership over them is both complicated and political. One Post Primary Teachers’ Association representative explained, “We believe strongly that secondary education begins at Year 7 yet most teachers of Years 7 and 8 are primary trained.”¹¹⁴ Professional rivalry between primary and secondary teachers’ unions, a shortage of funds, competition for resources, and administrative convenience have all played powerful roles over the past century in revising the approach to educating young adolescents in New Zealand, including repeated calls for recapitation and the closing of schools.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Darling Hammond (2000); Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002)

¹¹⁰ Alton-Lee (2003), p. 2

¹¹¹ Anfara et al. (2003), p. 18

¹¹² Anfara et al. (2003), p. 57

¹¹³ Kevin Knight, New Zealand Graduate School of Education, personal interview, 25 March 2008

¹¹⁴ Bronwyn Cross, Post Primary Teachers’ Association, personal interview, 9 June 2008

¹¹⁵ Hinchco (2004); Stewart and Nolan (1992)

Where do the middle years belong in teacher preparation? Should teachers of this age group be educated as primary teachers? Should they be prepared as content specialists as is the case for the secondary years? Or is preparation specific to the needs of the early adolescent age group necessary? Current data on student engagement in the middle years suggests a potential mismatch between some learners' needs and their learning opportunities. Examining the evidence for effective schooling practice in these middle years therefore may offer useful policy directions to address this potential lack of fit.

3 AN EMERGING EVIDENCE BASE ON EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MIDDLE YEARS LEARNERS

The increasingly negative attitude of some middle years students described in Chapter One suggests a *lack of fit* between these young adolescents' engagement needs and their schooling. While academic achievement remains relatively strong for a majority of New Zealand's middle years learners, the gap between high and low achieving students within the same school is substantial and disproportionately large in comparison to other OECD countries.¹¹⁶ Data also reveal that some students experience increasing disaffiliation from school at this age. They struggle to find relevance in their learning and to develop positive relationships with their teachers.

How, then, does one effectively educate learners in the middle years? What does research say about increasing student achievement, engagement and wellbeing? A theoretical framework and a small but growing body of research are helpful in identifying the fit between teaching and learning for young adolescents.

Theoretical Framework

Stage-Environment Fit

Stage-Environment Fit theory emphasises the importance of attending to the fit between young adolescents' needs and their school environment. The theory asserts that the fit between an individual's characteristics and the characteristics of the individual's social environment influences that person's mental health, motivation and behaviour. Given this perspective, if the school environment during the adolescent years does not fit with the developmental needs of the adolescent, a middle schooler's motivation, behaviour and performance will be negatively affected.¹¹⁷

For the young adolescent, typical mismatches in stage-environment fit include an increase in teacher control, ability grouping, and discipline; and a decrease in positive relationships, opportunities for decision-making and challenging assignments.¹¹⁸ Successful student engagement is predicated on a strong stage-environment fit, as is reflected in former Minister of Education Hon. Steve Maharey's comment, "Our focus today on the middle years of schooling ought to be on making our system better fit the student, rather than the student fit the system."¹¹⁹

Basics of Personal Efficacy

If such a fit is important, what, then, are the needs of the young adolescent? One perspective on the foundational elements of a positive school fit for this age group can be found in Stevenson's *Five Basics of Personal Efficacy*.¹²⁰ These basics address both academic and affective student outcomes. According to this theoretical perspective, the following five characteristics are essential for the positive self efficacy of middle school students:

¹¹⁶ <http://www.schoolsplus.govt.nz/> Retrieved 2 May, 2008

¹¹⁷ Eccles et al. (1993); Wigfield and Eccles (1994)

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Maharey (2006)

¹²⁰ Stevenson (2001)

- competence;
- awareness;
- affiliation;
- ethical sense of self; and
- responsibility.

While human development is often discussed in terms of the standard cognitive, socio-emotional and physical domains, using a construct of efficacy is advantageous in that each of the five elements is a complex entity in which the standard aspects of development are embedded, thus allowing for a more complete, holistic understanding of the young adolescent.¹²¹

The Polarity of Early Adolescence

The nature of early adolescence also suggests an inherent polarity to this life stage. James' theory of *Need Polarities* describes the key needs of the age group as the following:

- the need to need/the need to be needed;
- the need to move inwards/the need to affect the outer world;
- the need for routine/the need for intensity;
- the need for myth and legend/the need for fact;
- the need for stillness/the need for activity; and
- the need for separateness/the need for belonging.¹²²

James' theoretical premise as it relates to learning is that young adolescent students become and remain engaged when their emotional, physical and intellectual needs are addressed. Teaching should be individualised based on student need. "When teachers recognize, understand and meet the needs of adolescents, students will enjoy learning and be more productive. When needs are met, communication gaps and problems are reduced."¹²³

Educationalists internationally have produced many lists of early adolescent needs but common to most are the needs for competence, belonging, identity, independence, and responsibility. A school that attends to these basics of personal efficacy creates a learning environment that enables students to find relevance and experience competence and challenge; to feel a strong sense of belonging; and to grow in independence and responsibility. Doing so addresses the engagement and related efficacy needs of young adolescents through a positive school fit. Although the evidence base is relatively limited regarding the relationship between middle schooling practices and student outcomes, a growing number of studies illustrate what happens for students and teachers when these needs are met and approaches are implemented.

¹²¹ Bergstrom (2001)

¹²² James (1974), p. xi

¹²³ <http://ced.ncsu.edu/hyy/james.pdf> Retrieved 2 February 2008

Selected Research on Effective Middle Schooling Practice

The research on effective teaching practices is vast and discussing the research literature on middle years curriculum, instruction and assessment in specific subject areas is beyond the scope of this policy study.¹²⁴ This section includes only findings specific to the explicit study of middle years practice as outlined in a number of documents advocating for what has come to be known as the ‘middle school concept.’¹²⁵

Ten to 15 year-olds experience profound personal changes—in patterns of thinking, in physical growth and hormones, and of emotions, morals, and friends.¹²⁶ In fact, early adolescence is second only to birth through age three as the developmental stage with greatest diversity and breadth of change. Unlike in infancy, however, young adolescents are conscious of the changes within themselves. The failure of many schools to respond effectively to these changes is reflected in the poor motivation, low performance and negative behaviour typical of many young adolescents, and is explained by a lack of fit between the student and the school environment.¹²⁷

Based on stage-environment fit and the concept of attending to both academic and affective outcomes, several tenets of middle schooling practice have emerged internationally. Although relatively few New Zealand studies have examined the relationship between specific teaching practices for young adolescents and student outcomes, a small but growing base of research from the US may be helpful in promoting a discussion of the link between teaching and learning in the middle years. To understand this research base, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by the ‘middle schooling concept.’

The Middle Schooling Concept

Various reports and frameworks illustrate striking consistency in their call for an effective school for young adolescents.¹²⁸ Such schools are typically characterised by the following:

- *Curriculum* that is relevant, challenging, integrative, exploratory;
- *Instruction* that connects directly to curriculum, assessment and the unique nature and needs of young adolescents;
- *Assessment* that allows students to demonstrate knowledge and skills, and informs teachers’ choices of curriculum and instruction;
- *Relationships* that advance academic and affective student development, quality teaching and a supportive school environment;
- *Educators* who are prepared to work specifically with young adolescents, and who value doing so;
- *Leadership* that is courageous and collaborative, supports a shared vision and promotes high expectations through evidence-based decision making;

¹²⁴ For an excellent overview of best teaching practices, I encourage the reader to consult the Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis (Alton-Lee, 2003).

¹²⁵ Jackson and Davis (2000); Carnegie (1995); NMSA (2003)

¹²⁶ Knowles and Brown (2000); Stevenson (2001)

¹²⁷ Eccles and Wigfield (1997)

¹²⁸ e.g. *Turning Points* Carnegie Corporation (2000); *This We Believe* NMSA (2003)

- *Health and wellness* programmes that ensure young adolescents have the support they need to thrive; and
- *Family and community* partnerships that foster communication, and multiple avenues for involvement.¹²⁹

Based on these eight bulleted items, as well as on the landmark *Turning Points* recommendations,¹³⁰ researchers have studied the middle school reform movement as a whole, as well as several cornerstone practices of the middle schooling concept independently.

A glimpse into a school subscribing to the middle school concept illustrates several cornerstone practices. The first cornerstone that relates to New Zealand practices is *collaborative planning and teaching*. In the US this is typically accomplished through the interdisciplinary team, in which students affiliate with a group of three or four other classrooms of students and teachers, referred to as their team, house, or cluster, providing them with a small community of learning and a sense of belonging. In larger schools this is a way to create a school-within-a-school. Teachers on interdisciplinary teams regularly plan and implement lessons and units collaboratively, requiring the extensive and intentional use of common planning time across the team. This is similar to how some New Zealand intermediate and middle schools employ their syndicate model, at times grouping classes together and referring to them as whānau. A typical and important difference between the US model and New Zealand's, however, is use of the subject specialist and the generalist teacher, respectively.

Another cornerstone practice that holds implications for New Zealand practice is the *integrative curriculum* often found in primary classrooms but which is much less common in secondary. The *New Zealand Curriculum* acknowledges a responsive curriculum recognises that learners in Years 7-10 are “encountering increasingly complex curriculum contexts.”¹³¹ Through integrative curriculum, teachers and students together investigate themes of study that cross subject boundaries and are grounded in personal and social relevance for the learners. This approach requires a reduction or elimination of subject departmentalisation. Research and experience suggest that an integrative approach is more effective for middle years learners than the subject-specific one featured in most secondary schools.¹³²

A third cornerstone practice also currently emphasised in New Zealand is the building of *meaningful relationships*. In the case of middle years pedagogy in the US, relationships are often fostered through the use of a teacher advisory programme, a time set aside regularly to focus on the more affective and pastoral needs of students in the middle years school. Such teacher advocacy may take many forms, but common to all is the presence of the teacher as caring, knowledgeable adult and the belief that every student should be well known by at least one adult in the building. Because the US more often uses a team model of 2-4 teachers in the middle years than the self-contained classroom model employed in NZ, a teacher advisory model may be considered of greater import in the US, as it provides a student's family members with

¹²⁹ Andrews, Caskey, and Anfara (2007); Wilcox (2008)

¹³⁰ Carnegie (1995); Jackson and Davis (2000)

¹³¹ Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 41

¹³² Beane (1997); Dowden (2007)

one adult with whom to communicate. The *New Zealand Curriculum* stresses the importance of these positive relationships with adults as a key characteristic of learning in Years 7-10.¹³³

A fourth key cornerstone of the middle schooling concept that relates to New Zealand's current context is the practice of *active inquiry* as the primary mode of learning. Teachers employing a middle schooling concept create opportunities for students to learn in active, student-centred, discursive, often collaborative ways. Rather than the teacher-centred focus characterising many secondary school venues, these middle years classrooms showcase learners who identify their own questions, create ways to investigate answers, co-construct knowledge and demonstrate their learning in an authentic, often community-based, manner. The *New Zealand Curriculum* similarly emphasises the role of community in these students' learning, calling for "authentic learning experiences" and "opportunities for students to be involved in the community" in Years 7-10.¹³⁴

A Growing Evidence Base

Many middle schooling practices originally germinated more from ideology than from research evidence.¹³⁵ However, research into the middle school concept resulted in 3,717¹³⁶ studies related to middle schooling conducted between 1991 and 2002,¹³⁷ and researchers have conducted considerably more studies in the six years since. Two-thirds of these studies are qualitative and provide helpful descriptive and analytical findings. While these serve a purpose in informing policy and practice, they are by design not generalisable and cannot definitively link practice to student outcomes. As a result, the evidence base on specific outcomes of the middle school concept is relatively limited.

The emerging body of quantitative research included in this section has demonstrated relationships between particular aspects of the middle school concept and students' academic achievement, engagement and wellbeing. Anfara et al. asserted that:

The inconclusive nature of middle school research should not be adopted as a rationale for inaction or refusal to move forward in improving middle level schools. There is, indeed, a promising and expanding body of research that demonstrates positive results when schools fully implement the recommended tenets of the middle school philosophy.¹³⁸

The development of the *Turning Points* recommendations by the Carnegie Corporation was the stimulus for several such studies. These recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Involve parents and communities in supporting learning

¹³³ Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 41

¹³⁴ Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 41

¹³⁵ Dinham and Rowe (2007)

¹³⁶ 'Research' in this meta-analysis conducted by Hough was defined by original work that reported methods and findings from the systematic collection and analysis of data.

¹³⁷ Hough (2003); Anfara, Andrews, Hough, Mertens, Mizelle and White (2003)

¹³⁸ Anfara, Andrews, Hough, Mertens, Mizelle, and White (2003), p. 4

- Teach a curriculum grounded in standards
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students
- Prepare teachers for middle grades
- Organise relationships for learning
- Govern democratically
- Provide safe and healthy school environment
- Build leadership capacity and collaborative culture
- Create school culture to support high achievement
- Employ data based inquiry and decision making
- Network with like minded schools
- Develop district capacity¹³⁹

The fundamental finding in this expanding body of research is an understanding of the interdependence between and among the attributes of effective middle years schools. A series of studies over the past two decades has demonstrated that learners at schools that employ more middle schooling practices at higher levels of implementation have demonstrated higher achievement and wellbeing than have their counterparts in schools with fewer practices.¹⁴⁰

Several studies have investigated the link between student outcomes and the implementation of the middle school concept as an integrated reform model. Given New Zealand's strong emphasis on evidence-based practice, included here are only the quantitative studies with relatively large data sets linking the middle school concept to student outcomes.

- Researchers examined the impact of school reform on nearly 9000 students and 377 schools that were restructuring to follow a middle school concept (which included team teaching, reduced departmental structures, and heterogeneous grouping). Modest but consistent effects were found on student achievement and engagement.¹⁴¹
- Two large scale studies conducted almost a decade apart revealed that, when effectively implemented, “the middle school concept leads to positive outcomes, including improved academic achievement and attendance, lower rates of disciplinary problems, and improved relationships between and among students, teachers and parents.”¹⁴²
- A study of 155 schools revealed that students in schools demonstrating middle schooling practice improved in maths and reading scores over the two year span. “Compared to the non-grant schools, the Middle Start grant schools showed gains in both 7th grade reading (+10%) and math (+6%)” standardised test scores.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Carnegie (1995)

¹⁴⁰ Felner et al. (1997a), (1997b); Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999)

¹⁴¹ Lee and Smith (1993)

¹⁴² Anfara et al. (2003), p. 40

¹⁴³ Mertens, Flowers, and Mulhall (1998), p. 92

- Middle Start grant schools also displayed improvements in behaviour, student adjustment, and a decrease in student alcohol use. Students reported higher self esteem and academic efficacy than those at non-grant schools. Additionally teachers reported greater contact with parents and families.¹⁴⁴
- In a study of 31 middle schools, students at schools with highly implemented middle years practices demonstrated higher achievement across subject areas than those in schools with fewer or no recommended practices. This same study revealed higher self esteem and lower levels of worry and fear in students at schools with highly implemented middle years practices than their counterparts in schools with fewer or no recommended practices.¹⁴⁵
- Through the use of regression analyses and adjusting for a combination of demographic factors, researchers divided a set of middle schools into ‘higher-performing’ and ‘average-performing’ on the basis of student academic achievement on English and maths assessments over a three year period. The study revealed that the higher-performing schools were schools that “echo the NMSA recommendations” outlined in *This We Believe*¹⁴⁶ (summarised earlier), and subscribed to a middle school concept by focusing on respectful relationships; young adolescents’ social and emotional needs; teamwork; evidence-based decision making; and a shared vision.¹⁴⁷

The studies summarised above indicate students in schools with high levels of implementation of middle schooling practices consistently outperformed their counterparts in schools with lower or no implementation of such practices. These students also demonstrated higher self-esteem, fewer behaviour problems and lower levels of worry and fear.¹⁴⁸ The combination of team teaching, an eliminated departmental structure and heterogeneously grouped instruction demonstrated a positive association with academic achievement, engagement and greater equity of student outcomes across student sub-groups.¹⁴⁹

Team teaching has its own body of research related to young adolescents’ learning. Students demonstrated the largest gain on standardised achievement scores when they attended schools that teamed at all grade levels with high levels of common planning time among teachers; conversely students demonstrated the lowest gain in schools without teaming.¹⁵⁰ Smaller team size and greater teaming experience each added to this benefit.¹⁵¹ Two-teacher teams with fifty students or fewer demonstrated stronger social bonding than did the larger four-teacher interdisciplinary teams.¹⁵² High levels of common planning time for teachers within a highly refined teaming model resulted in student self-reports of fewer behaviour problems, less depression, higher self-esteem, and greater academic efficacy.¹⁵³ And when teaming and common planning

¹⁴⁴ Mertens, Flowers, and Mulhall (1998)

¹⁴⁵ Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand, and Flowers (1997)

¹⁴⁶ NMSA (2003)

¹⁴⁷ Wilcox (2008)

¹⁴⁸ Mertens and Anfara (2006)

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999)

¹⁵¹ Flowers, Mertens and Mulhall (2000)

¹⁵² Wallace (2007)

¹⁵³ Mertens, Flowers and Mulhall (1998)

time were coupled with research-based classroom practices, student achievement scores also improved dramatically.¹⁵⁴

In addition to gains for students, teaming improved school climate; increased contact with parents and families; and improved teachers' job satisfaction.¹⁵⁵ In order to fulfil its potential gains, teaming is dependent upon a number of factors including "the frequency and amount of common planning time, the number of students per team, the length of time or experience in teaming and professional development focused on effective teaming practices."¹⁵⁶

The findings of these studies provide the groundwork for a growing evidence base on middle years schooling. Anfara et al. asserted that, "They provide middle level practitioners, scholars, advocates, and policy-makers with a firm foundation that links the middle school concept to improved student academic and social-emotional development."¹⁵⁷ Yet the middle schooling movement in the US, where these studies have been conducted, is controversial and continually the target of heated debate, largely over school structure.

The educational dialogue in New Zealand is further along that continuum, having largely moved from debating appropriate structures to concerning itself with pedagogy. Therefore, while the findings of these studies can be viewed as a helpful start, this evidence-base is not specific to the needs of New Zealand's learners or to the unique structures and practices of New Zealand schools. Ongoing research in the area of education for young adolescents in this country will therefore be the key to furthering effective, evidence-based policy development. Some of this research is already being conducted in the area of Māori education.

Focus on Māori Learners

The evidence base for effective middle years schooling reveals several strong connections between effective pedagogy for young adolescents and what *Ka Hikitia* and Māori adolescents participating in Te Kotahitanga identified as important. For example, Māori learners named positive relationships, where teachers knew them as Māori and trusted them as important to their success.¹⁵⁸ The role of the teacher in increasing the achievement and engagement of diverse learners is great. "Much research indicates the benefits of teachers developing positive teaching and learning relationships with Māori students and the effect that this has on achievement results."¹⁵⁹ *Ka Hikitia*, the leading policy document on Māori education, also emphasises the importance of the teacher through its call for "professional development that shows improved outcomes for Māori to improve teaching in Year 9 and Year 10."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Anfara et al. (2003)

¹⁵⁵ Andrews, Caskey and Anfara (2007); Flowers, Mertens and Mulhall (1999)

¹⁵⁶ Anfara et al. (2003), pp. 35-36

¹⁵⁷ Anfara et al. (2003), p. 11

¹⁵⁸ Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, and Richardson (2003)

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of Education (2007a), p. 24

¹⁶⁰ Ministry of Education (2007a), p. 18

Dr Russell Bishop, Director of Te Kotahitanga and Professor at University of Waikato, explained:

The way we relate to other people has an enormous impact on how we interact with them. And if we see them in deficit terms then we will interact with them in a remedial manner.¹⁶¹

In addition to the emphasis on teacher-student relationships, *Ka Hikitia* reveals other strong connections between research-based practice for middle years youth and Māori learners' needs. Like the middle school concept's emphasis on student voice, *Ka Hikitia* expresses the importance of the role of *student input* when it calls for Māori youth to participate in decision-making for school improvement.¹⁶² Smith and others have drawn attention to the role the peer group plays in Polynesian culture and the substantial issues and problems that are examined and shared among children, asserting that they are often accustomed to significant responsibility and consensus-style leadership.¹⁶³ Student input into curriculum and school governance, they posit, is a strong match for these learners.

The importance of *relevant curriculum* is another parallel between effective practice for young adolescents and for Māori learners. "Māori children and students are more likely to achieve when they see themselves reflected in the teaching content and are able to be 'Māori' in all learning contexts."¹⁶⁴ This type of personal, cultural and social relevance is also the basis of integrative curriculum, which purports to connect students' new learning to prior learning, through personally meaningful curricula.

As in the middle schooling literature, the Ministry of Education has identified the role of *family/whānau and community* as an important component in improving outcomes for Māori learners, calling for "improved communications and partnerships with whānau to strengthen student attendance and engagement."¹⁶⁵ The focus on "productive partnerships"¹⁶⁶ similarly reflects the attributes of higher achieving middle schools.

Finally, a strong parallel between effective middle schooling practice and Māori learners is revealed in students' *pedagogical preferences*. Māori learners "believed their achievement could be enhanced if their teachers would use alternative pedagogical approaches that essentially were more discursive and inclusive than the expert-novice transmission model that they most often experienced."¹⁶⁷ Reinventing schooling to heighten inquiry and reduce the use of traditional transmission is in many ways central to the middle schooling concept. Overall, there is considerable alignment between some aspects of research-based effective practice for young adolescents and for Māori learners.

¹⁶¹ Russell Bishop, Te Kotahitanga, University of Waikato, personal interview, 29 May 2008

¹⁶² Ministry of Education (2007a), p 18

¹⁶³ Smith, 1998, Hinchco, 2004

¹⁶⁴ Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 21

¹⁶⁵ Ministry of Education, 2007a, p 18

¹⁶⁶ Ministry of Education, 2007a, p 20

¹⁶⁷ Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung, (2007), p. 259

For Māori and non-Māori students alike, direction from the Ministry of Education for middle years teachers and principals reminds educationalists that:

“regardless of what school a student goes to, we need to take account of their specific needs as an adolescent to make sure their learning is not adversely affected by the enormous physical and emotional changes they are also coping with.”¹⁶⁸

Teachers who attend to these unique developmental changes lay the groundwork for positive student achievement and engagement during these critical years.

While research suggests there is a set of evidence-based practices for middle years learners, less is known about what engages New Zealand youth in particular. And there is less clarity about whether or not teachers are well equipped to implement such practice within their classrooms. How does the content of teacher preparation programmes intersect with the skills, knowledge and values teachers ultimately need to teach this age group effectively? Current data on student engagement in the middle years suggests a lack of fit between many learners’ needs and their learning opportunities. Examining New Zealand’s current context of teacher education for these middle years may therefore offer useful policy implications to address this gap.

¹⁶⁸ Maharey, 2006, p.?

4 TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE MISSING MIDDLE

The policy document *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) outlines key competencies, learning areas, and achievement objectives for the schooling sector.¹⁶⁹ The NZC identifies five learning pathways: early childhood, Years 1-6, Years 7-10, Years 11-13, and tertiary education.¹⁷⁰ These learning pathways are described within the NZC as exhibiting unique foci and attributes, while at the same time providing for smooth and positive transitions.

The distinctive nature and needs of students in Years 7-10 are depicted in the NZC in the following way:

A responsive curriculum will recognise that students in these years are undergoing rapid physical development, becoming increasingly socially aware, and encountering increasingly complex curriculum contexts. Particularly important are positive relationships with adults, opportunities for students to be involved in the communities, and authentic learning experiences.¹⁷¹

Although teachers are prepared through teacher preparation programmes to teach in the other learning pathways in the schooling sector, there are no distinct programmes to educate teachers for Years 7-10 in New Zealand. Instead, teachers of the middle years are divided across primary and secondary teacher preparation, mirroring how the learners are spread across school types. This situation presents interesting questions:

- What is the potential for successful implementation of the NZC without explicit preparation or professional development in the teaching of all of its identified learning pathways?
- Is the set of professional knowledge and skills gained from primary or secondary teacher preparation sufficient for teaching middle years learners?
- Can teachers effectively engage students during the middle schooling years without acquiring knowledge, skills and dispositions specific to these learners' needs?

Considering that “the New Zealand Curriculum is a clear statement of what we deem important in education,”¹⁷² and is “the foundation policy statement covering teaching, learning, and assessment for all students in all New Zealand schools,”¹⁷³ the lack of emphasis on the preparation of teachers for one of its five learning pathways is worthy of examination.

Teacher Education Context in New Zealand

Initial Teacher Education in New Zealand is in the midst of dramatic change, as the six colleges of education who were the sole providers of teacher education until the

¹⁶⁹ Ministry of Education (2007g)

¹⁷⁰ Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 41

¹⁷¹ Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 41

¹⁷² Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 4

¹⁷³ <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/> Retrieved 1 February 2007

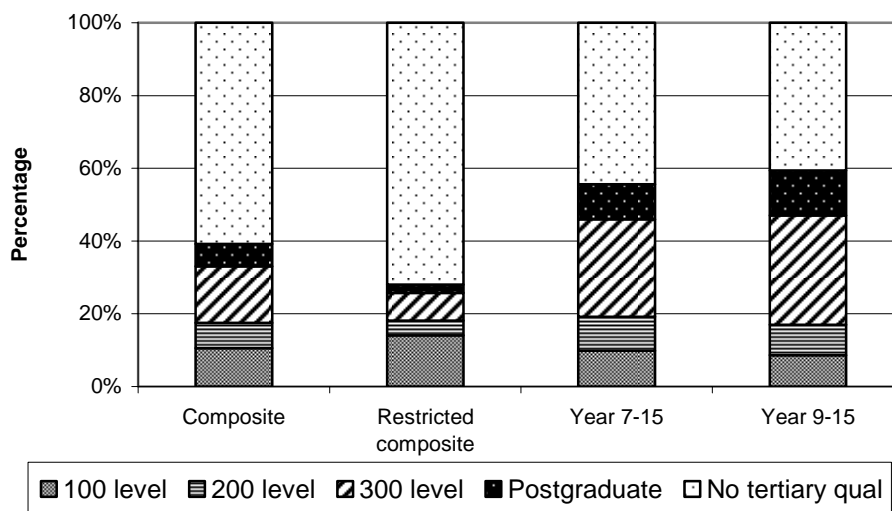
1990s merge with universities, and other tertiary institutions enter into the teacher preparation field. Up from those original six, 27 tertiary providers now offer a total of 85 different qualifications through 131 programmes.¹⁷⁴

Since 1936, the majority of primary teachers complete a three year undergraduate teaching degree and most secondary teachers undertake a one year graduate diploma.¹⁷⁵ Most recently a trend toward adding a fourth year of undergraduate study has emerged, further adding to the changes in programmes, climate and emphases. None of New Zealand’s 27 current teacher education providers offers a specialisation in middle years teaching and learning. Seventeen providers offer Primary Teaching Programmes, ten offer Secondary Teaching Programmes; and twenty offer Early Childhood Education Teaching Programmes.¹⁷⁶

Disparity Across Schooling Experience

Reflected in the division of middle years students across different school types, young adolescents are taught by either primary or secondary trained teachers, leaving both primary and secondary teacher education programmes to include the middle years as part of their overall programmes. There is dramatic range in teacher qualification across school types. As illustrated in Figures 5, 6, and 7, teacher census data indicate significant variability in the preparation of teachers of Years 9 and 10.¹⁷⁷ Similar data regarding Years 7 and 8 teachers are not collected by the teacher census and were therefore unavailable for inclusion in this report.

Figure 5. The percentage of teachers teaching year 9 and 10 students only and their highest tertiary qualification by school type¹⁷⁸



¹⁷⁴ Rivers (2006)

¹⁷⁵ Ministry of Education (2007b)

¹⁷⁶ Kane (2005)

¹⁷⁷ Durling (2007)

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

Figure 6. The percentage of teachers teaching year 9 and 10 students only and their highest tertiary qualification by school decile¹⁷⁹

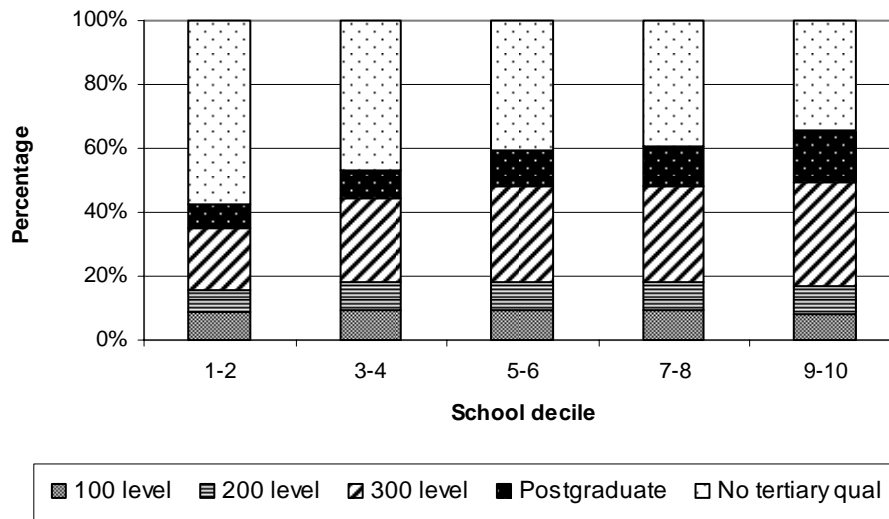
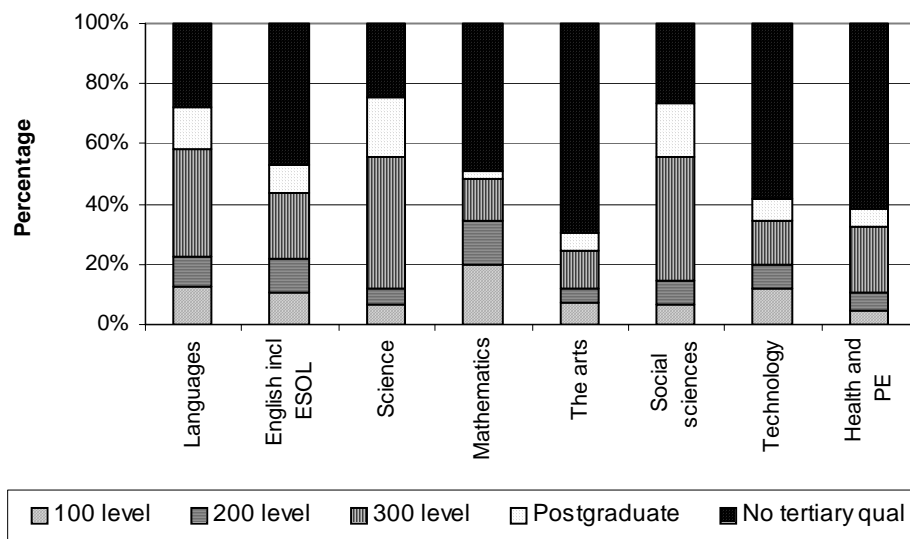


Figure 7. The percentage of teachers teaching year 9 and 10 students only and their highest tertiary qualification in the subjects they are currently teaching¹⁸⁰



These figures indicate that the quality of education, if defined by teacher qualification, is inconsistent across schools for middle years learners. Durling summarises this variability in the following way:

- Teachers teaching year 9 and 10 students at composite and restricted composite schools are *less likely* to have a tertiary level qualification in the subjects they are teaching compared to teachers at year 7-15 and 9-15 secondary schools.

¹⁷⁹ Durling (2007)

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

- Teachers teaching year 9 and 10 students in decile 1 and 2 schools are *less likely* to have a tertiary level qualification in the subjects they are teaching compared to teachers in decile 9 and 10 schools.¹⁸¹

A lack of consistency in teacher qualification is cause for concern, particularly when it pertains to decile, ethnicity and school type. This is likely true for all stages of schooling due to the individuality of teaching styles, and differing school resources and priorities. However, a lack of consistency in teacher preparation for the middle years adds to the complexity of the equity question. This aspect of educational inequity could be addressed through evidence-based policy development.

Current Initial Teacher Education Concerns in New Zealand

In addition to the equity issues raised by the disparity in qualifications of those teaching in the middle years, principals and others have expressed concerns about the quality of the teacher education programme graduate in general.

Employers report that graduation from an initial teacher education programme does not necessarily provide the quality guarantees they need. They regard many graduates as lacking the range or depth of knowledge of curriculum material, effective pedagogies, adequate people guidance, management, and relationship skills to begin teaching effectively.¹⁸²

A common perception among educators indicates that “a majority of primary qualifications are seen to lack subject knowledge content, and secondary programmes are described as lacking pedagogical and education studies content.”¹⁸³ This is often attributed to what many consider too short a time frame associated with each type of programme, as evidenced by the following comments of a Post Primary Teachers’ Association representative and former secondary teacher:

There is this perception that secondary teachers teach content and primary teachers teach children, and it’s garbage. It’s absolute garbage. Secondary teacher education includes a significant focus on pedagogy as well. But I *do* think we are caught by the fact that we try and educate secondary teachers over one year. If you had a policy that required and properly funded two year secondary teacher education or five year conjoint, you would have time.¹⁸⁴

In contrast to New Zealand’s system for educating teachers, the US middle years teacher education has seen significant growth at the state level over the past few decades, with the number of states offering a middle years teaching license growing from two states in 1968,¹⁸⁵ to 43 more recently.¹⁸⁶ This has been mirrored by a substantial rise in universities offering middle grades teaching programmes. Such growth illustrates how teacher registration and licensure often drive teacher preparation. Given that New Zealand uses a general teacher registration process, it is

¹⁸¹ Durling (2007), p. 10

¹⁸² Ministry of Education (2007b), p.19

¹⁸³ Ministry of Education (2007b), Section B, p. 20

¹⁸⁴ Judie Alison, PPTA, personal interview, 9 June 2008

¹⁸⁵ Pumerantz (1969)

¹⁸⁶ Gaskill (2002)

not surprising New Zealand's tertiary institutions have not developed specific programmes geared toward teaching young adolescents.

Almost all stakeholders were supportive of the current registration process and there was general opposition to changes in the registration. As Dr Barry Brooker of the University of Canterbury has stated:

If we had a four year programme that would be great. And a fourth year for students themselves to make some decisions about specialising – but to think you had to have a qualification that licensed you to teach just a specific age range. I think it's taking it too far.¹⁸⁷

While most participants did not want a change in teacher registration, the majority believed some form of specialised preparation for teachers of middle years learners would improve student outcomes. This was not necessarily equated with a stand-alone, separate programme, although a few did advocate for that. Rather, most New Zealand educationalists felt a specific and increased emphasis would be of great benefit, taking the form of core papers; a fourth year; or a post-graduate specialisation added to an existing primary or secondary focus.

There is currently considerable momentum within New Zealand for schooling that responds to the developmental and academic needs of young adolescents. The New Zealand Association for Intermediate and Middle Schooling launched its strategic plan in 2006, emphasising the importance of pedagogical reform in the middle years regardless of school type. In 2007 then Minister of Education Hon. Steve Maharey called on educationalists to “consider curricula and pedagogical practices that are responsive to and work best for early adolescents,”¹⁸⁸ and asserted that, “Training teachers specifically to handle the needs of early adolescents is a longer-term, but no less pressing, issue for the middle years. It includes understanding and researching what constitutes effective teaching for and with early adolescents.”¹⁸⁹ And in 2008 the Ministry of Education established a Middle Schooling Steering Group in order to develop “a strong, coherent evidence base to underpin the development of policy related to teaching and learning and student outcomes in the middle schooling years.”¹⁹⁰ This report as a whole aims to contribute to this evidence base, and the next chapter depicts New Zealand stakeholders' perceptions of teaching students in the middle years.

¹⁸⁷ Barry Brooker, University of Canterbury, personal interview, 25 March 2008

¹⁸⁸ Maharey (2007), p.10

¹⁸⁹ Maharey (2007), p.12

¹⁹⁰ Middle Schooling Steering Group Terms of Reference, 2008

5 VOICES FROM THE FIELD

An extensive document review – including policies, position papers, Ministry reports, student evaluation data, and research reports – has provided a rich picture of the status of schooling for young adolescents in New Zealand. With that as a backdrop, I added the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders as I examined the intersection between teacher credentialing and the education of young adolescents. From the field I endeavoured to discover the following:

- Do teachers of Years 7-10 require specialised skills, knowledge and values?
 - If so, what are these?
 - What options should exist for teachers to acquire them?
 - To what extent should such skills, knowledge and values be required of teachers at that level?
 - What barriers exist to such change in policy and practice?

Posed to principals, teacher educators, Teachers Council representatives, teachers' union personnel, researchers and other educationalists, these questions have formed the basis of this study in hopes that, "Researching what constitutes effective teaching for and with early adolescents"¹⁹¹ would further the understanding of student engagement in the middle years.

Methodology

Guided by these questions, several methods of data collection and analysis have informed this qualitative inquiry. Employing a case study approach and ethnographic methods, I relied upon document review, participant observation and interview/focus groups to understand the perspectives of various stakeholders in relation to schooling for New Zealand's young adolescents. This chapter lends voice to these stakeholders, relying heavily on the words of New Zealand educationalists themselves to convey the status of middle years teaching in the country.

Document Review

As illustrated in Table 2, I have conducted document reviews of relevant Ministry of Education reports and policies, including but not limited to the *New Zealand Curriculum; Ka Hikitia; Becoming a Teacher in the 21st Century; Inquiry into Making Schooling Work for Every Child; New Zealand Schools 2006; Staying at School: Assisting Students to Reach their Full Potential; New Zealand Student Engagement Report 2006; State of Education in New Zealand 2007; Ngā Haeata Mātauranga: Annual Report on Māori Education; Teaching and Learning in Middle Schooling: A Statistical Snapshot; and Initial Teacher Education Policy and Practice.*

Evaluation data gathered on schools and students, in the form of Educational Review Office Reports and from measures such as aTTle, NEMP, TIMSS Youth2000 and the NZCER Student Engagement Survey also proved essential. New Zealand research initiatives such as *Competent Children, Competent Learners;*¹⁹² *Students' Transition*

¹⁹¹ Maharey (2007) p.12

¹⁹² Wylie (2004), Wylie and Hipkins (2006)

from *Primary to Secondary Schooling*;¹⁹³ *Te Kotahitanga*;¹⁹⁴ *Politics or Pedagogy? The Development of Middle Schools in New Zealand*;¹⁹⁵ *Learning to Teach: A Survey of Provisionally Registered Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand*;¹⁹⁶ and the *Iterative Best Evidence Syntheses*¹⁹⁷ provided further critical data.

In each case, documents were analysed for their implications for the education of young adolescents in New Zealand, and considered in light of the small but growing international evidence base on effective middle schooling practice. When available in electronic form, documents were entered into NVivo for analysis. The document review informed the whole of this report and Chapters One through Four in particular.

One particular limitation of this study related to document review includes the reliance on US-based research in the absence of a more extensive research base on middle schooling in New Zealand. “There remains limited New Zealand-based information about educational provision for students in the middle years of schooling.”¹⁹⁸ On a related note, cultural transferability is also a challenge in this context. “What may hold for one culture, therefore, may not be the same for another. Citizens of multi-cultural societies, such as New Zealand, must be conscious of this important caveat to the generalisations made in much of the sociological literature,” and in the educational literature as well.¹⁹⁹

Table 2: Key New Zealand-based Documents

MoE Reports and Policies	NZ Research Studies	Sources of NZ Evaluation Data
New Zealand Curriculum Ka Hikitia Becoming a Teacher in the 21 st Century Inquiry into Making the Schooling System Work for Every Child Staying at School: Assisting Students to Reach their Full Potential State of Education in New Zealand 2007 New Zealand Student Engagement Report 2006	Competent Children, Competent Learners Students’ Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling Best Evidence Synthesis: Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis: Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling Learning to Teach: A Survey of Provisionally Registered Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand	National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) Youth2000 Educational Review Office Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) NZCER Student Engagement Survey

¹⁹³ Cox and Kennedy (2008)

¹⁹⁴ Bishop, Berryman, Powell and Teddy (2007)

¹⁹⁵ Hinchco (2003)

¹⁹⁶ Cameron, Dingle and Brooking, n.d.

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515> Retrieved 30 March, 2008

¹⁹⁸ Durling (2007), p.3

¹⁹⁹ Hinchco (2004), p. 92

<p>Ngā Haeata Mātauranga: Annual Report on Māori Education</p> <p>New Zealand Schools 2006</p> <p>Initial Teacher Education Policy and Practice</p> <p>Teaching and Learning in Middle Schooling: A Statistical Snapshot</p>	<p>Te Kotahitanga</p> <p>Politics or Pedagogy? The Development of Middle Schools in New Zealand</p>	
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Participant Observation

Understanding the status of middle years schooling in New Zealand was essential to analysing the intersection between teacher credentialing and the nature and needs of young adolescent learners within this country. I was graciously granted invitations and access to a number of organisations and meetings that proved essential to this study. These opportunities included joining the Learning Policy Frameworks team at the Ministry of Education; serving on the Ministry of Education’s Middle Schooling Steering Group; attending New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling Executive Board Meetings; attending and addressing the New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling Annual Summit; and, perhaps most importantly, conducting numerous visits to schools serving young adolescent learners.

An analysis of participant observation notes was emergent and ongoing. I kept a log of all meetings, discussions, and interactions along with the interview schedule, to which I subsequently added field notes, noted pertinent questions, and began to generate preliminary findings in relation to the other two modes of data collection. I entered all field notes and analytic memos into NVIVO for the purposes of interpretation. Data from participant observation informed this report in its entirety and Chapters One, Two and Five in particular.

Individual Interviews and Focus Groups

In order to access stakeholder perspectives on the status of middle schooling in New Zealand, I conducted over 70 hours of interviews and focus groups across the country. I consulted teacher educators at seven teacher preparation tertiary institutions across New Zealand: University of Auckland; Auckland University of Technology; Massey University; Victoria University; University of Canterbury; The New Zealand Graduate School of Education; and University of Otago. Although there are other tertiary institutions preparing teachers in New Zealand, the vast majority of teachers are prepared by universities.²⁰⁰ Because of this and the scope of this study I included the main universities and one private provider, chosen due to reputation and perceived alternative approach.

I also conducted interviews and focus groups with a multitude of principals and deputy principals of schools that serve any of Years 7-10, including full primary, intermediate, middle and secondary schools. In addition, I interviewed executive

²⁰⁰ Kane (2005)

board members of the New Zealand Association for Intermediate and Middle Schooling; the Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand; the New Zealand Teachers Council; and the Post Primary Teachers Association. Leading New Zealand educational researchers and scholars were also consulted.

As a result, the report is informed by a sample that is not necessarily representative, but I made every effort to consult with stakeholders in a variety of school structures, in a wide range of deciles; in rural and urban environs; both male and female; Māori, Pākehā and other. Interview and focus group recordings were transcribed and coded for themes identified across stakeholder groups through the use of NVIVO software. They were also cross-coded as a method of constant comparison with the document analysis and participant observation findings.

Presentation of interview and focus group data formed the basis of this chapter. Themes identified in the data are presented in the next section. While they do not purport to be generalisable across sites or stakeholder groups, these themes do represent common perspectives across a majority of respondents. I have attempted to note significant disagreement within or across groups wherever it appeared.

All participants were given the opportunity to select the level of identification they would prefer within this report. Stakeholders had different perspectives on the degree to which the middle years present a political issue and the extent to which they felt comfortable publicising their opinions in association with their organizations. Therefore, some respondents are identified by name, others only by institution or role, and still others not at all.

Findings

I have used the triangulated data to organise this chapter into four sections – within each, I present themes from interviews and focus groups. First, I describe stakeholders' perspectives on the characteristics and needs of middle years learners in New Zealand. Second, I relate those characteristics to the knowledge, skills and values required by middle years teachers, as seen by the various stakeholder groups. Third, I present participants' perceptions of the desirability of specialised credentialing for teachers of the middle schooling years. Finally, I explore the viability of such credentialing, given several barriers perceived by stakeholders.

The purpose of this chapter is to give voice to the many stakeholder groups in the study. Although I have selected quotes that represent the themes I identified within and across their diverse perspectives, I present their statements here as purely as possible so that readers may also draw their own conclusions about the findings.

The Middle Years Learner

Negative Preconceptions

Stakeholder groups conveyed the generally negative views held by many educators about this age group in numerous ways. Although two former secondary teachers

spoke favourably about “dewey-eyed Year 9s,”²⁰¹ they were the only two to do so. The vast majority of respondents reported a general societal discomfort with emerging adolescents. Dr Barry Brooker of the University of Canterbury, for example, regularly taught pre-service teachers who held preconceived notions of what young adolescents were like:

I was visiting one of our students whose placement is in the middle primary at the moment. She’s enjoyed that and we talked about her last placement, which was in an intermediate school. She made it early on in her time here because she thought she would hate years 7 and 8 – that they would be too big and too unruly. But she said that when she got in there she really loved it and is actually thinking that might be the area she’ll teach in. It turned out they were lovely kids, and she could teach in ways she could never do with the younger children. I know at least anecdotally from talking to a lot of our students – they’re scared off by the upper school primary school placement or an intermediate school placement.²⁰²

Dr Sally Hansen of Massey University described pre-service teachers’ tendency to steer toward younger children or older youth to teach:

If people train to be primary teachers, they want to work with little kids. If people train to be secondary teachers, they want to work with big kids because they have specialist knowledge. I’m not sure how many people say, “Wow, I really want to work with that difficult age group.” People might end up there by default rather than by design. And that, in a sense, feeds into the disenchantment.²⁰³

Owen Alexander, principal of Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, summarised the preconceptions held by many of the pre-service teachers who intern at his school, “The kids are too big and the maths too hard.”²⁰⁴ Student teachers who enrol in primary programmes, he explained, often want to teach younger children. They have strong, frequently negative, ideas about middle years kids and have not necessarily chosen that pathway for their teaching. They come to his intermediate school and are often surprised by how this duality – fear of the content and fear of the children – disappears as they begin to work with emerging adolescents.

The reference to fear of the students and their physical development was echoed by others as well. Hilary Wynyard, teacher educator at Auckland University of Technology, described her student teachers’ observations of children evolving from “snowy haired gorgeous little boys into... rather demanding and physically frightening big boys.” She elaborated:

Just as when young people first find that wonderful word “no”, so does the adolescent have a range of language for the same prodding, probing, making a sound to see how people react. We need to listen to these and not be frightened

²⁰¹ Judie Alison and Bronwyn Cross, Post Primary Teachers Association, personal interview, 9 June 2008

²⁰² Barry Brooker, University of Canterbury, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²⁰³ Sally Hansen, Massey University, focus group, 4 June 2008

²⁰⁴ Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

... the primary school teacher, as they're now called, needs to be able to sit with an adolescent who looks terrifying, acts in a terrifying manner, and enjoy them... Come on, your 9 and 10s are just ready to go and all they need is someone to listen to them and not be frightened of them.²⁰⁵

Teacher educators at other universities agreed:

It's that fear of the behaviour of the kids. They're physically big by the time they're Year 8s. Our students here feel scared of them but we place them in intermediate schools and often somebody will come back and say, "Oh! I really love them!"²⁰⁶

Before I became a teacher educator, in my beginning teaching years I knew that I didn't want to be in Year 7/8 and the education board placed me there despite my begging and pleading to "Please don't send me to that school." I went and thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it and that's often the experience of our pre-service teachers of course.²⁰⁷

There's the kind of assumption that adolescents will run amuck, I think, if you don't pin them down.²⁰⁸

Some teacher educators described their former experiences in secondary schools and the prevailing attitude of veteran teachers towards working how young adolescents:

They want to teach Year 13. They don't want to teach Year 10. No one wants to teach Year 10. And that's in every secondary school. "Ugh, I've got two Year 10s this year!" It's like a punishment.²⁰⁹

The challenge of preconceived notions about emerging adolescents is not unique to New Zealand; it is predominant, for example, in the US as well. Nevertheless it adds to the complexity of attending to an age group whose identity has been a struggle to establish. As one principal summarised:

I guess that it's part of our culture to a certain extent that we don't celebrate emerging adolescents. It's "Oh, my God." We don't really want to know about it so we cover it up. Whereas in other cultures they actually celebrate that label.²¹⁰

Identity and Peer Relationships

Moving beyond the initial reactions to the age group, study participants identified clear and distinct characteristics of emerging adolescents. Stakeholders underscored the strong role peers play in the lives of New Zealand's young adolescents as they work to establish an authentic identity. Dr Lone Jorgensen of Massey University, for

²⁰⁵ Hilary Wynyard, Auckland University of Technology, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁰⁶ Teacher Educator, University of Auckland, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁰⁷ Teacher Educator, focus group, 4 April 2008

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Sally Hansen and Lone Jorgensen, focus group, 4 June 2008

²¹⁰ Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

example, asserted one of the primary characteristics of this age is the “young adolescent need to find identity within a secure environment.”²¹¹ Dr John Hattie also emphasised the concept of identity development:

Peers usually become much more dominant in a totally different way than they are in primary school... Schools can be very lonely particularly given the structures of high schools. So I think the whole identity thing is very powerful in the early years...I think schools should take more responsibility for making learning cool – forgive the cliché – and to turning kids on to giving them multiple identities at that early a period. We underestimate the power of peers on that period.

Linking the adolescent search for identity to schooling is a key aspect of developmentally responsive education. Dr. Hattie elaborated:

As our kids go through early adolescence they want to have a reputation to enhance. Some do it through academics, some do it through criminality, some do it through sports. In the New Zealand system there is a large cohort of kids that do not get their reputation enhanced in school. So they leave.... I think schools have to start asking how you generate multiple identities for kids to get a reputation in the school here. Unlike the American schools we have no club systems here. You can't be good in a club because we don't have them. And that old 1950-60 model of schooling, which we're still doing, means so many kids don't get that opportunity for reputation enhancement.

The influence of peers on one's identity is also reflected through technology as a social medium. One principal described how many students measure their and others' reputations by the number of hits they have had on a social networking site:

That's one of the things I've had conversations with my students about. “He's the top man,” they'll say “Why?” I ask. “Well, he's had over 2000 hits on Bebo.”²¹²

A considerable part of the reputation and identity struggle is connected to a youngster's sense of personal efficacy. Dr Terry Crooks of the National Education Monitoring Project explained:

One of the prime goals we have is to have every child have something that they feel good at, and makes them feel that "I'm a good learner." And I don't really care whether it's math or science or English or singing or whatever. I mean if schools can carry kids through those middle school years feeling that way, then you're setting a better situation for secondary school.

As students this age work toward identity development, these educators are aware of the various factors that are involved. Peter Gall, President of the Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand and Principal of Papatoetoe High School, explained:

²¹¹ Lone Jorgensen, personal interview, 4 June 2008

²¹² South Auckland Intermediate and Middle Schooling Principals, focus group, 14 March 2008

Socialisation, experimentation, boundary pushing are part of the nature of the age group and just because they push boundaries doesn't mean they're bad kids.²¹³

A Need for Voice

This boundary pushing is indicative of the emerging adolescent's growing need for independence, identity, responsibility and self efficacy. It often manifests itself in a strong need to voice opinions and to have input into various issues, including curriculum development. A principal described one of the ways her school attends to this need:

Students this age need a voice. At our school we have a council of students. Our agreement to them is that we will always listen. We may not *always* act, but we will always listen. One example is last year one of our students died of cancer. The students wanted to do something to support the family – several things, in fact – and so we did. They participated in a meaningful way at the funeral. They raised money for cancer research. And they planted a tree on school grounds...²¹⁴

Dr Sally Hansen of Massey University agreed wholeheartedly with the premise that students this age require meaningful opportunities to express themselves:

We don't listen to kids enough. Sometimes they are telling us loud and clearly why school is so unattractive to them and why they don't engage. I don't think we listened enough to student voices. There are very few avenues at the intermediate and secondary levels for student voices to come to the fore and for us to hear what their experiences are.²¹⁵

A search for identity, a need for voice, the importance of peers – all of these elements contribute to a complex picture of the New Zealand young adolescent, as perceived by educationalists across the country. What, then, are the characteristics of teachers who work effectively with this age group? What skills are necessary to foster a positive sense of identity and reputation, and nurture the personal efficacy described here? These student characteristics bring to light the importance of a number of teacher characteristics.

The Middle Years Teacher

Does an effective teacher for the middle years require specific knowledge, skills and/or values? The question of specialised preparation for middle years teachers is deeply rooted in a developmentalist versus generalist debate. One perspective is the firmly held belief that 'good teaching is good teaching.' There was a strong conviction among these New Zealand educationalists that there is a set of general principles of teaching and learning that are not developmental or stage specific. At the

²¹³ Peter Gall, Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand, personal interview, 2 May 2008

²¹⁴ Andrea Knight, Heaton Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²¹⁵ Sally Hansen, Massey University, focus group, 4 June 2008

same time, many stakeholders voiced a belief that a developmental awareness is an important lens to apply to these principles.

Dr Barry Brooker of the University of Canterbury viewed the idea of specific middle years teacher preparation as an opportunity to specialise after mastering the general principles of teaching and learning:

From my personal philosophy I don't see how you can learn to be a specialist in an area before you actually know the general foundation for that area. ... People don't go through medical school and immediately become heart surgeons. They learn the general needs of the medical profession first and then specialise. And I feel that we should be doing the same.²¹⁶

Dr Terry Crooks of NEMP also subscribed to the theory that the basic principles of teaching are generalisable:

I don't think that the fundamental principles change. There are different challenges. I mean we've seen for example that mixed gender groups of nine year olds can't – if you get one boy with three girls in a group, the boy feels relatively uncomfortable in that context. Whereas by age thirteen it can be actually a bonus to put one boy with three girls. You know? So you know there are things that change across the time, but fundamentally people want to see a purpose for their learning and a purpose that's meaningful for them, and they want to see personal interest in them... If those sorts of criteria are met then kids – of all categories – are likely to do well in school.²¹⁷

A teacher educator concurred:

I think at the centre we have a really sound pedagogy that underpins New Zealand education, and what I think is that we need to acknowledge that across all levels – right up to year 13 essentially. Quality teaching and use of effective strategies and everything we know about good teaching practice applies from year 0 to year 13. But I think it's more about having a knowledge and an awareness of the developmental stages of an adolescent that is absolutely crucial. So if I'm using group teaching with my new entrants I have used it for a specific purpose. But if I'm using group teaching with my adolescents I'm using it for this purpose.²¹⁸

Participants in this study felt teachers of the middle years require skills and knowledge that are not necessarily emphasised in teacher preparation programmes. Most stakeholders identified one or more of the following teacher skills, knowledge and dispositions as essential:

- The ability and desire to form supportive and authentic relationships with young adolescents;

²¹⁶ Barry Brooker, University of Canterbury, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²¹⁷ Terry Crooks, National Education Monitoring Project, personal interview, 17 April 2008

²¹⁸ Teacher Educator, focus group, 4 April 2008

- A belief in balancing a focus on the subject matter with a focus on the whole child;
- In-depth content knowledge, especially in numeracy, above and beyond what primary preparation can offer;
- An understanding of the developmental nature and needs of young adolescents and how to connect those to pedagogy;
- An ability to foster learning through inquiry and integrative curriculum over traditional secondary school methods;
- A skill in differentiating instruction and assessment, thus allowing students to progress at their own different rates; and
- A commitment to working with the age group.

Of these, the three most emphasised were an ability to form relationships through an understanding of adolescent development; deeper subject matter knowledge; and the skill to differentiate one's teaching for varied abilities and interests.

Relationships

Interaction with these youngsters involves listening. Listening to their stories, to their world, and moving with them. And teaching them about how to develop consistent and healthy relationships.²¹⁹

With the words above Hilary Wynyard, a teacher educator at Auckland University of Technology, described the critical importance of relationship building as a means for successful teaching and learning in the middle years. Although most would agree that establishing caring relationships with students is important at all stages of schooling, the vast majority of researchers, principals and teacher educators in this study agreed that a focus on the teacher-student relationship was particularly crucial in the middle years, given the specific developmental changes occurring within this age group. Glenis Sim of the University of Otago echoed the crucial role relationship plays in student success, "Some teachers build wonderful relationships with their kids and know them really well. And that *has* to be a focus if they're going to be successful, I think."²²⁰

Stakeholders felt that early adolescents require caring teachers who know how to relate to them:

These kids need to know you like them, more than any other age – they don't care if you're very, very strict. It doesn't matter. But they need to know at the bottom of the day that you actually care for them as people."²²¹

John E Watson described this need for relationship in 1964 in his seminal work, *Intermediate Schooling in New Zealand*, when he asserted:

To a considerable extent the emotional tone of a school as a whole is a product of the human relationships in each of its classrooms. The closely-knit,

²¹⁹ Hilary Wynyard, Auckland University of Technology, focus group, 5 May 2008

²²⁰ Glenis Sim, University of Otago, personal interview, 16 April 2008

²²¹ South Auckland Intermediate and Middle Schooling Principals, focus group, 14 March 2008

purposeful class, the idea of which is so widely admired, is by no means a result of chance...The main influence on class spirit is undoubtedly the class teacher.²²²

The need for teachers who can build meaningful relationships with students prone to disengagement and risky behaviour was seen as particularly stark given the absence of school counsellors in many schools that serve young adolescents. Intermediate principals in particular identified school counsellors as “the crucial thing for this age group lacking in our schools.”²²³ Andrea Knight, Principal of Heaton Intermediate School, explained:

I would be a proponent of specialised training for teachers of this age. They need to be strong, almost counsellors. They have got to be really tuned into the needs of their kids. Increasingly kids are disconnected from families and communities. Teachers need to realise just how important the relationship is.²²⁴

An acknowledgement of the counselling needs of student in Years 7-10 was not confined to an intermediate school perspective. Peter Gall, Principal of Papatoetoe High School:

When I think about good teaching I think of two components. One is about pedagogy. The other is making connections. At the emerging adolescent level I think it's particularly about connections, making positive connections with young students is so important. They have all sorts of social issues, and socialising issues, that they are facing at that stage of their lives and it's even greater now than it has been in the past. There are so many more choices that people of that age group have to make now... Adolescent health issues are critical right now and I don't know if we have enough support mechanisms in place for young people who are having some real mental health issues. That represents a lot of the early exemptions I've dealt with.²²⁵

The importance of a supportive relationship is underscored by governmental priorities as well, as indicated in recent reports. “The ability of teachers to establish individual relationships with every student underpins personalised learning.”²²⁶ This acknowledgement of relationship in teaching is noteworthy as it is rarely seen at a governmental level.²²⁷

Principals, teacher educators and others expressed the importance of understanding the nature and needs of the age group as they described the attributes of a middle years teacher who was well prepared to establish these relationships:

I want teachers who actually have an understanding of the needs of this age group as distinct from the other two groups. They've got to have an

²²² Watson (1964), pp. 239-240

²²³ South Auckland Intermediate and Middle Schooling Principals, focus group, 14 March 2008

²²⁴ Andrea Knight, Heaton Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²²⁵ Peter Gall, Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand, personal interview, 2 May 2008

²²⁶ Education and Science Committee (2008), p. 16

²²⁷ O'Connor (2008)

understanding. And they've got to actually have the passion to want to deal with this group, and the nuances of this age group.²²⁸

The biggest thing I find is just the understanding of the age group, you know? And it comes back to that relationship...And it's more than just, "Oh well, I was a teenager once myself and I've got one in the family." It's more than that.²²⁹

Teachers need to understand the students. When students feel important, when they know they belong, when they feel connected with us, the learning seems to follow.²³⁰

They certainly need to have knowledge of human development, in particular the fact that children of that age are in a transition time and they're not all at the same level.²³¹

They need to know quite a lot about the characteristics of adolescents and those are the kind of things that seem to me to have gone out of secondary teacher education as they try and squeeze everything in.²³²

While an ability to establish authentic relationships with learners was seen as a crucial attribute of a middle years teacher, it was not sufficient in these stakeholders' eyes. Many respondents voiced a strong belief in rigorous content, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and felt the primary preparation possessed by most middle years teachers was inadequate for the upper primary and middle years.

Content Knowledge

An essential attribute of an effective middle years teacher in the eyes of these stakeholders was in depth knowledge of the subject areas. "The best teachers turn you on to their subject."²³³ Participants in this study felt the need for teacher content knowledge in years 7-10 was, in general, greater than what is necessary in the lower primary years due to the increasing sophistication of the subject matter and the growing cognitive abilities of the youth in their classrooms:

There's also the content, particularly by halfway through Year 8, the teachers need to have strong content knowledge in maths and science and literacy. Far greater than they need in Year 5 or year 6.²³⁴

Yet there is a substantial challenge inherent in acquiring sufficient depth of content knowledge at the primary level:

²²⁸ Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

²²⁹ Principal focus group, 4 June 2008

²³⁰ Andrea Knight, Heaton Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²³¹ Sally Hansen, Massey University, focus group, 4 June 2008

²³² Judie Alison, PPTA, personal interview, 9 June 2008

²³³ Dr John Hattie, University of Auckland, personal interview, 5 May 2008

²³⁴ South Auckland Intermediate and Middle Schooling Principals focus group, 14 March 2008

There is consistent research evidence that one of the factors in successful or effective teaching is strong content knowledge. It is more difficult for generalist teachers to have such knowledge across several subject areas.²³⁵

Rowe and Dinham recommended an increased emphasis on subject knowledge in their review of research literature on middle schooling, “Introducing a degree of teaching subject specialisation into primary teaching could... address the situation where teachers feel under-prepared to teach maths and science (and indeed other subject areas).”²³⁶

Many middle years teachers are responsible for most of the subject areas, but at a more advanced level than their lower primary teacher peers, given the aptitude of their students. Reports point out the challenges inherent in both primary and secondary initial teacher education. The concerns voiced here may hit the middle years doubly hard, due to the nature of both the age group and the curriculum:

Preparation of secondary teachers is inadequate in that they don’t have enough conceptual understanding of the qualities of good teaching and they have so little time to learn and absorb and practice those that they end up as subject experts who often are quite limited in their ability to see individual learners. And primary teachers have the huge challenge of learning the entire curriculum and while they’re doing their teacher education.²³⁷

Although subject knowledge was seen as critical to the improvement of middle years teaching, an overarching understanding voiced by many was the shift in pedagogy – a shift due both to the era in which teachers work and to the nature of the age group:

The world has changed and knowledge is at the end of a Google – all the facts and figures and data is at the end of a Google button. The teachers don’t have to know all the answers any longer. Because if we’re making this mind shift to the constructivist where we’re empowering the learner to start asking the questions, then that actually is diminished in its value in teacher education. The problem we have is that some people still want to control that knowledge as the teacher, you know? And until we can make that mind shift I think we are going to have issues. So in terms of whether the student teachers come out with the content knowledge, I’m not too fussed about that in intermediate. But what I do want is...if there is a change in what the concept of knowledge is, then there’s a change in the role of a teacher. They’re a facilitator, a mentor, a counsellor, a navigator, and so they’re facilitating learning.²³⁸

Various perspectives on this changing role of a teacher are expressed in the section that follows.

²³⁵ Rowe and Dinham (2007)

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ Terry Crooks, National Education Monitoring Project, personal interview, 17 April 2008

²³⁸ Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

Pedagogy

Many stakeholders expressed awareness of this shift in teacher role in the middle years. Some felt the appropriate pedagogy for young adolescents was more aligned with primary teaching practice than with secondary:

Our primary teachers could much more easily make a transition to teaching in the middle years because they teach in more interesting ways than you see in secondary schools. Students don't have to sit down and shut up.²³⁹

One of the particular aspects of teaching young adolescents is attending to the wide range of diverse interests and aptitudes within a classroom. Dr Terry Crooks explained:

There are going to be some kids that outpace their teachers and so the teachers have to learn how to support kids who are actually past them in terms of thinking skills... Obviously richer content knowledge is a plus. But in the end, in primary education at least, you have to accept that teachers are not going to be rich enough in all areas to be able to you know be top quality coaches of all kids in all areas... they have to have strategies for allowing progress for the high fliers who otherwise know they're going to be constraining by their own level of expertise... One of the qualities you're looking for in a teacher is a willingness to admit what they don't know and an emphasis on strategies for finding out. And strategies for allowing kids to progress at their own different rates. I think that's probably the hardest thing in teaching – how to handle the range within a class.²⁴⁰

Given that early adolescence is second only to birth through age three in its developmental variability and range of cognitive, physical and socio-emotional growth,²⁴¹ the middle years classroom contains a tremendous range of abilities. The need to individualise and adopt a discursive mode of learning was a strong theme in the data:

A lot of the secondary schools are trying to change the delivery but I would say it's a very behaviouralist approach to learning. What happens is the kids have been in quite a constructivist environment in their primary schools and suddenly it's content orientated and it's about how much can you get in your head. Its still prevails, I think, in secondary schools.²⁴²

You've got to be treating all of the kids as individuals and what worked for this one might not work for that one. It's far more complex... they identify their interests and their need for knowledge, and a teacher who is able to lead them along that path is invaluable for them.²⁴³

²³⁹ Teacher Educator, University of Auckland, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁴⁰ Terry Crooks, National Education Monitoring Project, personal interview, 17 April 2008

²⁴¹ Stevenson (2001)

²⁴² Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

²⁴³ South Auckland Intermediate and Middle Schooling Principals focus group, 14 March 2008

In our school system, in both primary and secondary, although there's some really interesting things happening and it's quite successful, it really is quite conservative. We have a lot of new technologies around. We probably have a better understanding about how people learn than we've ever had. We know that there's a group of students, as they work their way through secondary, who really don't want to be there. It doesn't suit them. So we know all of these things. But we seem to stick to a very traditional way of teaching, on the whole. So with all of this knowledge, if you walked into a secondary school and virtually any classroom, there would be 35 students in desks all facing the front. Probably listening to a teacher.²⁴⁴

Many were sympathetic to the pressure of testing at the secondary school level and how it weighs heavily on Years 9 and 10 teachers in particular, influencing their style of teaching. Dr Barry Brooker:

I think teachers in full primary or intermediate schools offer probably more interesting curriculum development than teachers in secondary schools, because although they're not driven in years 9 and 10 by the examination system, they do know these children are going to come up to NCEA or other formal exams and I think by then as a result they try to structure things much more.... A middle school concept would allow for a much more interesting curriculum...than I think many secondary teachers think they can afford to put in place at the moment.

He proposed a new way of thinking about the middle years, how a different type of teacher preparation could serve as a bridge between primary and secondary approaches:

The way primary teachers teach and interact with the children is on the whole quite different than the secondary approach, and the middle school concept if done well that would allow us to get *the best of both worlds*... we could have teachers with greater content knowledge but also teachers who have spent a lot more time thinking about teaching and learning and pedagogy, rather than just the curriculum knowledge.²⁴⁵

Desirability of Specialised Preparation

While study participants were generally opposed to the idea of specialised teacher *registration*, almost all viewed some degree of specific *preparation* for middle years teaching to be an effective way to address several educational issues, including student engagement and achievement in the middle years, to “get the best of both worlds.”

The Current Lack of Emphasis

Ken Wilson of the New Zealand Teachers Council expressed concern about the current lack of emphasis on middle years teacher preparation.

²⁴⁴ Barry Brooker, University of Canterbury, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

There are some teacher ed. programmes that will have modules about teaching...adolescent learners but very few. There will be some that have human development courses that also look at that. And I think that's a major issue for the whole middle schooling area because I think it's very clear that at years 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 students start learning differently. There are different things that work.²⁴⁶

Intermediate principals expressed a similar interest in having teachers prepared specifically for this age group, identifying a clear need for specialisation in this area. This was less desirable to, although not opposed by, secondary principals, who typically staff teachers across Years 7-13 or 9-13:

Intermediates struggle to appoint teachers because of that lack of understanding in pre-service education. We find it harder to staff our schools.²⁴⁷

Would that change my hiring practices? Absolutely!²⁴⁸

I've got a beginning teacher who had her mind set on being a Year 2 teacher. And now she's come to our school as a Year 7 teacher and for the first five weeks she said to me, "I've had to learn how to teach all over again." Well she's an absolutely fantastic teacher but it was that realization of "Jeez, these kids are a hell of a lot different than little six year olds! How do I deal with them, how do I relate to them?" ...They see that as a real challenge and hard task... because of the diversity of our students within our intermediate system.²⁴⁹

To me, that goes back to the training college, and there's almost the need for some sort of specialisation related to how you teach in intermediate schools. Because it's different people skills that they need, and there's certainly different ways that they run and structure their programmes compared to the primary school, that they need to learn and put in place. I find that a lot of beginning teachers struggle for the first six months to a year, in the intermediate school...Because, there's a specialisation area in this that needs to be addressed. Maybe it's like something in the teachers college where they do the first two years and get the basics. And then like anything else, you select where you think you'd like to actually go and then you specialise for a year in those areas. Teacher training for the emerging adolescent.²⁵⁰

The strength of specific teacher preparation for the middle years would be its ability to prepare teachers for a full range of student needs, including the socio-emotional and pastoral, according to those interviewed:

Dealing with little kids is completely different than dealing with the intermediate aged kids. Every now and then you're going to get swarming.

²⁴⁶ Ken Wilson, New Zealand Teacher Council, personal interview, 28 March 2008

²⁴⁷ Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

²⁴⁸ Andrea Knight, Heaton Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²⁴⁹ South Auckland Intermediate and Middle Schooling Principals focus group, 14 March 2008

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*

You don't take it personally. It's the frustration that's inside these kids and when they can't cope – the way they sort of say “listen I need help here.” And if you were a year 2 teacher you'd get really upset. But if you've been around intermediate kids for a while you just say, “OK, there's a cry for help.” They just don't know the nature of the kids that they're going to teach. They don't have the experience of dealing with young adults.²⁵¹

Tertiary providers and others were not surprised by these principals' perceptions. They acknowledged a lack of emphasis on early adolescence in most teacher education programmes and in many cases voiced a desire for change:

This is one of the problems with our three year programme. To get through everything we want, it's very tight in three years. If we could go to four years, we could add things like understanding development at a certain age. Particularly the young adolescent one is something I would love to have specific courses on. We don't have it in our primary programme at the moment. We touch on it of course, and secondary touch on it at the bottom end of what they do... But in terms of really catering for their age group, I'd be fairly sure other providers would say the same, I don't think we do enough to prepare teachers for that age group really well. To have an understanding of what's happening to them and why they may be the way they are is really important. I would say our students come out of here with a surface understanding of what happens then.²⁵²

A lot of our secondary courses, which are aimed at students focusing on Years 9-13, have a segment of Years 7-10 and then Years 11-13, but there has been very little emphasis on middle schooling as such.²⁵³

There's talk about appropriate curriculum and appropriate pedagogy and everything but I'm not sure that it's necessarily taught in the context of, “This is appropriate pedagogy for Years 9 and 10 *because* these are emerging adolescents.” That's not happening, I don't think.²⁵⁴

We would be quite interested in offering a specialisation in middle years teaching. We have other niche programmes and it would fit in quite nicely with what we do. More emphasis on this age group is needed.²⁵⁵

I would not necessarily advocate a specific programme. I think there is a danger of boxing people into thinking then that this is pedagogy that only applies to middle school. But I certainly would like to see papers available either as options or even as a core paper perhaps so that those kinds of developmental stages of learners can be explored.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ *ibid.*

²⁵² Barry Brooker, University of Canterbury, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²⁵³ Teacher Educator, University of Auckland, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁵⁴ Judie Alison, PPTA, personal interview, 9 June 2008

²⁵⁵ Teacher Educator, Auckland University of Technology, focus group, 10 April 2008

²⁵⁶ Teacher Educator, focus group, 4 April 2008

Is there a place for some sort of courses or something of that nature? Yes, I think so. I think it would be great to offer such things cross-sector, for both primary and secondary.²⁵⁷

Such courses are in demand not only for pre-service teachers but also for practising teachers in schools, some teacher educators noted:

I was recently inundated at a conference by principals requesting a post-graduate middle school course here. There is a lot of interest in it.²⁵⁸

Overall, stakeholders expressed a desire to change teachers' preconceptions about early adolescence, asserting that to do so would ultimately improve student outcomes. This sentiment was summarised by Colin Andrews, principal of Blockhouse Bay Intermediate:

If we can engender understanding in young teachers about these wonderfully fantastic years, then I think it will make a huge difference to learning and teaching right across the whole spectrum, and to kids' performance and enjoyment of education.²⁵⁹

The Purpose of Middle Schooling

As study participants grappled with the question of what knowledge, skills and values are needed to teach effectively in Years 7-10, the purpose of schooling arose regularly. A number of stakeholders described the purpose of middle schooling as distinct from primary and secondary. Dr John Hattie explained:

Where we struggle is those first two years of high school because they're not primary school, and they're not allowed to be because they're secondary teachers. And so there's an identity thing there.²⁶⁰

Struggling with that 'identity thing' is a significant part of the challenge that is the middle years. What is the purpose of years 7-10?

Some stakeholders described the middle years as a time to encourage enthusiasm for learning and the sense that school is valuable; and as a time to focus less on broad coverage of content and more on active exploration and skills development. Dr Terry Crooks identified a number of these purposes:

What I desperately believe is that we need to keep the enthusiasm for learning and (the sense that) schools are for something really valuable, during those years... the most important thing is to have high quality learning experiences rather than a drive for curriculum breaks through those years. The early years of schooling are developing core skills that are pretty critical to everything else. And you know core literacy and numeracy is high on my agenda. And the middle years of school, I think, the prime aim should be to maintain

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Teacher Educator, University of Auckland, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁵⁹ Colin Andrews, personal interview, 11 April 2008

²⁶⁰ John Hattie, University of Auckland, personal interview, 5 May 2008

engagement to have them be interesting and exciting and not worry too much about what gets covered. But for the high school years – a high goal in terms of ability to learn being developed through those years, and self efficacy being built or maintained.

Dr Crooks described in greater detail what those years might look like:

What I see happening in those years is more choice for teachers and students doing substantial projects as opposed to routine book learning. Working in groups, and class projects... I really do think that the issue of choice is quite central to motivation with engagement. We're really talking fundamentally about motivation and things that flow from motivation. And so I want teachers to be able to do things that they really like doing with kids in those years.²⁶¹

There was wide variation in stakeholders' feelings about the purpose of these years, with some feeling a focus on rigorous content knowledge to be essential and others emphasising more affective outcomes. Across groups, however, respondents acknowledged the importance of attending to the decline in engagement during those years, and ensuring the years fostered learning and also nurtured students' enthusiasm for school.

Whole Scale Change

The desirability of specialised teacher preparation was not only identified as a means for improving schooling for New Zealand's young adolescents; a subset of stakeholders viewed it as a means for larger change. For this group, such implementation was less about the need for differently prepared middle years teachers and more about the need for radical educational transformation. Dr John Hattie explained:

If you are asking me about whether there should be a specific teacher's programme related to Years 7 to 10 I would say it won't have any effect if we go with the current models. It would allow more demarcation but I don't think it would have any effect. I don't think our unions would allow it because it crosses the line. If you ask me could a programme make a difference if you said, "I want to see the effects you are having. And you must be better than the other teachers," then I think there'd be more success.²⁶²

Here Dr Hattie underscores the need for programmes to be evidence-based. His perspective that specific teacher preparation related to Years 7-10 would not make a difference if it were based on current models of teacher education was decidedly a minority view; he was the only stakeholder to voice such an opinion. However his perspective that such a change would need to be evidence-based and could be a stimulus for greater educational transformation was shared by others. "There's a big debate in New Zealand about the middle schools. And it's ripe for the picking and this government's decided middle schools are good things, tentatively."²⁶³

²⁶¹ Terry Crooks, National Education Monitoring Project, personal interview, 17 April 2008

²⁶² John Hattie, University of Auckland, personal interview, 5 May 2008

²⁶³ *ibid.*

Dr Hattie's perspective that middle schooling teacher preparation is "ripe for the picking" represents an opinion shared by others that the middle schooling debate could act as an important policy lever for educational change. One teacher educator asserted, "The school's whole system should be blown out of the water."²⁶⁴ Primary and secondary teacher education are deeply rooted in tradition within New Zealand and therefore less conducive to the implementation of major schooling change. Creating teachers for the middle schooling years, however, presents New Zealand educationalists with an exciting opportunity for educational transformation.

Barriers to Specialised Preparation

Participants in this policy study perceived three main barriers to the advancement of specific middle years teacher preparation:

1. Opposition from the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA);
2. Reluctance from tertiary institutions; and
3. Lack of Ministry of Education prioritisation.

In each case, analysis revealed these barriers may be more perceived than actual, as evidenced by stakeholder interviews, document review and participant observation.

Opposition from the Post Primary Teachers Association

The Perception

Almost all study participants stated the opposition of the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) was a significant barrier to specific middle years teacher preparation. When asked what would serve as a stimulus for preparing middle years teachers specifically, one principal mused, "Quite a miracle I think. We have very strong teachers' unions."²⁶⁵

The Facts

A position paper posted on the PPTA website²⁶⁶ and personal interviews with PPTA representatives provided information about the PPTA's view on middle schools and middle schooling. While the focus in this policy study is on teachers and teaching rather than structures and school type, the position paper includes several pieces of pertinent information. First, the PPTA paper calls for careful attention to terminology when it states:

The term 'schooling in the middle years' is a more neutral term to describe the education of students between years 7 and 10, and does not imply preference for any particular structure nor appear to advocate for middle schools.²⁶⁷

The call for language change and a shift away from a focus on structures is closely aligned with other stakeholder opinions, the vast majority of whom now place the

²⁶⁴ Hilary Wynyard, Auckland University of Technology, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁶⁵ Andrea Knight, Heaton Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²⁶⁶ <http://www.ppta.org.nz/cms/imagelibrary/100131.doc> Retrieved 28 May 2008

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*

middle schooling debate soundly within a conversation about teacher quality and not about school structure.

Further, according to the position paper, the PPTA's primary concern about middle schools – the degree of subject knowledge a teacher in years 7-10 possesses – appears to be in agreement with one voiced by most study participants. The position paper describes:

Specialist education should begin at Year 7. This does not necessarily mean that all schools should be Year 7-13 schools, nor that curriculum delivery in Year 7-8, or even Year 9-10, must follow traditional secondary patterns with a different teacher for every subject. What it does mean is that in some subjects at least, most students in Year 7 and 8 need access to teachers who know how the subject develops in its higher levels.²⁶⁸

Students' having access to teachers with greater subject knowledge was a clear theme within the data. In this sense, again, the PPTA is in alignment with the other stakeholder groups. When asked outright about the organisation's stance on specialised teacher education for Years 7-10, PPTA representatives readily agreed that an enhanced emphasis was needed and, while they stated a strong preference for it to be considered part of secondary rather than primary preparation, they were not at all opposed to such an initiative.

The position paper relates concern around adequate content knowledge to the teacher preparation programme type typically attended by middle years teachers. It explains:

Significant numbers of primary-trained teachers do not have the subject content knowledge to effectively deliver the curriculum at Year 7 and 8, let alone at Year 9 and 10... The range of options available in a middle school is limited by the knowledge and skills of the teachers, who are almost invariably primary-trained.²⁶⁹

The issues voiced here by the PPTA echo a major theme across all stakeholders: concern about middle years teachers' preparation and depth of content knowledge. Given they are typically graduates of primary teacher preparation programmes, teachers of the middle years find themselves, as the name suggests, in the middle. They need the vast knowledge of pedagogy typically expected and required in primary schools but also require a depth of content knowledge beyond what is usually expected in secondary schools, given the multiple subject areas taught. This coherence in perspectives demonstrates a greater alliance across groups, including the PPTA, than is often perceived.

Reluctance from Tertiary Institutions

The Perception

Tertiary institutions and universities in particular are viewed as steeped in tradition and slow to change. Many stakeholders perceived tertiary institutions as major

²⁶⁸ <http://www.ppta.org.nz/cms/imagelibrary/100131.doc> Retrieved 28 May 2008

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*

blockers to specific middle years teacher preparation, due to concerns about overall programme time, financial viability, and historic tradition.

The Facts

While some tertiary institutions expressed concern about issues of funding and time, these were not central themes within the tertiary stakeholder group. On the contrary, groups from three different institutions spoke unsolicited about their interest in offering such a programme, stating if it were deemed a Ministry of Education priority such adoption would be possible and in fact desirable.

The current financial reality of New Zealand universities is complex. Within a span of ten years, "...funding for universities per domestic student fell by 34.75%"²⁷⁰ In 2007 Minister for Tertiary Education Michael Cullen's vision for the future of New Zealand tertiary education included clearly differentiated roles for tertiary institutions, thereby simplifying collaboration rather than competition between institutions.²⁷¹ This new vision of collaboration and differentiation holds promise for the type of preparation proposed here by stakeholders, whereby a few institutions might offer a specialisation in teaching in the middle years:

There's no reason why we couldn't have a middle years programme here. We have the expertise. It would just be a matter of it becoming a governmental priority. I don't think it would be that difficult. Certainly the skills and knowledge are here.²⁷²

Most participants perceived a lack of emphasis on Years 7-10 by the Ministry of Education and felt increased focus would result in better schools and teachers for this age group.

Lack of Ministry of Education Prioritisation

The Perception

Various respondents described Ministry of Education priorities as neglecting the middle years. Principals felt this particularly at the intermediate level:

There needs to be a taskforce to look at the emerging adolescents and at emerging adolescent education. But clearly the ministry's been hijacked by the junior high school movement and whilst we've got a minister who has a department that supports that thinking we're not going to get anywhere.²⁷³

I just don't think there's any passion in the ministry for the intermediate schools. I think it's a tragedy that they just don't support the middle.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Russell (2007), p.112

²⁷¹ Russell (2007)

²⁷² Teacher Educator, University of Auckland, focus group, 5 May 2008

²⁷³ Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 11 April 2008

²⁷⁴ Colin Andrews, Blockhouse Bay Intermediate School, focus group, 11 April 2008

Funding is key here. [A change] would need to come at the government level through Ministry of Education policy work. The government would need to support such an initiative with funding.²⁷⁵

This perspective was also pervasive within tertiary providers' responses:

One of the reasons the middle years aren't focused on in schools is that they haven't been set by the Ministry of Education as priority. School support services have primary and secondary advisors whose priorities are clearly set by the Ministry. Their emphasis is driven by these. There's no call currently for middle years.²⁷⁶

When the Ministry puts time and energy into something, it does result in a change in school focus. The Ministry really needs to sit down with intermediate and middle school principals and with secondary schools and actually talk through this issue. Because of our very hands off approach – our self-managing schools – it's been left to somehow solve itself. But because it has to bridge several different types of institutions, I think the ministry really does need to play the lead role if they want something to happen in this area. As far as I can see there is no coherent policy from the ministry. Or even discussions. All of this does need to start at that policy level and get the various groups talking to each other. Rather than thinking, "How can I make my intermediate school survive?" or "How can I get a few more people into my secondary school?" it's, "How can we best cope for children of this age?"²⁷⁷

The Facts

Over the past two years the Ministry of Education has begun to establish an evidence base for policy work related to Years 7-10. Tasks outlined in Phase I of Table 3 were completed in 2007. Tasks in Phase II are currently in progress.

Table 3: Research Programme – Increased Engagement and Achievement in Middle Schooling

Phase I	Description
Research Literature Review	Review of relevant international and national research on middle schooling and student achievement outcomes
Statistical Snapshot	Compilation and analysis of New Zealand data available across years 7 to 10
Transition to Secondary School: A Literature Review	Review of national and international research on transition and identifies issues relating to the impacts of transition upon student achievement and adjustment to secondary school

²⁷⁵ Andrea Knight, Heaton Normal Intermediate School, personal interview, 25 March 2008

²⁷⁶ University of Otago teacher educator, focus group, 16 April 2008

²⁷⁷ Dr Barry Brooker, University of Canterbury, personal interview, 25 March 2008

Students' Transitions from Primary to Secondary Schooling Study	Investigates what it is like for students when they move from primary to secondary schooling with a focus on their experiences and achievement.
Phase II	Description
Middle Schooling Steering Group	Cross-Ministry Steering Group overseeing the development of a strong, coherent evidence base to underpin the development of policy related to teaching and learning and student outcomes in the middle schooling years
Teacher Education for Middle Schooling Years	Policy study of the intersection between teacher credentialing and young adolescents' learning.
Student Engagement Research	Examination of key aspects of engagement for NZ's students in the middle schooling years.
Pathways and Achievement of NZ's Middle School Students	A longitudinal study of the pathways and achievements of students in year 7 in 2007 attending NZs middle schools.
Phase III	Description
Case Studies of Middle Years Schooling	Examination of contributors to effectiveness in middle years schooling.
Other work informed by Phase II	To be informed by Phase II findings

CONCLUSION

In *Ka Hikitia* 'ako' is defined as the Māori term for teaching and learning where the educator is also learning; it is grounded in the principle of reciprocity where both the teacher and the learner give and receive.²⁷⁸ In order for New Zealand's rangatahi to reach their greatest potential, their teachers must also be learners. Young adolescents in New Zealand schools will benefit from teachers who learn from, understand and focus deeply on students' academic and socio-emotional needs and who craft learning opportunities accordingly. The past few months of visiting schools for young adolescents revealed many dedicated and talented teachers and principals in New Zealand who work daily with youth and who learn alongside their students. The impressive academic outcomes of most Years 7-10 students is further evidence of this hard work.

At the same time, something is happening during Years 7-10 that suggests a lack of fit between some learners' needs and their schooling experience, as shown by a steady decline in attitude and engagement. How might schools recapture the enthusiasm and interest of these youth? How might New Zealand reconsider its approach to teaching and learning in the middle years in order to foster more students' belief in the importance of school? It is tempting to want to solve this engagement problem through schooling structures, particularly since New Zealand educates its young adolescents in six different school types. Yet no relationship has been found that suggests school type makes a difference to engagement or achievement. Given the strong evidence that the teacher is the primary change agent in schools, one important avenue is a modification in how teachers for these years are prepared.

From a policy perspective, the most direct way to change schools ten years from now is to change the way we educate teachers now. Most New Zealand educationalists agreed on the necessity of heightening emphasis on the nature and needs of young adolescents within teacher education. Principals and teacher educators alike identified a set of knowledge, skills and values that effective teachers in the middle years possess. Given the Ministry of Education's increasing focus on Years 7-10, the time is right for a serious consideration of specific middle schooling teacher preparation in the tertiary sector, preparation that would connect in a meaningful way to a pre-service teacher's primary or secondary programme. Many stakeholders asserted that directives for change in the middle years must come from the Ministry of Education in order to be effective. "Unless there is a *national* recognition that there are special conditions and needs for these students within the school systems, nothing will change."²⁷⁹

New Zealand middle years teachers' and principals' focus on evidence-based practice is impressive. These educationalists care deeply about student success, both academic and affective, and the impressive achievement data of many young adolescents is testimony to their hard work. They expressed a fairly united concern about the need to prepare teachers specifically for working in the middle years. They voiced an interest in and desire for professional development on the needs of young adolescents; on how

²⁷⁸ Ministry of Education (2007a), p.20

²⁷⁹ Lone Jorgensen, University of Auckland, personal interview, 4 June, 2008

to plan developmentally responsive learning opportunities based on these needs; and on deepening the evidence base underscoring the practice.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's deep commitment to research-informed policy is equally impressive. The knowledge base upon which decisions can be made in this country is rich. Data are collected and available on a wide range of schooling factors. Student outcomes are broadly defined, rather than limited to academic achievement. Educationalists consider more than just test scores when making decisions. In this sense, New Zealand is well poised to develop and implement sound educational policies about middle schooling. "Although a more well-developed research base does not, by itself, ensure more successful reform efforts, without such a foundation the progress and fruits of reform efforts will continue to be disappointing."²⁸⁰

To continue these efforts, research into the middle years of schooling must continue to expand. To date, only a handful of dissertation studies specific to New Zealand schooling for young adolescents have been completed and relatively few academics have made this age group their research focus. New Zealand needs to encourage more research in this area in order to strengthen its ability to construct evidence-based policy.

One of two primary reasons identified for merging colleges of teacher education with universities was to advance the research related to teaching and learning in order to ensure degree programmes are evidence-based.²⁸¹ Without specific middle years preparation in its tertiary institutions, New Zealand is substantially less likely to develop or attract researchers to its universities who will conduct research on schooling for this age group. Specialised preparation for middle schooling would invariably produce or bring scholars to New Zealand who are prepared to contribute to this important evidence base.

The barriers to such preparation identified by respondents appear more perceived than actual. Stakeholder groups were quick to identify other groups who might stand in the way of such change but none opposed it themselves. Some asserted that the Post Primary Teachers Association would never allow a greater emphasis on middle schooling teacher preparation. Others blamed the Ministry of Education for not making middle schooling more of a priority. Still others claimed that tertiary institutions would oppose this kind of change, steeped in tradition as they are. Yet the findings of this policy examination are compelling and clear: each of these groups agrees an increased emphasis on learners in Years 7-10 is important in New Zealand. While the exact structure of such emphasis differed slightly from group to group, stakeholders agreed that some form of specialised teacher preparation would be one important step toward improving schooling for this age group.

The following set of key findings and recommendations stem from the combination of extensive document review, in-depth interviews, and several months of participant observation.

²⁸⁰ Felner et al. (1997b), p. 41

²⁸¹ Ministry of Education, (2007b)

Key Findings

Research Question 1

Do teachers of Years 7-10 require specialised skills, knowledge and values? And, if so, what are these?

- **Finding**
The vast majority of stakeholders concurred that there is a specialised set of knowledge, skills and values held by effective middle years teachers.
- **Summary**
Most stakeholders identified the importance of both general and developmentally appropriate principles of good teaching, although the former emerged as the more deeply rooted cultural perspective. However, a vast majority of stakeholders agreed that effective middle years teachers require a greater focus on relationship than is emphasised in secondary schooling and a deeper knowledge of subject area than primary preparation allows, due to the increasing sophistication of the subject matter and the growing cognitive abilities of the youth in their classrooms.

In particular, stakeholders identified the following knowledge, skills and values as important:

- The ability and desire to form supportive and authentic relationships with young adolescents;
- An understanding of the developmental nature and needs of young adolescents and how to connect those to pedagogy;
- In-depth content knowledge, especially in numeracy, above and beyond what primary preparation can offer;
- An ability to foster learning through inquiry and integrative curriculum over traditional secondary school methods;
- A belief in balancing a focus on the subject matter with a focus on the whole learner;
- A skill in differentiating instruction and assessment; and
- A commitment to working with the age group.

Research Question 2

What options should exist for teachers to acquire this set of knowledge, skills and values?

- **Finding**
Specialised preparation for teaching in the middle years is a desirable pathway toward improving student outcomes.
- **Summary**
Most study participants viewed specialised preparation for middle years teaching as an effective way to address a number of educational issues, including student engagement and achievement in the middle years and

beyond. Intermediate principals expressed greatest interest in having teachers prepared specifically for this age group. This was less desirable to, although not opposed by, secondary principals.

Most respondents preferred this preparation as a specialisation added onto primary or secondary training, most viable in a 4th year or post-graduate format. Many also identified ongoing professional development in this area as important. A smaller portion of respondents felt that middle years teacher preparation should be implemented as a stand-alone programme. A vocal minority advocated for evidence-based teacher preparation, regardless of level, as the change that would affect student outcomes and could result in radical transformation of the educational system in New Zealand.

Research Question 3

To what extent should such skills, knowledge and values be required of teachers at that level?

- **Finding**
Current teacher registration practice is preferable to stage-specific teacher registration.
- **Summary**
Most stakeholders felt principals and boards should continue to control decisions about hiring based upon the experience and expertise of the candidate. The majority of study participants opposed a change in teacher registration. They preferred the flexibility afforded by the existing general teacher registration system and perceived a stage-specific system to be undesirable and unnecessarily restrictive.

Research Question 4

What barriers exist to such a change in policy and practice?

- **Finding**
Stakeholders perceived that there are several barriers to the advancement of specific teacher preparation for the middle years, although analysis revealed barriers may be more perceived than actual.
- **Summary**
Cultural, historical, political, procedural and structural conditions all contribute to the current lack of specialised middle years teacher preparation in New Zealand. The barriers include:
 - A perceived lack of Ministry of Education priority on the middle years;
 - A historical tendency to divide the tiers of schooling into primary and secondary, as evidenced in reports, legislation and policy;
 - A strong teachers' union presence divided along primary and secondary lines;

- A relative lack of identity for middle years schooling given as many as six different school types; and
- Tertiary institutions' concern about overall programme time and financial viability.

Analysis revealed several of the largest barriers may be more perceived than actual, due to stakeholder assumptions and lack of communication about the issues.

Key Recommendations

1. Heighten awareness of Years 7-10 as a key area.
 - a. Ensure all Ministry of Education documents that discuss primary and secondary education also include the education of young adolescents in Years 7-10 as a distinct learning pathway, as identified in the New Zealand Curriculum.²⁸²
 - b. Establish a website or links to New Zealand-specific middle years research and development
2. Expand the role and function of the Middle Years Steering Group to engage stakeholders and maintain focus on research and policy for Years 7-10.
3. Review policy settings related to promoting engagement in Years 7-10 (e.g. school counsellor provision; class size ratio).
4. Create new policies and programmes that are evidence-based and increase positive student outcomes in Years 7-10.
 - a. Ensure the following knowledge, skills and values are addressed in the preparation of teachers of young adolescents in all primary and secondary teacher education programmes:
 - The ability and desire to form supportive, authentic relationships with young adolescents;
 - An understanding of the developmental nature and needs of young adolescents and how those connect to pedagogy;
 - In-depth content knowledge, especially in numeracy, above and beyond what primary preparation can offer;
 - An ability to foster learning through inquiry and integrative curriculum over traditional secondary school methods;
 - A belief in balancing a focus on the subject matter with a focus on the whole learner;
 - A skill in differentiating instruction and assessment, to enable students to progress at different rates; and
 - A commitment to working with the age group.

²⁸² Ministry of Education (2007g), p. 41

- b. Ensure the following knowledge, skills and values are addressed in the Conduct a pilot of evidence-based middle years teacher preparation.

Nota Bene

This paper completes Phase I of a two-part study. Within this report, I have explored the intersection between young adolescents' schooling outcomes and teacher credentialing. This led me to examine the desirability and viability of specific middle years teacher preparation. Phase II of this study commenced in May 2008 and explores in greater depth what knowledge, skills and values are necessary for teachers of this age group and begins to examine which teaching strategies and learning contexts young adolescents find most engaging. Phase II employs survey methodology to provide quantitative data on these questions and relies on a random national sample of principals and teachers of Years 7, 8, 9, or 10 to broaden the representation of the respondents from Phase I. It also relies on focus group interviews to provide qualitative depth to the findings. While in the first phase I consulted adult informants exclusively in order to obtain an understanding of the political contexts, the second phase adds the perspectives of students to the mix by including student focus groups from across New Zealand, in all school types and across decile rank. Cook-Sather aptly reminded educationalists that:

We as educators and educational researchers must seriously question the assumption that we know more than the young people of today about how they learn or what they need to learn in preparation for the decades ahead. It is time that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education.²⁸³

Of all people involved in education, learners know at the most intimate level what happens in classrooms. Students themselves are critical stakeholders in defining engagement and in identifying in greater depth what engages them.

²⁸³ Cook-Sather (2002), p.3

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