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Middle Years Teacher Education: New Programs and Research Directions

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Abstract

Teacher education programs focussing on the development of specialist teachers for 'the middle years' have proliferated in Australian universities in recent years. This paper provides some insights into middle years' teacher education programs at the University of Queensland, Edith Cowan and Flinders Universities with regard to their: philosophical underpinnings; specific educational context; scope and nature of the program. In addition, some of the research directions and efficacy strategies utilised in conjunction with the programs will be shared, along with some early findings from a longitudinal study in one of the programs. We propose that the pattern of programmatic growth heralds a new time for teacher education, and we speculate about the production of new kinds of teacher identities as graduates take their place in the profession.

Introduction

In response to the recognition of the changing contexts of the lives and futures of early adolescents and in acknowledgement of their special vulnerabilities and needs, there has been a growing interest in, and commitment to, the development of policies, programs and practices that relate specifically to students in the 10-15 year age group in Australia (Pendergast 2005). This focus, commonly encapsulated by the term 'middle schooling', is becoming increasingly employed as a philosophical framework guiding curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and in some cases organisational reforms, aimed at catering specifically for the needs of this group of students (Chadbourne 2001). Diversity of cognitive, physical, moral and social attributes is profound. Nevertheless, middle school students share experience or a particular place in their life within society. The types of personal development journeys typical of young people at this stage/phase of schooling strongly suggest the need for school reform to address their concomitant needs. The reform initiative is underpinned by a constructivist approach to curriculum design where the emphasis is on connecting learning to the world of the individual, where 'real' issues and contexts are connected to the world beyond the classroom (Beane 1991). Middle schooling aims to diminish alienation and disengagement which is a common experience for many young people in their schooling environment, threatening achievement of their educational potential.

The burgeoning interest in middle schooling is apparent at the policy level and in changing school structures in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. In both Queensland and South Australia state education departments have commissioned reports and action plans that set directions; clarify expectations and accountabilities, and commit systemic support for reforms in government schools (Queensland Government 2003, Whitehead 2000). Queensland's action plan requires the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to bring greater consistency and rigour to middle years' classrooms. The South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework included a 'Middle Years Band' spanning Years 6-9 for much the same purpose in 2001 (Whitehead 2001). In Queensland and Western Australia the state school systems are experimenting with differing configurations of school structures. Since 1995, every new government 'high' school in Western Australia has taken the form of a middle school for young adolescents (eg. Year 8-10 students) and a separate senior campus for young adults (eg. Year 11-12 students). District high schools (K-10) are increasingly substituting their high school section (Years 8-10) with a middle school (De Jong & Chadbourne 2005). Having commissioned a report on middle schooling, Catholic and non-Catholic private schools are implementing similar innovations (Jackson 1999). In 2004 the Brisbane Catholic Education Commission also released a position paper to promote middle schooling (Catholic Education Archdiocese of Brisbane 2004). The rate and extent of

this growth of middle schooling has taken it beyond the status of a ‘passing fad’ in both the government and non-government sectors.

The question of the effectiveness of these middle schooling initiatives in achieving the identified aims, however, remains relatively poorly investigated and documented, making evidence-based policy development and reform particularly challenging. Hill and Russell (1999, p. 6-7) lament that reform efforts have been ‘piecemeal, localized and short-lived . . . [with] few well documented models that adopt a whole-school approach to the middle years . . . and little known regarding their efficacy’. Similarly, Luke, A., Elkins, J., Weir, K., Land, R., Carrington, V., Dole, S., Pendergast, D., Kapitzke, C., van Kraayenoord, C., Moni, K., McIntosh, A., Mayer, D., Bahr, M., Hunter, L., Chadbourne, R., Bean, T., Alverman, D. and Stevens, L. (2003, p.137) note that although there were some preliminary findings relating to the efficacy of explicit state/territory policy, funding and curriculum and professional development frameworks for improvement, ‘little is known of the efficacy of the middle years initiatives’ and the ‘paucity of systemic data made it difficult to develop any clear or categorical answers about the efficacy’. The national study *Developing lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling* (Pendergast, et al. 2005) set out to identify processes, strategies and structures that promote lifelong learning in the middle years of schooling. The study found that the ‘middle schooling enhanced environment’ provides opportunities for the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with lifelong learning. These opportunities are offered through: cooperative and collaborative learning; specific curriculum programs and assessment; and, most importantly ‘. . . as a result of the role models provided by individual teachers – both as learners themselves and as illuminators of specific attitudes regarding the importance of learning in their lives’ (Pendergast et al. 2005, p.8). Hence, in this paper the spotlight of middle years’ reform necessarily shifts to the preparation of middle years teachers.

The emergence of middle years teacher education

It has long been argued in Australia that one of the major impediments to effective and successful reform in the middle years is the lack of ‘specialised’ practising teachers capable of designing and implementing innovative pedagogies, knowledge of the need for structural and philosophical change, and understandings of the needs and abilities of young adolescents - all of which are necessary for effectively implementing reform initiatives (Luke et al 2003, Whitehead 2000). As far back as 1982 a four year Bachelor of Education (Upper Primary/Lower Secondary) was established at Flinders University (Brinkworth 2005). Combining philosophical commitment and pragmatism, the degree was introduced to maintain a secondary program at the Sturt campus and its development was facilitated by a staff member’s investigation of middle schooling in the United Kingdom (Woodhouse 1981). A decade later the Schools Council (1993, p. 73) reported that it was still the only

program 'designed specifically to prepare teachers for the middle years of schooling' in Australia. This report also noted the ambivalence of some educators as it was 'felt that such specialisation could limit a teacher's career prospects in the longer term' (Schools Council 1993, p. 73).

The development of middle years teacher education programs in the United States seems to have been equally problematic. While a recent paper suggests that 'there appears to be considerable apathy and disagreement regarding the issue of whether middle level teachers need specialised professional preparation' (McEwin, Dickinson & Smith 2004, p. 10) others argue that improving the professional preparation of middle years teachers is essential to enhancing young adolescents' learning (Jackson & Davis 2000, National Middle School Association (NMSA) 2001). In a position statement on this matter, the NMSA (2001) outlines what it considers are essential elements of middle years of schooling teacher preparation programs:

- collaboration in teacher preparation with school-based faculty;
- study of young adolescent development and needs;
- study of middle level philosophy and organization;
- study of middle level curriculum organized around and emphasizing interdisciplinary and integrative approaches, approaches that also incorporate young adolescent interests as starting points for curriculum planning;
- broad academic background, including concentrations for at least two teaching fields;
- systematic study of planning, teaching and assessment, and practice in authentic settings;
- early and continuing field experiences in middle schools; and,
- provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand and experience the collaborative role of middle level teachers.

These essential elements for teacher education have informed much of the teacher education programmatic design in Australia where there is now strong support for specialised professional preparation of middle level teachers both at the pre-service and graduate levels (De Jong & Chadbourne 2005, Luke, et al. 2003). To work effectively in a reformed middle years' program it is anticipated that teachers will understand the needs and abilities of early adolescents and have the capacity to plan integrated and flexible programs accordingly. In addition, effective practice in the middle years requires ongoing collaboration with colleagues and other professionals

(Taylor 2001). This is a new field and these are new professional challenges for teachers, requiring new types of pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development.

The next section of this paper provides some insights into philosophical underpinnings, scope and nature of middle years' teacher education programs in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. Following on, research directions and efficacy strategies utilised in conjunction with the programs will be shared.

The Edith Cowan University Graduate Diploma of Education (Middle Years)

In 2001 a small team of academics worked collegially to plan a one year Graduate Diploma of Education (Middle Years). One of the main aims was to 'practise what we preach' in preparing:

. . . graduating teachers to contribute to the construction of 'new order' curriculum practice and pedagogy [in schools], as well as new forms of interactive professionalism (Harvey et al. 2001, p.1-2).

The team adopted a "Ready Fire Aim" curriculum strategy, first proposed in the leadership literature of Peters and Waterman (1984, cited in Scott 1999, p. 37). This informed the cyclical process of planning, implementing and evaluating in developing the diploma. A set of initial strategies was central to this process, namely:

- adoption of best practice associated with middle schooling at the time to inform planning;
- endeavouring 'to practice what they preach' in terms of middle schooling philosophy;
- monitoring the diploma closely, eliciting feedback from all stakeholders to enable modification along the way (after Scott, 1999);
- embracing Fullan's (1993, p. 28) idea that 'shared vision must evolve through the dynamic interaction of organisational members and leaders', including students, and the wider community; and finally,
- advocating for the middle schooling movement, particularly in Western Australia (De Jong & Chadbourne 2005, Newhouse-Maiden & De Jong 2005).

The Graduate Diploma of Education is underpinned by a clear, shared vision: 'To prepare employable graduates with the knowledge, skills and values required to teach in classrooms at the frontier of middle schooling reform'. The Diploma is characterised by six key features:

- it is specifically *adolescent-centred* in its thinking and application, keeping the needs of young adolescents consistently in focus;
- its design and delivery is *outcomes-based*, thus modelling the WA Curriculum Framework for effective teaching, learning and assessment;
- it embraces a social and individual *constructivist* approach to learning, reflecting congruence with adolescent-centredness and outcomes-based philosophy;
- *Information and communication technology* (ICT) is an integral part of course delivery;
- the development of a *professional learning community* which is characterised by a climate of trust, openness, support, optimism, high morale, and efficacy; and
- *partnerships* with middle schools are considered vital to facilitating the professional development of students and teachers alike.

The aim is for students to embrace an outcomes-based, authentic, constructivist, student-centred and developmentally appropriate pedagogy. The belief that good teaching of young adolescents demands the provision of developmentally appropriate learning experiences underpins the course while the goal is to develop graduates with a capacity and commitment to:

- relate positively to young adolescents;
- work collaboratively with colleagues in interdisciplinary teams;
- establish a sense of, and the substance of, community within and across the classroom;
- design assessment that is authentic, outcomes-based and developmental;
- construct tasks that promote cooperative, active, inquiry-based learning; and help students take charge of their own learning, and construct their own meanings;
- teach discipline-based and integrated curricula;
- use information and communication technology as an educational tool;
- teach mixed-ability classes using effective management practices;
- promote positive interpersonal and inter-group relations in the classroom;
- contribute to school development policies, programs and processes;

- engage with parents and community members to support students and the school; and,
- think like a middle years teacher (De Jong & Chadbourne 2005, Newhouse-Maiden 2002).

A whole-course approach is used to integrate the four core curriculum units (Maths, English, Science, and Society and Environment). This includes developing a working knowledge of three other learning areas (the Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Design and Technology) through integration across our curriculum and practicums. Other areas of significance, such as indigenous education, adolescents with special needs (including giftedness), gender equity (particularly related to boys' disengagement), and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are addressed in the eight course units, at weekly "Forums" (often with guest-speakers), and in activities planned for two practicums (Semester One with Years 6 and 7 and in Semester Two with Years 8 to 10).

Advocacy for middle schooling occurs in the form of intellectual argument. For example, one of the units includes an online debate about issues associated with the philosophy and practice of middle schooling. In addition, there is an electronic discussion board, which is actively used by students and staff to engage in critiquing middle schooling.

The University of Queensland Bachelor of Education (Middle Years of Schooling)

The University of Queensland initiated a dedicated middle schooling teacher education degree program, with the first graduates in 2003. Working collaboratively, the team sought to design a teacher education pre-service program that was both responsive and generative: that is, responsive to local school contexts and to current educational research and reform at national and international levels; and generative of cutting edge theories and practices associated with middle schooling philosophy, teachers' work, and teacher education (Mitchell et al. 2003). The NMSA (2001) essential elements of middle years of schooling teacher preparation programs were among the guidelines used as a basis to inform the development of the program.

From this initial program, the specialist field of middle schooling has expanded to a suite of courses for pre and in-service professional teacher education, including Masters and Graduate Certificate specialisations, along with a one year Graduate Diploma in Education commencing in 2006. The programs are designed to equip pre and in-service teachers to approach pedagogy, curriculum and assessment in innovative ways and to challenge educators to enable their students to embrace diversity and change, a feature of the times in which they live and work.

The initial program, the Bachelor of Education (Middle Years of Schooling) degree is a two year course of study available as both a dual degree and as a graduate entry program. It embodies progressive views on teaching and learning, and access to technological innovations, situated on a campus with a philosophy is of innovation, blending the best elements of the old and the new with twenty-first century technology, new courses and student-centred learning, creating an innovative, dynamic and distinctive brand of education. It draws from a wide range of theoretical perspectives, balanced with the practical skills and knowledge of expert classroom teachers and curriculum specialists. The principles underpinning the program include:

- negotiated learning paths – students commence in the program after completing two years of a dual degree or as graduate entry from an approved program – based on their previous experience and interest they elect two Key Learning Areas as their focus, typically for example either English or Mathematics, combined with a Studies of Society and the Environment;
- integration – the program is multidisciplinary, utilising multiple pedagogical practices and catering for multi-age groupings;
- team work – students conduct much of their teaching practicum and major learning activities in teams of varying sizes and with varying expertise across key learning area fields;
- collaboration – students work together with team members comprising university colleagues, university lecturers, classroom teachers and community bodies, creating a community of learners. This leads to the development of attitudes of democratic governance, where families and communities are inextricably linked;
- Middle Years of Schooling Teacher Associates (MYSTA's) – practising classroom teachers with middle years expertise work as tutors in the program, providing real contexts for learning;
- flexibility – the program allows for the development of expertise in literacy or numeracy, along with the key learning area focus Study of Society and Environment while also preparing students to teach across all other Key Learning Areas (with the exception of LOTE);
- technological literacy – students are engaged in flexible learning practices that employ the use of embedded technologies in all courses and are encouraged to develop skills in flexible delivery modes;
- student ownership – evident as students are able to map learning paths that best suit their needs, depending on their companion degree and other prior learning;

- expertise in adolescence – specialist knowledge and understanding of adolescents and their learning styles, with the development of concomitant pedagogical practices;
- expertise in diversity – specialist knowledge and understanding of diversity and development of attitudes to embrace diversity and change, and the implications for pedagogy;
- expertise in middle years reform – specialist understanding of reforms in middle years in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and structures;
- extensive practicum experience in middle years of schooling contexts - students will have the opportunity to observe and interact with expert teachers in a number of settings;
- deep/higher order/ enhanced learning – students are actively engaged in deep learning, developing skills of critical and reflective practice through complex tasks and portfolio development;
- expert-novice approach to learning – students are encouraged to adapt a philosophy of learning where they are expert at learning anew and ongoing learning, leading to a commitment to life-long learning; and
- authentic learning experiences – students negotiate topics of interest to them, in real contexts and applications where connections and scaffolding to real life is possible.

Flinders University's middle schooling program

At Flinders University the middle years teacher education program is currently prospering having been reoriented 'to promote the role of education as an agent of social change and justice' (MacMullin 2005), and the adoption of more critical approaches to middle schooling. Although several lecturers are committed to socially critical education, the Bachelor of Education (Upper Primary/Lower Secondary) curriculum is designed to introduce prospective middle school teachers to a variety of ideological positions and they are encouraged to make informed choices in relation to competing standpoints. Kemmis, Cole and Suggett's (1983) three orientations to curriculum and Starr's (1991) discussion of social justice provide the context for problematising middle schooling philosophies and practices. In common with most literature on middle schooling, prospective middle school teachers in the program usually adopt progressive stances (Whitehead 2005a, 2005b). Given the aforementioned need for advocacy, a teacher education program that enables prospective middle school teachers to clarify their positions and empowers them to critique contesting stances is crucial to the growth of middle schooling (Bartolome 2004, Beane 2005, Poplin & Rivera 2005).

In 2005 Flinders University introduced a four-year double degree program so that middle school teachers graduate with the Bachelor and either a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Health Science. Students take a major and sub-major in relevant content areas, and the commitments to social justice have been transferred into the professional components of the new program. These studies are now facilitated by new publications (Brown & Saltman 2005, Pendergast & Bahr 2005), each with different ideological positions on middle schooling. The program is in keeping with the NMSA position statement mentioned earlier in this paper, and it includes courses across the four years that consider some philosophical, historical, cultural, sociological and psychological underpinnings of education. From second year, students enrol in a range of curriculum and pedagogical studies and field experiences. These courses focus on literacy and numeracy in the middle years, curriculum theory and development, integrated curriculum studies and two specialist curriculum studies that are related to content areas. While all courses encourage critical social awareness, the program features a core course in fourth year that specifically addresses the education of Indigenous students (Rigney et al. 2003). Commitment to education as an agent of social change and justice is thus maintained across the program.

| Focus of the middle schooling research | Collaborators |
|--|---|
| Efficacy of ECU program | Newhouse-Maiden & De Jong, 2005 |
| Team building | Newhouse-Maiden & De Jong, 2004 |
| Philosophy | Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005 |
| Student resilience | Newhouse-Maiden, Bahr & Pendergast, 2005 |
| Teachers perspectives of integrated curriculum | Whitehead, 2001 |
| Understanding of being a teacher | Whitehead, Lewis & Rosetto, under review |
| Reasons for choosing teaching as a career | Whitehead, 2005b |
| Literacy & numeracy | Luke et al, 2003 |
| Construction of teacher identity | Pendergast, 2002 Mitchell et al, 2003 Keogh et al, 2005 |
| Lifelong Learning | Pendergast et al, 2005 |

Table 1. Examples of research in middle schooling conducted by staff in the programs under discussion

Research and efficacy strategies

Given that the specialist preparation of middle years teachers in Australia is a relatively new phenomenon, there is substantial commitment among teacher

educators to establishing the efficacy of current programs and engaging in rigorous research into middle years teacher education and the movement more generally. Each of the universities actively collect quantitative and qualitative data using the respective institutions formal instruments for evaluating students perceptions of the teaching and courses of work. This information is used in conjunction with external advisory committees comprised of key stakeholders to guide the development and direction of the programs.

A variety of research and scholarly work associated with the university programs has accumulated rapidly. A snapshot of some of this work is presented in Table 1.

Of particular interest to all academics across the programs is the construction of middle year teacher identities. One longitudinal study that has been underway for over three years investigates the experience of pre-service teachers in the program (see, for example, Mitchell et al. 2003, Keogh et al. 2005). The following component of this paper provides some insights into this longitudinal study.

University of Queensland Longitudinal Middle Years Teacher Research

The longitudinal study is focussed on the students participating in the Middle Years of School teacher education pre-service program. Data have been collected over a three year period, with a further two years of study to be completed in this research cycle. A range of data collection approaches are employed, including surveys, personal interviews and focus groups. The research set out to gain an understanding of four key aspects: why students selected middle schooling as their program of study; the pre-service teachers conceptions of middle years students identities and how this impacts on their practice and the development of the middle years teacher identity; and the implication of these insights for the teacher education agenda. The first cohort from the program graduated in 2003 and the data considered in this section of the paper utilise responses from them, focusing on their conceptions of middle years of schooling teachers and of middle years of schooling students.

Research method

A survey, two focus groups and voluntary personal interviews were completed over the two year study period, during which the students commenced and subsequently completed their two-year teacher education program. In each case, the data collection activity was conducted outside of classroom times and in no way linked to the assessment of students. The raw data from interview transcripts and written surveys was examined with a view to highlighting any data relating to the key issues for investigation in this instance; namely, the conceptions of middle years of schooling teachers and the conceptions of a middle years of schooling students.

Content analysis was employed as the method for analysing the data. All data from across the various sources which related to either of these conceptions was lifted verbatim from the transcripts and placed in a table which linked the data item with the particular research instrument and the cohort who had participated in the research, underneath a heading of either 'Middle Years Student' or 'Middle Years Teacher'.

The individualised data items were then placed into similarly themed groups for each of the two key focus issues. These groups were given a descriptive name or title, derived from an understanding of the items, which was placed as a subject heading for the group. A summary paragraph was written which highlighted the similarities and/or differences of content in the data considering each content-themed subject heading. Some data items were included in more than one themed group. Finally, a primary layer of content theme was created under which all of the collated themed subject groups could be placed. At this stage, the raw data were separated from the themes, for ease of comprehension and conceptualisation. Some summary paragraphs were included in more than one overarching theme. The data thus sit in a three-tiered organisation addressing each of the two focus issues: Level One: Overarching themes; Level Two: Summary paragraphs; Level Three: Grouped items of data placed under a collective content subject heading.

Research findings

The overarching themes extrapolated from the data are shown in Table 2, along with some verbatim quotes as examples of the types of data contributing to this theme. The overarching themes share an obvious commonality. The pre-service middle years teacher education students are considering both themselves as developing as Middle Years teachers and are also considering the characteristics of the students who fit under the middle years banner. Firstly, as pre-service Middle Years Teachers, they are projecting an understanding of what kind of teachers they believe they need to be, based upon their understandings from theory and practical experience. Secondly, they are also considering the students who they have interacted with, as well as how these students are described and explained in the literature they have investigated. The commonality comes from the central point of the investigation – the pre-service student teachers – thus, it can be expected that the data will show some similarity between the two areas. Middle Years teachers and Middle Years students share an environment and an interest in the development and success of Middle Years students.

In both cases, the overarching themes show a focus on relationships.

| Conceptions of Middle Years Teachers | Conceptions of Middle Years Students |
|--|--|
| <p>Middle Years as a period of transition and development</p> <p>"... the issues that exist in that set of years, 6 - 9</p> <p>Importance of relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With students • With other teachers • With parents and community <p>"... have an interest beyond the classroom/lesson, Rapport with students".</p> <p>"Start with the kids. It's all about the students. And not the curriculum".</p> <p>"Support colleagues and accept support".</p> | <p>The Middle Years as a period of transition and development</p> <p>"... they're not quite primary, they're not quite upper, they're actually sort of in limbo</p> <p>Importance of relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With other students • With teachers • With parents and community <p>"Because they are trying to establish their place in the world, they are pushing boundaries taking risks and trying new things - often under the influence of friends who are extremely important at this age".</p> |
| <p>Teacher identity</p> <p>"... engaging adolescents in my teaching practices and integrating subjects to highlight 'real work' applications".</p> <p>"I am not a primary teacher, I am not a high school teacher - I AM A MIDDLE YEARS TEACHER!"</p> | <p>Developing as individuals</p> <p>"That it is a pivotal time in their development of self identity and learning journey".</p> <p>"These young people are going through an identity formation process and facing great pressure while they do this from media, peers, parents, advertising, and schools".</p> |
| <p>Considerations of curriculum</p> <p>"Not just integration in terms of subjects but integration between teachers, integration between year levels, integration between the school and the community"</p> <p>"I sort of believe that we were taught middle year schooling techniques, and I've used those (indistinct) and I haven't taught in my subject areas yet, and I've got a job where I'm not teaching in my subject area, because of those skills, so I think it's the skills, not necessarily the process".</p> | <p>Considering education and school</p> <p>"They are adolescents who specifically need a curriculum tailored to suit their needs. Such as realizing they are developing and changing and may not fully understand why. They need a curriculum that is real world, and relates to their interests and ensure that it keeps them interested in the school institution as well".</p> |
| <p>Differentiating Middle Years from primary and secondary schooling</p> <p>"But in terms of the stuff that happens in primary schools, the level of support, the level of scaffolding and stuff like that, I think middle years is a lot about that. You know, to not suddenly whip it out and carve it out from underneath them as often comes when they hit grade 8".</p> | |
| <p>The future of Middle Schooling in the broader education system/s</p> <p>"Also I think sometimes that the education system in schools were losing their place in the limelight so they created middle schooling to shake things up a bit ..."</p> <p>"In limbo - could go either way i.e. applauded and enthusiastically adapted by schools/teachers; OR be seen as a 'Fool' in education and rejected by schools/teachers".</p> | |

Table 2. Conceptions of middle years teachers and middle years students, as formulated from responses by pre-service middle years student teachers

The issues the pre-service teacher education students believe are of importance to Middle Years teachers, are also those they believe are of importance to Middle Years students. Two of the overarching themes are identical – considering **the middle years as a period of transition and development** and emphasising the **importance of relationships** for both students and teachers are seen as of key importance whether for students or teachers in this middle phase. The third overarching theme from each of the two areas is also very similar. With regard to considering themselves as developing teachers, the students have emphasised the importance of understanding a **teacher's identity** while for the students they have worked with, as well as researched, the student teachers also consider it important to consider and understand how students in this time frame are **developing as individuals**. While there are two more overarching themes derived from the student teachers perceptions, understandings and constructions of middle years teachers all three of them are related to the final of the overarching themes derived from the data where student teachers were asked to consider middle year's students. These final four themes deal with the work of school and of education. The final overarching theme from the data where the student teachers considered Middle Years teachers shows evidence of concern and uncertainty about the **future of the Middle Years** focus as well as the student's anxiety about the future prospects of employment.

New teacher identities

This paper provides insight into the mechanics and philosophical platforms of some teacher education programs in middle schooling in Australia, from which new kinds of teachers – middle years teachers - are emerging. It has revealed some of the research directions and efficacy strategies utilised in conjunction with the programs shared. It is interesting to note that the NMSA (2001) essential elements for middle years teacher preparation programs appear to have informed the development of these programs questioning the relevance and value of utilising this framework, and more importantly, the need to develop Australian guidelines, which take into consideration the different philosophical understandings of middle schooling adopted by the policies and directions around the states and territories.

We have introduced early findings of a longitudinal study investigating the emergence of middle years teacher identities, and their constructions of middle years students in schools, promising to provide rich data for future work. Plans to follow graduates from the program also provide opportunity to investigate long term questions about teacher identity and program success. The effectiveness of graduates from each program will become the focus of research with several cohorts of graduates now employed:

. . . we know next to nothing about what happens to teachers as they leave these programs and are enculturated into the varied approaches to middle years of schooling. What is needed is medium-duration

longitudinal studies of teacher problems, strategies and pathways from various kinds of training into and through the middle years in the schooling sector. This would set the conditions for a much better sense of what really counts as excellent middle years teaching practice (Luke et al. 2003, p 138).

And while the authors concur with Bates' (2005, p. 237) urgings not to fall into the political pattern in teacher education of 'fragmentation and marginalization' by creating yet another silo within the education community, we argue that middle schooling teacher education operates from a paradigm that is both responsive and generative, and has the potential to contribute to the establishment of a politics of teacher education that is appropriate to new times. As such, middle years teacher education may well be a panacea for more general reform of teacher education.

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