

MSR PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION:

# Say it with an Image

The MSR quarterly photographic competition invites students and teachers to submit a digital image accompanied by a piece of writing of no more than 50 words - see instructions

Say It with an Image captures and records middle schooling experiences that make a difference.

**SPOTLIGHT ON:** Students' and teachers' experiences, perspectives and viewpoints.

**THE COMPETITION:** MSR publishes the winning image and written piece in the next Issue of MSR and highly commended images either throughout the MSR or in the [www.nzaims.co.nz](http://www.nzaims.co.nz) "Best Images" gallery.

**THE PROJECT:** Say it with an Image Anthology - publishes the best images and written accounts annually. This publication will be supplementary to the MSR.



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1. A high quality digital photograph that captures one or all of the following: Exciting ideas, valuable learning, fun experiences, great relationships and making a difference - 300dpi at 200% see detailed instructions at [www.nzaims.co.nz](http://www.nzaims.co.nz)

2. Write: a poem, a descriptive account, an imaginative piece or a pithy report to go with your image - no more than 50 words.



To enter the competition: go to [www.nzaims.co.nz](http://www.nzaims.co.nz)

*Pretend that every early adolescent you work with or teach has a sign around his or her neck that says, 'Make me feel important.'*

*Adapted from a saying by Mary Kay Ash*



MIDDLE SCHOOLING  
**Review**  
PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL

[www.nzaims.co.nz](http://www.nzaims.co.nz)

NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION OF INTERMEDIATE AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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- NZEI President  
- SPANZ President

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**COMPETITION**  
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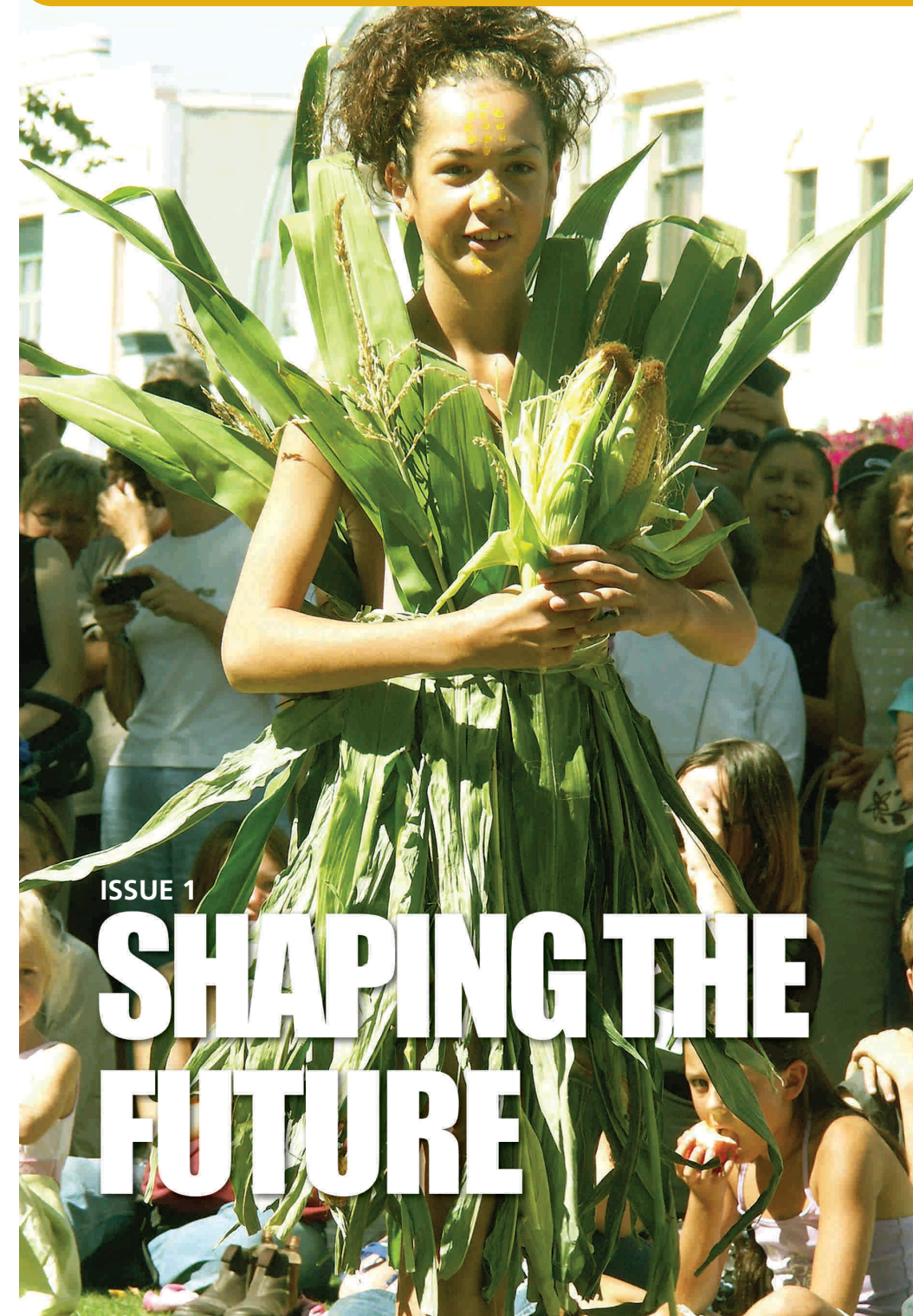
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LAST CHANCE - BOOK NOW!

The articles and contributions propose that openness to change, shared vision and perspective and powerful commitment to early adolescent education, development and welfare are placed high on all agendas - Government, community and schools, and that they stay there.

Pat Nolan



ISSUE 1

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**JOURNAL MOTTO**

**"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore,  
is not an act but a habit."**

*Aristotle - Greek philosopher*

## President's Message Opening debate and discussion



BILL NOBLE

All the articles in *Middle Schooling Review Issue One* point in a single direction.

Exemplary middle-years practice has been alive and well in schools generally for a very long time that work with and teach young adolescents, not just in intermediate and middle schools - although my role as intermediate school principal leads me to think that here it predominates.

*On behalf of the NZAIMS Executive I accordingly invite all educational practitioners – from teachers to schools principals, across school sectors, to subscribe to Middle Schooling Review and join NZAIMS.*

Soon we will move to rename NZAIMS so that it more truly reflects our intention to be non-partisan and inclusive. In this way, NZAIMS more truly will represent and make a place for the voice of everyone who works with, teaches and has an interest in the development and welfare of early adolescents.

At the 2006 NZAIMS Summit on the 7<sup>th</sup> June, Minister of Education Steve Maharey officially launched the NZAIMS strategy of reconstitution and cross sector collaboration and support. We believe that the strategy will define our future.

*Middle Schooling Review* is an integral part of the NZAIMS middle schooling strategy, and it provides:

1. Well-informed discussion, reporting and debate of current issues, concerns and interests pivotal to early adolescent education and middle schooling; and
2. Access to the latest and best evidence of current (and past) research and effective middle schooling experience and practice.

Nationally and across school sectors we presently may lack consensus on what counts as appropriate and the most effective curricula designs, learning and teaching practice, and forms of school organisation. The current debate over the new Year 7- 10 schools that the Minister recently announced for Auckland, and what name to give them, reflects lack of consensus and a degree of confusion.

If seemingly we are confronted with ambiguity about what works best across the middle years, then this ambiguity may provide "a nagging moral voice within the broader discourse on middle years education policy and practice" (San Antonio, 2006)<sup>1</sup>.

It provides an opportunity to keep the debate on important matters open, and conduct the debate in our own home grown *Middle Schooling Review*, which soon, we envisage, will be the widely read professional education journal in New Zealand for the middle years sector.

*Middle Schooling Review* will report

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## Opening debate and discussion

BILL NOBLE

the voice of all those who are involved with and have an interest in early adolescent education - diverse students, parents, and teachers along with other practitioners, researchers and officials.

For now, the time is right to identify and document exemplary practice where ever it occurs. Sharing practice in this way will realise the vision of Minister of Education, Steve Maharey and make explicit the "Kiwi Way" of educating young adolescents (see Bishop and Downes later in *Issue One*).

As I see it, student centred schooling is at the heart of the *Kiwi Way*. The teachers work in teams and they use active and interactive teaching

methods. The schools invite and encourage parent and community participation. Programmes of learning make school education relevant and real to students' lives and highly motivating. In the spirit of Clarence Beeby, the focus of education for young adolescents is exploration of themselves and their world.

It is an expansive, realistic and socially integrative education, with consistent, continuous and coherent development of students as future citizens through a common core curriculum, across Years 7 to 10. In this context, a place exists for some differentiation of courses (i.e., specialist teaching) but the timing is crucial at a time in the lives of young people when other

considerations related to development, such as developing identity as persons and establishing their place in the world and their view of it, equally are vital and are the well springs of motivation to learn.

I encourage and look forward to ongoing discussion and debate in *Middle Schooling Review* about topics and developments vital to early adolescent education in Aotearoa New Zealand. ■

Bill Noble  
President NZAIMS

\*1. San Antonio, D.M. (2006). Broadening the World of Early Adolescents. *Educational Leadership*, 63:7, 8-13.

## Editorial

### Respecting diversity - a common perspective and purpose



PAT NOLAN

Wise educational thinkers and practitioners of recent times say that respecting diversity enables a common perspective and meaningful purpose to emerge on matters of great importance.

Diversity means diverse ideas, diverse points of view and diverse positions on matters and topics that count. Respect permits healthy and productive debate. Respect enables

satisfactory and workable solutions; and it makes worthwhile developments and change possible and sustainable. It is said that sense of common purpose and a broad and inclusive perspective emerge, in time. Taken together all three – respect for diversity, common perspective and a common purpose, are the touchstone of the articles and other contributions in *Issue One* of *Middle Schooling Review*.

Three themes underpin the articles

Respect enables satisfactory and workable solutions; and it makes worthwhile developments and change possible and sustainable.

and seemingly vest them with wide and inclusive perspective and purpose, even though all were written and submitted independently of each other. The themes are:

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## Respecting diversity - a common perspective and purpose

PAT NOLAN

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1. Valuing, challenging and supporting early adolescents to develop as young persons and as future citizens, continuously, coherently and consistently;



The articles and contributions propose that openness to change, shared vision and perspective and powerful commitment to early adolescent education, development and welfare are placed high on all agendas – Government, community and schools, and that they stay there.

2. Practitioner collaboration and collegiality - within schools and across school sectors, and schools working in, and with community - are the keys to responsive and effective curricula, and pedagogical practice across the middle years; and

3. Realisation that all the (exemplary) ingredients to make middle schooling a positive, productive and enjoyable experience for all, continuously

across years 7 to 10, already are known and used in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some articles convey a sense of implicit surprise that schools do not more widely, universally even, practice that which is known and recognised as exemplary.

Taken together the articles and contributions set the tone not just for *Issue One* but the *Issues* to follow. They all take a stand on what is important and on directions to take. They all express, although in different ways, optimism and hope for middle schooling of the future in Aotearoa New Zealand - and

they view middle schooling as a durable and enduring enterprise. The articles and contributions propose that openness to change, shared vision and perspective and powerful commitment to early adolescent education, development and welfare are placed high on all agendas – Government, community and schools, and that they stay there. The proposal is in keeping with the spirit and driving force of *Middle Schooling Review*, now and into the foreseeable future.

*Middle Schooling Review* **encourages and fosters debate.** It acknowledges and respects the diversity of voices, perspectives and insights that might fuel the debate and inform, hopefully enlighten, our middle-years educational thinking and practice, and it will report and celebrate our accomplishments.

*Middle Schooling Review* **puts a stake in the ground** and asserts and demonstrates that in Aotearoa New Zealand, we know about, care for and will act with determination more than ever, present and past, to provide early adolescents with the educational experiences and opportunities they need and deserve.

*Middle Schooling Review* **invites** all those who work with, teach and support young people at this vital early adolescence stage of their lives to write articles, submit reports and provide descriptions and commentaries of exemplary practice that are in the spirit of authentic accounts, verifiable practice and open debate. Openness especially is vital since diversity of opinion expressed in *Middle Schooling Review*, supported by sound evidence and robust and compelling argument, will ensure that the *Review* maintains steadfastly the development, education and welfare of early adolescents as its principal focus. ■

C.J. Pat Nolan  
Editor

*Middle Schooling Review*

# A Letter from America

## Ideas that make a difference



JAMES BEANE

**A**s NZAIMS expands its mission, membership, and media, I have been thinking about the early days of the middle school movement in the US and my four decades of involvement within it. It is true that the title “middle school” sometimes went only so far as the sign in front of the school and the school stationery. But in many places the push for better education for young adolescents brought great success. Visiting those places and reading research about them tells us a lot about what makes for good middle schooling. Here are some ideas that have really made a difference here. I don’t know if they would all apply in New Zealand, but they’re worth considering.

**Forge Relationships.** Nothing is more important to success with young adolescents than solid and supportive relationships. When young adolescents believe we care about and respect them, they are more likely to join us in learning. And in knowing them well we are more likely to know how to differentiate instruction to meet their diverse needs. Besides, teaching young adolescents is a lot more fun when you get to know what is really making them tick.

**Create Contexts.** Young adolescents learn best when they are engaged with topics, issues, and problems that have meaning and relevance for them. Integrative units built around personally and socially significant themes bring to life and offer more access to otherwise meaningless content and skills. Moreover, the road to intellectual

rigor runs right through relevance. It’s almost impossible to get one without the other. This shouldn’t be hard to understand – it’s true for adults too.

“... in many places the push for better education for young adolescents brought great success.”

**Mix it Up.** Young adolescents thrive when activities, methods, and resources are varied and mixed. Use of large group, small group, and independent activities, as well as a range of resources, opens the possibility for addressing lots of learning styles and keeping things interesting. Young adolescents also learn best overall when groupings are heterogeneous and diverse. There is plenty of research on this that speaks to access, modeling, and peer tutoring. But I think such grouping also appeals to the young adolescent sense of fairness, looks more to them like the real world, and presents richer opportunities for relationships.

**Mentor Relentlessly.** No matter what they say or how they look, young adolescents still have a lot of child in them (more “young” than “adolescent,” so to speak). They still need and want support and guidance from adults who know and care about them. Providing persistent adult mentorship and counseling is a necessary ingredient for the health and welfare of all students.

**Find a Partner.** Teacher teams offer a number of benefits. Students demonstrate greater achievement, more social bonding, and fewer

behavior issues when they are taught by a team that plans together. Teachers can enhance their professional work by sharing information about students and

methods as well as ending the isolation they often feel. The best teams are small (two or three) since they are less likely to experience conflict and more likely to share the curriculum. When teams get large (four or more) communication tends to break down and people fall into the same old divisions.

**Stretch the Clock.** Young adolescents need longer blocks of time with fewer teachers. Only when teachers and students are together for longer long time blocks can we expect to get in-depth projects, serious discussions, and solid relationships. At the same time, longer time blocks mean fewer of the transitions that so many young adolescents struggle with.

**Connect with Families.** Young adolescents learn best when they have support and understanding of their families. Frequent and positive contacts are crucial to that process. Learning conferences, sharing of projects, narrative assessments, and family nights all work well in this regard. In addition, parents and guardians typically know little about young adolescence in general and benefit greatly when we help them to become better informed.

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## Ideas that make a difference

JAMES BEANE

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They also gain a greater respect for our professional expertise.

**Go for Broke.** If you really want great middle schooling, then you have to go for the whole package all at once. Tinkering around the edges brings few or no results. Great schooling is made up of a number of principles and practices: best methods, quality professional development, networking with other schools, democratic leadership, inclusive and equitable practices, data-based problem-solving, and more. None of these can do the job alone. This can be very messy and difficult, but research tells us it's the only reliable way.

**Percolate Out.** The key elements of good middle schooling need

protection over time. The way to do that is not to isolate or insulate, but to reach out to other levels of schooling, other agencies, the media, and the general public. The more people come into contact with the middle years educators and their schools, the more they seem to appreciate, even admire, what we are after and how we go about it.

**Give it Time.** Making great schools takes time and patience, including the time reflect. Whether it is schedule changes, teaching teams, or new approaches, things need to be left in place long enough for people to become skilled and ideas to take hold. Teaching teams, for example, take five to six years to show the greatest benefits in terms of student achievement. Changing them, or anything else, too soon

only creates mixed messages and confused participants. Someone else might have a different list or maybe even argue with some of my choices. But I think I'm pretty close to right about this, or at least a long ways from wrong. And I'm really wondering if advocates and practitioners of middle years schooling in New Zealand think that this list would apply there. Chances are good I'll be told right out as soon as I get there in September. I can't wait. ■

*James Beane, Professor  
Interdisciplinary Studies in  
Curriculum  
National College of Education, USA*

## Success in the Middle Message from the NZEI National President



IRENE COOPER

**First of all, my warm congratulations on establishing a very timely and necessary publication.**

**T**he recognition of middle years' education as a unique part of our education system is critical to success for all students. Central to that are teachers and schools continuing to engage students in learning at a time when

they are undergoing the most rapid intellectual and developmental changes of their lives, other than infancy. Yet little recent New Zealand research has been conducted on best practice for students learning in the middle years of education. I am confident that the focus taken by NZAIMS through their strategy document will see bold strides taken to fill this gap.

A number of areas can be identified

where schooling for the middle years will benefit from more specific research and support. I hope that policymakers will stand up and take notice of these areas, and provide the necessary tools for advancement.

### **Professional development**

Overseas research already has confirmed the importance of teachers catering to the particular needs of students during this time

## Message from the NZEI National President

IRENE COOPER

in their lives. In the United States, researchers (Mertens, Flowers, and Mulhall, 2002; Flowers and Mertens, 2003) have found that teachers who have attained specialised middle level preparation are more likely to use instructional practices linked to higher student achievement.

All middle level teachers in New Zealand should have access to professional development that is specific to the needs of middle-years students. It's just common sense. Such professional development needs to include the nurturing aspects of primary education with the upper levels of academic knowledge required to challenge students. To focus solely on one aspect or the other is to turn a blind eye to students' needs.

Professional development needs to include the nurturing aspects of primary education with the upper levels of academic knowledge required to challenge students. To focus solely on one aspect or the other is to turn a blind eye to students' needs.

### Research on best practice in the middle years

International research sends strong signals for what New Zealand should consider as best practice. Teachers in New Zealand need access to such research to meet the needs of their middle school students.

Such areas include:

- Teaching students about strategies for learning on their own;
- Giving students a more integrated curriculum;
- Setting gradually higher expectations;
- Building analytical and problem solving skills;
- Recognising and building on past learning experiences; and



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## The Middle Years of Schooling Shifting the focus



STEVE MAHAREY

**The crucial factor affecting the success of any school remains the quality of teaching.**

What happens in the classroom has the greatest impact on students' achievement in schools, and it accounts for up to 60% of variation in student achievement.

years' teaching that works well. Puberty represents the greatest change that students face during schooling. It is a time where many disengage from adults, both parents and teachers. As a consequence, some students also disengage from the learning process. Studies in Australia highlight the lowering levels of student satisfaction with and motivation for school, after the onset of puberty.

focus has been firmly on senior secondary and the NCEA.

Now is a good time to look at how the curriculum ought to proceed from the primary years into the middle years, and also, how the expansion in curriculum in the senior secondary years ought to impact on the curriculum for the years immediately prior to NCEA.

I want to discuss the sorts of middle

We need to admit that the recent

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## Shifting the focus

STEVE MAHAREY

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Effective teaching in the middle years allows schools to respond to the specific needs of emerging adolescents. It should do this in ways that ensure effective learning and teaching can take place.



Key elements of such practice include Interdisciplinary teaming of teachers and integrated study programmes that link across subject boundaries. They are more appropriate at a stage in schooling where the curriculum is not as driven by subject-based external and internal assessment for qualifications.

To work effectively, these two approaches require teachers who are well qualified in their subject area and also in the needs of emerging adolescents.

Other key elements include: content and subject study that is based on the students' interests, including student involvement in what is taught; enquiry-based, interactive teaching techniques; flexible timetabling to allow more innovative models of curriculum

delivery; a high level of community consultation and parent involvement in school matters; and, a range of advisory programmes to better inform decisions taken by emerging adolescents, for example, road safety and health issues, such as smoking and drinking.

Advice from the Ministry of Education is that student achievement levels in the middle years of schooling show little variation attributable to school type. Further, differences by learning area also are not related to the type of school.

The extent to which changing the setting of the year levels, for different stages of schooling, actually influences student outcomes is uncertain. Nevertheless, changing the setting can have two effects: it can act as a catalyst for changing schools and teachers thinking and practice; and it can provide the conditions required for effective teaching to occur. The placing of boundaries between school stages also has a bearing on schools and teachers thinking and actions that are needed to support successful transitions, both through schools, and to and from schools.

New networks of schools, built in response to demographic trends, provide a unique opportunity for new communities to develop innovative learning pathways and models of school provision. These may include secondary-tertiary partnerships, Year 7-10 junior high

schools, Year 11-13 senior high schools and Year 7-13 schools. The traditional model of intermediate schooling is **not** being abandoned; no one model is favoured over another. What happens inside the classrooms in these schools remains the most important factor.



New research is needed on issues such as teacher training, teacher recruitment and effective teaching practices at our newly-opened schools. I have asked the Ministry to develop a research proposal to find out what works for students and teachers in these schools in the middle years. I expect to take a proposal to Cabinet in the near future. ■

*Steve Maharey  
Minister of Education  
New Zealand Government*



# Finding a Kiwi Way for the Middle Years

## An outsiders' perspective



PENNY A. BISHOP & JOHN M. DOWNES

**In the field of education, the opportunity to step out of our own schools and communities is far too rare a pleasure.**

As U.S. educators, we treasured the opportunity to spend two weeks in New Zealand this past May and June traveling around North Island. Our visits to a dozen schools and our rich conversations with principals, teachers, students, and other educators have yielded endless hours of rewarding reflection, both on middle schooling in New Zealand, and on our ongoing middle level challenges in the United States. Our experience offers ample evidence that we can learn much from each other and find great joy in doing so. In this brief opportunity, we hope to share some of our insights, not so much into New Zealand education – we cannot hope to grasp any degree of nuance based on such a brief visit – but rather to examine common challenges in designing effective and rewarding middle school experiences for our students. In particular, we were impressed by New Zealand's approach to local control in school management, curriculum, relationships and student leadership.

### **Balancing Issues of Local Control**

In stark contrast to the bureaucratic structure of schooling in the U.S., New Zealand's system of local control appears to support many of the middle schooling innovations

we observed. We hail from a small New England state noted for its local control relative to the rest of the U.S., but schools and principals here have far less influence over curriculum, assessment, and supporting infrastructure than those we observed in New Zealand. For example, many principals in the U.S. would be envious of the autonomy with which New Zealand principals go about property improvements, such as the new performing arts facilities we saw under construction at Otahuhu Intermediate, or the impressive Marae complex at Fairfield Intermediate, improvements that contribute to a strong middle years program because they are based on a deep understanding of the nature and needs of this age group.

The examples of strong middle schooling practices we observed, are hopeful indications of the vision, capacity and energy of the country's middle schooling movement.



Principals in the U.S. would also relish the opportunity to select assessment strategies that reveal particular learners' strengths and challenges, according to specific building needs and priorities, and receive the data in time to make instructional adjustments. We were

shown fine examples of assessment directly informing instruction at Taradale, Fairfield and Papatoetoe Intermediates. In contrast, most principals in the US have no choice but to implement standardized assessments mandated by state or district officials, and rarely receive the results before students have moved on to other teachers.

Of course, one danger of local control is the potential to act too often in an insular fashion. Yet far from being isolated, many of the New Zealand principals we talked with enjoyed rich and enviable collegial connections through contract collaborations, regional associations such as the Auckland Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools, and NZAIMS.

Whereas U.S. middle schools striving toward reform confront myriad political and structural obstacles at every layer of local, state, and national bureaucracy, most principals in the reform movement in New Zealand intermediate and middle schools wield the autonomy to bring their vision to reality.

### **Ensuring Relevant Curriculum**

New Zealand's local, school-level autonomy appears to support innovation in the design of relevant

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## An outsiders' perspective

PENNY A. BISHOP & JOHN M. DOWNES

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curriculum for young adolescents. For instance, New Zealand's current shift from a larger and more specific national curriculum to a condensed, more general framework provides local educators the opportunity to



ground their work in the kinds of relevant and integrative experiences young adolescents deserve and require (Beane, 1996). Many of the schools we visited had adopted or were planning ambitious approaches to their technologies curriculum, emphasizing student-driven media production, art, and music at a time when these curricula are seriously undervalued and even threatened in the U.S.

At Havelock North Intermediate, for example, a Media Studies

program offers students the opportunity to take control of media messages through the reporting, editing and producing of news items. The sustainable gardens and native reforestation projects at Hastings Intermediate explore the powerful nexus of young adolescent civic consciousness, balancing students' global and local interests while tapping into their nascent passions for advocacy and action. In Otahuhu Intermediate's Civil Engineering class innovative curriculum blends seamlessly with community connections and school improvement. Students there experience an authentic, thematically integrated curriculum dedicated not just to student learning, but to contributing to their school through designing and constructing a peace garden, building renovations and an historical walking path. As high-stakes testing exerts great pressure on U.S. educators to focus almost exclusively on math and literacy, we found in New Zealand many bold examples of curriculum designed around the interests and concerns of students rather than those of politicians and bureaucrats.

### Building Meaningful Relationships

Just as the U.S. emphasis on testing in math and literacy threatens relevant curriculum for young adolescents, it is coupled with other initiatives in an attack on the very foundation of responsive middle level schooling: building relationships with students. The "highly qualified" facet of the No

Child Left Behind Act, a recent U.S. federal policy with heavy emphasis on formal undergraduate preparation in specific subject areas, has compounded long-standing historical and political pressures to eliminate small teaching teams, even in the face of convincing research that describes the benefits of two and three teacher teams for young adolescent relationship-building (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Here too our observations in New Zealand schools suggest a more hopeful future for Kiwi adolescents. A tradition of self-contained, single teacher classrooms in full primary and intermediate schools yields a degree of intimacy and connectedness that undergirds responsive curriculum, assessment, and social-emotional opportunities for growth. There are hopeful signs that a renewed Ministry of Education emphasis on new, thoughtfully designed middle level schools may yield other structural approaches to building and sustaining relationships, such as partner teams, looping, and multiage teaming. But above all, we witnessed many examples of building relationships regardless of the schooling structures. We were wowed by the camping tradition present in so many schools, both for building relationships and honoring the non-academic needs and interests of middle level students. Teachers and administrators at Ross Intermediate cultivated exemplary collegial relationships, as well, in the course of their ambitious improvement

## An outsiders' perspective

PENNY A. BISHOP & JOHN M. DOWNES

efforts. And then there was tea, a time for kids and adults to focus on the people around them, free to pursue the human connections they need each day. These examples are common in New Zealand, but uncommon in the US, and offer heartening illustrations of healthy dispositions toward middle schooling.

### Fostering Student Leadership

Such meaningful human connections are but one of the daily needs of young adolescents; these learners also require regular opportunities to explore new roles and try on various identities. Trying on adult roles in a safe environment -- physically, socially and intellectually -- is vital to youngsters' successful navigation through adolescence and ultimate sense of personal efficacy (Stevenson, 2002). Outside of school, students naturally experiment with a variety of adult roles, at times through instant messaging, multi-generational gaming, or the use of drugs and alcohol. School, in contrast, presents one of the few formal opportunities for learners to try on the best of adult roles-- contributing in a concrete way to the community-- and to do so with the thoughtful guidance of adults who care deeply about them and their well-being.

Our visit revealed a number of courageous examples of intermediate schools offering students rich opportunities to try on adult roles with genuine circumstances, real work and

authentic audiences. We visited an all-boys class at Otahuhu Intermediate that explores curriculum through the lens of sports and manages the sports equipment for the school; At Taradale Intermediate we spoke with two proud and smiling girls who confidently run the receptionist's desk daily during tea; and at Havelock North Intermediate, we learned of a peer mediation program whereby trained student mediators are regularly the first point of contact in classroom conflict.

In each of these cases, students are encouraged and empowered to adopt leadership roles within their schools, helping the educational community as a whole to run more smoothly. While fostering student leadership remains a goal of many U.S. middle schools, current concerns around high stakes testing cause more and more educators to forego such important opportunities in order to spend more time teaching to the test. Yet from our observations, New Zealand educators seem to recognize that promoting student leadership in these ways also holds the promise of personalizing and individualizing education. A rich array of non-academic, yet critical, needs is addressed through such authentic leadership opportunities.

As Minister Maharey recently outlined the vital role education plays in transforming New Zealand, he called attention to the type of future citizen he envisions, "We

want Kiwis who are confident and enterprising; connected to each other and the wider world; and actively involved in creating New Zealand's wellbeing" (2006a). How better to accomplish this goal than to provide young adolescents with multiple leadership opportunities, thus presenting future citizens with years of practice being active in their surrounding communities?



### Concluding Thoughts

The examples of strong middle schooling practices we observed, whether or not they are representative of middle years practices across New Zealand, are nonetheless hopeful indications of the vision, capacity and energy of the country's middle schooling movement. They are potent in and of themselves but they are also rooted in New Zealand's unique historical, political, and cultural context. In contrast to the U.S., where the middle level movement has been relatively slow to identify and lobby against the contradictions between new federal policies and

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## An outsiders' perspective

PENNY A. BISHOP & JOHN M. DOWNES

### PENNY A. BISHOP & JOHN A. DOWNES

Penny Bishop is a professor and the Director, Middle Level Teacher Education programme at the University of Vermont, U.S.A. and John Downes, a middle level school leader in a Vermont middle school district is studying for his EdD at the University of Vermont.

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the movement's interests and traditions, middle level educators in New Zealand are well positioned to avoid the same mistake.

At the recent NZAIMS Summit, we found ourselves in a room with 125 principals, all dedicated to improving schools for young adolescents. The momentum was palpable. We felt the commitment and heard the stories of educational leaders working hard to create schools for young adolescents that are responsive to the nature, needs and interests of that age group. Principals in New Zealand seem uniquely situated to further the

reform initiative in a collaborative way, and by expanding its membership to include more classroom-based educators, NZAIMS will likely go far toward its goal of supporting schools in the education, development and welfare of early adolescents. We visited New Zealand at a moment when the Ministry of Education's initiatives and those of the middle level movement appear to overlap substantially. Minister Maharey's praise for NZAIMS' emphasis on changes that put the student at the centre of learning (2006b), complemented by the recent announcement of two new middle schooling-oriented facilities,

reveal a mutual focus on the young adolescent that is the very bedrock of the middle years concept. The time appears right for New Zealand's middle years educators to make the most of the current political context, continue to clarify their own policy priorities for the future, and contribute heartily to a truly New Zealand way of serving young adolescents. ■

Penny A. Bishop  
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## A Vision of Middle Schooling Bridging the gap



GRAHAM YOUNG

I welcome the decision of the New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools to reconstitute itself to include a much wider range of educational practitioners who work with and teach early adolescents and encompass the full gamut of middle schooling - Years 7 to 10. I

welcome especially the decision to focus on individual students, their specific learning needs and the educational practice that supports them rather than focus on school structures. The down-side of our current educational environment is that, so often, many of the debates can be polarising. Either you are for it or agin it: Norm referenced

vs standards-based assessment; Competition vs co-operation; Principals as big teachers vs principals as business managers. The debate around middle schools too easily polarises also: Either you are for them or agin them. For example, it is the PPTA's view that:

*"The current ability of Intermediate*

*Schools to become Middle Schools should be removed and that comprehensive research be done to establish which school structure and curriculum organisation best promotes high levels of achievement for diverse students”.*

A counterpoint view is that we should develop coherent middle schooling practice to more effectively meet the educational needs of early adolescents, and involve a much wider audience than to date in meaningful educational discussion and avoid confrontational debate.

As I see it, students during the middle school years (Years 7 to 10) are unique in at least five different ways, and all of the ways have quite profound implications for middle schooling practice:

**Firstly**, during early adolescence, young people are taking their first steps towards being young persons on the bridge of adolescence. Minister of Education, the Hon. Steve Maharey, says:

*“Those teachers who take the trouble to understand the students’ background also help their students to make the most of every opportunity. Nowhere in the timing of a student’s life is this more important than in early adolescence. It is a sure-fire method of protecting students from the perils of disengaging from education”* (Maharey, 2006).

Focussing on what happens inside classrooms, and on the engagement

of families in the learning of their early adolescent children should predominate, not battles over school structures. This focus, according to ERO (2003), better will enable schools to assist young people cope with the extensive change, diversity and complexity that they experience during early adolescence, from about age 10 years to 14 or 15, and “where young people are in transition between the stability of childhood and the maturity of adulthood”.

**Secondly**, during early adolescence, students are most likely to challenge prevailing values (e.g., rebel against the establishment), before firming up their own personal values system. They do this via the social activity of networking; increasingly they access the Internet and other forms of technology and can acquire knowledge and information easily and readily for either good or evil purposes.

An implication for schools is the need to teach wisdom, integrity and values. In this way middle years practitioners may exercise a greater responsibility, educating young adolescents for citizenship and using their new-found knowledge for positive ends. Text-bullying and teen-web-sites, which provide young people with information to abuse fellow students, and in some cases teachers and students learning how to commit fraud through Internet banking or design a terrorist bomb, all are examples of how instant knowledge via the Internet can be used

inappropriately. A role for middle schooling is to ‘up the ante’ and support students to access and use knowledge for wise and ethical action and purposes.

**Thirdly**, the end of compulsory curriculum at the end of Year 10 puts pressure on schools and heightens their responsibility, up to this point, to embed citizenship education in the curriculum, and achieve positive results before students either progress to senior secondary school or leave school.

Citizenship education embellished by historical knowledge, particularly significant aspects of our history such as the Treaty of Waitangi, provides a rich, real life, context to develop numeracy, literacy and relationship management in the middle years: the expansive, realistic, socially integrative education of which Beeby spoke so many years ago.

**Fourthly**, significant research on the transitions that early adolescents experience around and during the middle schooling years suggests two actions that schools responsible for early adolescents can and should take: (i) engage all middle schooling teachers in serious and sustained collaboration within schools and between schools; and (ii) use the available technology to develop student management and student learning systems to track and support students through the middle schooling years, continuously.

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## Bridging the gap

GRAHAM YOUNG

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**Fifthly**, a word of caution. Talking of middle schooling runs the risk of narrowing the focus down to mere schooling. Schooling is a necessary but not sufficient component of education. Through the Education Act (Reporting and Planning), through NCEA and through an emphasis on definable outcomes, schools constantly are at

accumulation agency. Outcomes, targets and standards by themselves are a pragmatic response to the challenge of increasing student achievement. Such an approach belongs to a quantitative paradigm of the past - it is an overly scientific approach and too analytical and empirical. This overemphasis is ironical given that education is a species of social

a science of education, and advances in education do not produce a science of education.

On the basis of the five points, education during the middle years now more than ever before needs a vision for education with a moral purpose, a qualitative focus and human values perspective, all of which together transcend and take priority over that which merely is measurable and quantitative, and which may lead to employment. If these comments are near the mark, then middle schooling in the future, across school sectors, is: more about learning than teaching; It is about knowledge development not just acquiring information; It is individual, not generic; It is about qualities, not just competencies; It is complex, not linear.

In these ways middle-years schooling in all schools (secondary, intermediate and others) more likely will contribute to making the world a better place for young people to inherit through the quality of the coherent middle-years school education they experience during early adolescence. ■



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risk of putting too much emphasis on standards, on achievement targets and on reporting against those targets to the point that a school could easily become a credit

science not a physical science, and it requires a more humanistic approach. Education is more qualitative and it's about quality of life. Its practice is more an art than

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# Closing the Reality Gap

## Educating conceptual thinkers



N. GERRY HOUSE

**Inclusion of the Maori proverb at the outset is to acknowledge the role that indigenous cultures play in challenging the status quo of longstanding customary secondary school curricula and predominant pedagogy.**

**I**ts wisdom suggests perspectives and directions to stimulate educational change and reform.

*Te manu e kai ana i te miro -  
nona te ngahere.*

*Engari te manu e kai ana i te  
matauranga - nona te ao.*  
-- Maori proverb

*The bird that eats of the miro  
berry owns the forest  
But the bird that eats of  
education owns the world.*

This article is about new kinds of intellectually challenging and academically rigorous and demanding educational programmes that some secondary schools in economically impoverished urban areas of the USA have developed. The purpose of the new programmes is to educate young and older adolescents for the world of today, which bears little relation to the world their parents entered as school leavers. In fact, in many ways that world bears little relation to the one we woke up in yesterday. In a microscopic measure of human time, we have moved through the Agricultural Age, to the Industrial Age, to the Information Age, and

now to another age altogether. Author Daniel Pink calls this new age the Conceptual Age. It requires young people to be not only knowledgeable and competent, but creative and inquisitive as well.

The case studies of two secondary school programmes from the USA that the article reports suggest a direction for secondary education that a good many researchers, commentators and community leaders in the USA now believe is vital:

- (i) so that societies may prosper in the Conceptual Age; and
- (ii) to help young adolescents develop the attributes and capabilities that increasingly they will need.



Early adolescence is the focus of the programmes, since this is the period when the contribution of secondary education is most vital - assisting young people to develop and mature as persons in their own right, educating them as future citizens and capitalizing on the innate conceptual thinking that emerges rapidly during early adolescence.

*New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman says that in the

technology explosion of the '90s, undersea cable, universal software, high-tech imagery and Google virtually erased geography. College graduates in Latin America, Central Asia, India, China and Russia can do the Information work Americans used to count on - in many cases better and in all cases cheaper. And as technology opens up more jobs to more markets, competition for those jobs in less-developed nations grows more fiercely.

In the USA, reliable careers for young people are disappearing at warp speed as technology relieves us of the tedium of repetitive work. The robots that vacuum our floors today will be filling our teeth tomorrow. Even entry-level, low-skill jobs like those for cashiers at massive retail outlets such as Target, or attendants at service stations, are endangered. Have you seen the Self-Check-Out lanes in huge chain stores—or purchased your petrol at a self-serve pump? No cashiers required.

'Competitive' now means that adolescent students aiming for careers must develop sophisticated critical thinking and analytical skills to manage the conceptual nature of the work they will do. In the future and right now young people will need the capability and skills to recognize patterns, create narrative and imagine solutions to problems we have yet to discover. They will have to see the big picture and ask, and answer, the big questions.

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## Educating conceptual thinkers

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If USA secondary schools are to avoid the labels that Bill Gates and others assign to secondary education: "obsolete and falling behind," then secondary curricula and instructional programmes for early adolescents must:

1. Encourage all students to use their minds well to construct knowledge, to inquire, to invent and to make meaning and relevance out of their learning; and

Avoid the repetitive practice, gathering and organizing information for its own sake, remediation and test preparation that predominate now.

### Secondary Schools for Original-Conceptual Thinkers

The two brief accounts of secondary school programme initiatives presented here are but two examples of the way that many schools, affiliated to the ISA, and in New York and elsewhere the USA, are rising to, and meeting the challenge.

#### Queens High School of Teaching – Queens, New York

Queens High School of Teaching in New York City is a "small school" partner of the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA). At the School, the art and science teachers collaborated to create and teach an integrated course that engaged

students in authentic intellectually challenging learning.

They took a multi-media approach to investigate rain forest issues. The students explored the scientific and medical benefits derived from a healthy rain forest. They examined the lives of indigenous populations and they studied endangered species and habitats. They debated conservation versus exploitation, digging deep into the clash of economic and social forces.

With deliberations and investigations completed, the students made 3-D tactile images in bright colors, representing rain forest habitats. They assembled an exhibit for friends, peers and family where they showed people how to make rain forest prints from woodcuts, sold cards made from student art work, delivered presentations on conservation and endangerment and generally attempted to raise consciousness of the complex issues they had studied.

The students used funds raised from sales at the exhibit to buy 20 acres of rain forest for conservation. At no time were the students engaged in passive learning. They created powerful, and empowering, experiences of their world, using academic and artistic skills to make meaningful results.

#### Bushwick School for Social Justice – Brooklyn, New York

At Bushwick School for Social Justice, a somewhat larger ISA

According to the New Zealand Royal Society and Business New Zealand, which seem to share the same view, the challenge to avoid obsolescence, develop secondary schools for the conceptual age and contribute to global competitiveness through secondary education, is no less in NZ than it is in the USA.



## Educating conceptual thinkers

N. GERRY HOUSE

partner school, the students engage with their community and develop strong personal voices within a rigorous academic program. Ninth graders chose a theme from the literature they had studied, photographed images in the community relating to the theme, created photo-essays and staged an installation of their work.

A biology class identified serious health issues in the Bushwick neighborhood: HIV / AIDS, cancer, heart disease, asthma and diabetes. The students developed newsletters for each disease explaining pathology, effect on community and methods for implementing a successful public health awareness campaign. Students typically arrived at school early and stayed late, of their own volition, to work on their projects.

Countless examples of school programmes like these illustrate:

1. Inquiry-based, demanding curricula in a supportive environment of high expectations and caring teachers who facilitate learning;
2. Assisting and leading young adolescent students to be confident, original conceptual thinkers, who are teaching themselves the most valuable educational experience of all - learning how to learn.

### **The Architecture of Achievement and the Leadership Factor**

The core programme of both schools is adaptable to any school. The programme was designed to

support historically under-performing schools in low-income urban areas and it does so by promoting conceptual thinking. ISA's model, in practice with 37 high schools, is reversing low attendance and high drop out rates and getting students *into college* who were most certainly left behind.

Schools implementing the ISA Model into practice share the following characteristics:

1. An unwavering commitment to prepare all students for college and other post-secondary education;
2. An instructional programme focused explicitly on students' intellectual development through inquiry, higher order thinking skills and authentic learning;
3. Large schools organized into small schools or small learning communities, with no more than 400 students, and dedicated teams of teachers and a counselor building relationships with students to foster improved achievement;
4. Students *respected* and *valued* for who they are, and for the rich cultures they bring to the school;
5. Students *expected* to perform at high levels and to internalize those expectations as their own;
6. Faculty using multiple forms of data continuously to assess student progress and provide effective instruction;
7. Faculty members assuming the role of advisor to a small group of students over several years in caring, personalized small school communities and preventing any student from slipping through the cracks;

8. Extended day and extended year learning opportunities that provide students with the time, attention and other supports that they need;
9. Teachers supported through regular professional development, cross curricula collaboration, and coaching; and
10. Schools communicating regularly with parents / guardians about their children's progress and engaging parents in the life of the school.



A lot of work is involved setting up schools to operate like Queens High School and Bushwick School.

**“The key is a new vision for collaboration and the individual and collective backbone to implement the vision.”**

Everyone has to be on board and this constitutes a very tall order for school boards and superintendents, for legislators and national leaders. But in the USA it is time to engage in some risky behaviour. School Boards and principals and others involved in school administration

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## Educating conceptual thinkers

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need to stop thinking of themselves as *governing* organizations and begin to accept that they must be *learning* organizations. We are living in that Conceptual Age, too, and likely not too ready yet to be labeled “obsolete.”

worse still nothing, the events and developments of the Conceptual Age, now rapidly emerging from the information age in the USA, and leapfrogging the Industrial and Information Ages in China and India, will overtake us - and the children and young people will be

Perhaps like minded educational practitioners in the USA and NZ will collaborate and share their best practices and best educational ideas to construct that future. This would help strengthen our collective resolve to give all our students the type of education that they need to navigate constant change, and make sure that the rising tide truly does lift all boats. In this way we may create stronger, more cohesive and capable, well-educated societies, the societies which all of us --and especially our children deserve and need, now and in the future. ■

*Dr. N. Gerry House, President and CEO of The Institute for Student Achievement, New York. A leading innovator in high school reform in the United States. For more information, see: [www.studentachievement.org](http://www.studentachievement.org)*

Children have an innate drive to master their world, if they are not held back. Our job simply is to do whatever it takes to help them succeed.

This is a fundamental shift away from the often disparate or even adversarial roles of superintendents and school boards in the USA – leaders, managers and powerful people with personal agendas, however altruistic – and *towards a commitment to discovering results and best practices together within the framework of a shared picture of the future*. If we do less than this, and

the losers in that failure to unite and take action.

Children have an innate drive to master their world, if they are not held back. Our job is simply to do whatever it takes to help them succeed. Hopefully, the work that the ISA is helping poor and disadvantaged urban high schools to do in the USA will suggest a direction and hope for the future.

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## Message from the NZEI National President

IRENE COOPER

- Preparing students for transition to the different academic and social structures of upper secondary schools.

These are just a handful of areas that attain greater significance in the middle years; areas that would benefit from further examination.

### Supportive school structures

The middle years of education are the last phase when social institutions have access to virtually the entire population. This is the last chance to influence the economic and social futures of many students.

Therefore providing a supportive

learning environment during young adolescence is critical. It is well-known that small, personalised environments such as those experienced through home room teaching raise the student's sense of belonging. Retaining student engagement in purposeful learning through the middle years of

## Message from the NZEI National President

IRENE COOPER

education is critical to student success in completing secondary schools qualifications and to educational retention rates into senior secondary. Well-implemented guidance and support services need to be a part of this supportive environment. During a time when students are starting to explore the world around them and make important decisions on their own, for the first time, they need to know that they have people on whom they can rely and who can give them sound advice. Choices made at this stage can affect or restrict life chances.

### Parent and whanau involvement

The support structure in the middle years needs to include parents and whanau as a key element. It is ironic that, just when students may need it most parental involvement in schooling often plummets. Schools should seek to turn this around and develop partnerships with parents to discuss the changing roles they must take on as their children mature, and make sure that parents understand the greater academic requirements for students as they prepare for secondary school. By working with parents at this time of change, educators are likely to see greater parental involvement in

Retaining student engagement in purposeful learning through the middle years of education is critical to student success in completing secondary schools qualifications and to educational retention rates into senior secondary.

years to come. This debate is not about school structures per se, but about achieving quality educational provision specific to the needs of students in the middle years in whatever educational setting, so that they are successful, motivated learners. Having a better understanding of best practice during these crucial years can have nothing but a positive effect on our education system as a whole.

Irene Cooper

National President, New Zealand Educational Institute, NZEI

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### INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE

Invitation to all those who work with, teach and support early adolescents to: Write an article, submit a report or write a description of an exemplary programme or teaching strategy in The Middle Schooling Review – see information for contributors at [www.nzaims.co.nz](http://www.nzaims.co.nz) or send contributions to [editor@ircnz.co.nz](mailto:editor@ircnz.co.nz)

## NZAIMS Middle Schooling Review

### AUDIENCE

**Middle Schooling Review** is inclusive of the wide range of educational practitioners and other individuals, organisations, agencies and groups with a stake in early adolescent education, development and welfare.

The primary audience of **Middle Schooling Review** is educational practitioners and researchers who work with and who are responsible for and teach early adolescents, across all school types and other education sectors.

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- Private, Public and Community sector views
- A key note article
- Topical Articles, Comments and Reviews
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- Update on association events and activities
- Research updates - keeping current

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#### PURPOSE OF MIDDLE SCHOOLING REVIEW

- **Middle Schooling Review** celebrates the distinctive and special character of early adolescent education and the middle years of schooling. Years 7 to 10:
  - A stage of education and development in its own right; and
  - A high priority area for government policy and actions.
- **Middle Schooling Review** is the authoritative and highly credible source of information about learning and teaching, new ideas and practices and trends and issues affecting the education, development and welfare of young adolescents in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- **Middle Schooling Review** will inform practitioners, parents and the community at large about developments, issues and topics central to middle-years education in Aotearoa New Zealand and challenge them to think and to act.

**"The philosophy of Middle Schooling Review is non partisan and inclusive"**

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