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NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR INTERMEDIATE AND MIDDLE SCHOOLING

MSR

MIDDLE SCHOOLING REVIEW

ISSUE TWO NOVEMBER 2006

DIALOGUE & DEBATE

The Philosophy of Middle Schooling Review is non partisan and inclusive

MSR
MIDDLE SCHOOLING REVIEW

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Middle Schooling Review
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NZAIMS links with other Educational and Middle Schooling Associations

MSR – Middle Schooling Review actively supports and promotes the aims and objectives of NZAIMS. MSR also encourages readers to refer to the journals of the North American and Australian associations that support middle schooling and early adolescent education:

- Middle Ground and the Middle School Journal of NMSA (The National Middle School Association, USA - www.nmsa.org);
- The Australian Journal of Middle Schooling (Middle Years of Schooling Association of Australia - www.mysa.org.au); and
- Educational Leadership of ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development – www.ascd.org), which routinely publishes leading edge articles pertinent to middle schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Rationale for the Links
The ability of all societies and all school systems today to educate early adolescents, effectively, positively and responsively, rapidly is emerging as a serious challenge, globally. Parents everywhere know intuitively and first hand that getting it right is critical, while their children grow and develop as young persons, and as future citizens, through early adolescence. Professionals in a wide range of sectors connected to education – e.g., health and welfare, the judiciary, sport and recreation, economic and social development and the environment, all have a vested interest in the process and the outcomes. The journals of all the professional associations, NZAIMS, NMSA, MYSA and ASCD provide forums for debate, they foster developments and they report research and the exemplary practice of middle years schooling.

Editorial

PAT NOLAN

Challenge and Satisfaction

Starting a new educational journal is a challenge and a source of enormous satisfaction. With Middle Schooling Review, the challenge is not so much finding copy but developing a format and style appealing both to discerning professionals and to a wider public audience, notably parents vitally interested in young adolescents. Satisfaction, so early in the piece, derives from the high quality of the articles to date, on diverse topics of great importance. Close on the heels of the 2006 Draft National Curriculum, the contents in MSR Issue Two, although not directly on the curriculum (that topic is reserved for Issue Three), address topics affecting the curriculum and the way that, in the future, young people may experience vital, productive and rewarding middle schooling through the school curriculum, across the middle years.

In his President's message, Bill Noble announces the renaming and reconstitution of NZAIMS. This is a far reaching move: the change of name from Schools to Schooling signals a wider and fully inclusive representation and constituency. Bill Noble says that developing and supporting exemplary, highly effective curricula and pedagogical practice is the future focus of NZAIMS - now that early adolescence and middle schooling is acknowledged explicitly and affirmed as a stage of development, education and schooling.

James Beane's latest Letter from America, in a few succinct yet cogent words addresses and answers the key question: Why Middle Schooling? The Article does two things: (i) It outlines the origins of middle schools in the USA; and (ii) It explains how researchers, practitioners and advocates in the USA fought and won the case for middle schools and middle schooling, on philosophical and empirical grounds, against the odds. The paper explains how the situation in the USA parallels that in Aotearoa New Zealand, today. Here, the impetus for change and development across the middle years is building. James Beane says the case to support middle schools and middle schooling practice here, empirically and philosophically, equally is compelling, perhaps even more so than in the USA.

The NZAIMS Executive Viewpoint in MSR Issue Two is an invitation to Debbie Te Whaiti, President PPTA, to engage in and sustain meaningful dialogue on the future development of middle schooling in New Zealand. The Invitation is in the spirit of NZAIMS philosophy: Inclusive and non-partisan openness to dialogue and change, the development of a shared vision and perspective, buttressed by powerful commitment to early adolescent education, development and welfare, now and for the future.

Minister of Education, Steve Maharey, confirms that early adolescence is a key area of schooling, vital to the future of the whole school system, and to transforming New Zealand to a knowledge-based economy. He emphasizes that switching young people on, and keeping them switched on, during the middle years, is a top priority for Government, with curricula and pedagogy that are different, responsive and effective. For Government, the Draft National Curriculum provides the framework and the opportunity for change, with young people themselves learning and demonstrating through the curriculum the values of respect for others, respect for self and respect for community and the environment.

Harry Shier writing from Nicaragua, about education and schooling for young people, vastly different to Aotearoa New Zealand, provides a timely reminder that respecting the voice of students during early adolescence is essential if we are to foster and support their development as individuals in their own right at the centre of responsive schooling. Student participation is the means: active, substantial, meaningful participation - deeply ingrained into all our school curricula and teaching practice, and into students' ongoing everyday experience of education and schooling, across the middle years. Shier's Pathways

to Participation provides a participation framework that teachers and students may use to evaluate students' current levels of participation and to explore and expand possibilities[1].

Lisa Rodgers and Erika Ross explain how information and evidence, on student achievement from national and international research relating to numeracy and literacy, helps middle years practitioners to understand how well the education system is performing and how well students are developing the skills that they will need for their future lives. The Article discusses where the evidence on student achievement comes from, what it shows, and what it means for national policy and for individual schools. Three vignettes explain how three schools in the middle (intermediate schools) actually are using assessment data to improve student learning, and the steps that the schools are taking to support teachers and empower them to work with data. The Article identifies aspects of literacy related to writing and reading that are central to students' ongoing achievement,[2] but that "improving writing within the context of literacy achievement should continue as an important focus".

Cathy Wylie, chief researcher, NZCER, presents findings of the longitudinal Competent Children, Competent Learners Study (2006) that relate to students' transition to the secondary level. The article reports the diversity of circumstances associated with schooling transitions and their subtleties, and the subtleties of their effects. Her conclusion identifies some possible concerns and suggests that the Key Competencies and the new National Curriculum may create opportunities for a new approach to "equip all students for a fast changing world".

Invitation to write

David Stewart (2000)[3], widely read New Zealand author on school development, used to say words to the effect, that:

If you want to change the way people behave you first must change the way they think.

If the articles in MSR Issue Two are food for thought, then I hope that they will inspire readers and others to write an article for publication in MSR during 2007. The article might be a case study, an application of research, a discussion paper, an account of exemplary middle years learning and teaching or another suitable contribution in the style and spirit of articles published to date during 2006 in Issue One and Issue Two.

MSR will publish four issues in 2007, Issues Three to Six, with Issue Three due out mid March 2007 and an issue per school term thereafter (for details see www.nzaims.co.nz). MSR accordingly invites contributions for publication in MSR during 2007. ■

Pat Nolan
Editor

(Footnotes)

1 The students themselves could read the Harry Shier article, perhaps use it to design a project or unit of work, maybe with a social studies focus and include aspects of language, media, ICT, communication the arts and employ most of the Draft National Curriculum's key competencies. Students in New Zealand might communicate with students in Nicaragua, via the CESESMA website (see Harry Shier's article) and exchange stories and digital images, with principal and senior teacher encouragement and support.

2 See Middle School Journal, Vol. 38, No. 1, September 2006 (www.nmsa.org) for a range of articles that report strategies for literacy development that complement ideas and suggestions in the Rodgers and Ross article: integrated middle school literacy instruction, the powerful use of picture books as literacy tools across the curriculum, and assessing English language learners content knowledge in middle school classrooms. Other topics include using curricula cultures to engage middle school thinkers and ways that media affect adolescents' views of heroes.

3 Stewart, D. (2000). Tomorrow's Principals Today. Massey University: ERDC Press, which develops the concept of thinking to action in a four phase school development model that readily is applicable by schools wishing to implement into practice middle years curricula and teaching as discussed and advocated in MSR Issue Two.

Letters to the Editor are comments in response to published contributions in the Journal and they: must be limited to 200-300 words; should directly address a point made in a published contribution; must be issue-related, not personal; must not promote commercial products or services; and will be subject to editing for clarity and space limitations.
Email: Editor@ircnz.co.nz

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 for publication in MSR – see information for contributors at www.NZAIMS.co.nz
Email: Editor@ircnz.co.nz

President's Message

BILL NOBLE

NZAIMS LEADING THE WAY

NZAIMS is renamed and reconstituted
I am very pleased to announce here in MSR Issue Two that the 2006 NZAIMS National Conference AGM decided, by unanimous vote, to change the constitution and the name of NZAIMS to: New Zealand Association for Intermediate and Middle Schooling.

The changes are the culmination of over two years work. They position NZAIMS actively to now realise the objectives of becoming truly a national, nonpartisan and inclusive professional educational association. As NZAIMS grows and develops in this way it will provide relevant and timely support to teachers of early adolescents across school sectors – primary, intermediate/middle, area and secondary. It will help them and others fully to become conversant with, and know how to meet the developmental and educational needs of early adolescents - physical, social, emotional, and intellectual, along the lines that James Beane (and others) outlines here in Issue 2.

NZAIMS Vision

The change of name and constitution will permit NZAIMS energetically and purposefully to develop as:

1 The (leading) professional association in Aotearoa New Zealand that advocates for early adolescents and identifies and articulates forms of practice and of schooling that developmentally are responsive and highly effective, and Steve Maharey in Issue Two of MSR already has identified some of these; and as

2 An association of international standing recognised for its progressive thinking and for its work promoting and helping schools to implement best pedagogical and curricula practice for early adolescents.

MSR - Middle Schooling Review will develop as the flagship of NZAIMS. It will provide the forum required to propose and examine directions, strategies and approaches, challenge conventional wisdom and advocate for high quality early adolescent education. Through dialogue and debate in MSR, I hope that we will better understand the types of teaching and teachers that early adolescents need and deserve.

Importantly, the NZAIMS vision-in-action today and tomorrow will take up and meet Trevor Mallard's challenge in 2004; work with communities to develop awareness and to develop grass roots understanding and support, work in communities and in schools, and in this way fight for the rights of early adolescents to an excellent education.

It is my hope that all those in education with a vested interest, notably members of PPTA, NZEI, SPANZ and NZPF, and the four associations themselves, will see themselves as being in the same waka, with us, and pull together in the same direction supporting early adolescents and the teachers who work with and teach them. I say this knowing that some in the teaching profession and in the community, perhaps many, may continue as critics of middle schooling, and resist it. We must respect that resistance, yet remain steadfast in our knowledge of teaching and curricula that work best for young adolescents and in our commitment that middle schooling philosophy-in-practice offers the best prospects for delivering high quality, developmentally responsive, early adolescent education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

All the steps taken to date demonstrate that NZAIMS is moving with the times, keeping ahead of the times even. Three specific developments seemingly support the directions of NZAIMS:

1 Evidence is mounting that New Zealand's developing knowledge economy increasingly will require that young people, during early adolescence,

develop as conceptual thinkers (House, 2006) and as creative, active and responsible persons and citizens, they will be able to use information, skills, and technologies to –

- Construct new knowledge,
- Solve complex problems,
- Integrate concepts and ideas across disciplines and subjects,
- Effectively communicate orally and in writing, and
- Work in diverse groups - See House (2006) in MSR Issue One.

2 The 2006 Draft National Curriculum tacitly acknowledges the need for curricula and pedagogies (viz. the key competencies) different to those of primary and secondary schooling of the present and past; they are of the form that House (2006) and others describe, e.g., active, inquiry, experiential and process orientated pedagogy and co-constructed curricula. From this perspective, the Draft seems well suited to supporting middle-years curricula practice.

3 Recently Minister of Education, Steve Maharey, said that in future all newly established Year 7-10 schools will be called middle schools not junior high schools; at the NZAIMS 2006 Summit and the 2006 National Conference he commented that they, along with other schools, will be encouraged and expected to adopt curricula and pedagogies very much like those that I described above and which feature centrally in the Draft National Curriculum (see also the articles by James Beane and Harry Shier in Issue Two).

Invitation to Join NZAIMS

NZAIMS invites all the educational practitioners, professionals in other areas, and service providers and care givers associated with, who teach and who work with early adolescents to join NZAIMS, as members, and to subscribe to MSR Middle Schooling Review. In this way, NZAIMS will build the middle schooling community of practice that early adolescents deserve and that early adolescent education in Aotearoa New Zealand needs, urgently. ■

Bill Noble
NZAIMS President

Cover Story

For Tyler, front cover, starting high school was pretty straight forward because he makes friends easily: "I knew quite a few others who I got to know at school camp in Year 8 and others who live in the same valley as me" about 25 kilometres out of town. "Some in Years 10 and 11 and others in Year 13 helped me to fit in". Tyler is good at athletics and plays in the top Year 9 hockey team and he says "School dances are fun". "Things are pretty good on the whole; they could be a lot worse. I am learning to fit in, and I am learning".

Years 7 and 8 were fun and interesting: "My (male) teacher from Year 6 to Year 8 knew me really well and talked to me lots. He treated me as a normal human being and I connected with him … he helped me to find out what I could and couldn't do" - "I was sad leaving at the end of Year 8 and happily would have stayed to the end of Year 10!". "Year 9 is different: lots of pressure and no time to talk with teachers, except a couple. Academic learning is up and down - lots of copying from text books - some teachers are friendly, enthusiastic and help you … but getting used to others is hard; sometimes they get angry and you can't be yourself". Sitting still, up to 45 minutes, is hard too especially not wriggling and making a disturbance and, exams; I can't see the point of them". At High school: "I like it best when teachers take the time to explain things and when learning is practical - I like learning by doing things, just like most others".

Why Middle Schools?

JAMES A BEANE

WHY MIDDLE SCHOOLS?

For almost a century, educators and other advocates for early adolescents have sought to establish schools that would offer an appropriate and responsive educational experience for them.

In the early 1900s, this meant that early adolescents were removed from elementary schools and placed in junior high schools. Faced with a fragmented, subject-centred curriculum, a round of teachers with varying and uncoordinated demands, and large, anonymous enrolments, many early adolescents lost their way, both educationally and socially within the unfriendly structures of this institution. In fact, this arrangement was so ill-suited that by mid-century, one American journalist declared that the "junior high school was the wasteland - one is tempted to say cesspool - of American education." Indeed, by that time, many middle level educators had turned their attention to the formation of a new movement aimed at finally establishing a kind of school that would serve early adolescents well. Sandwiched between the elementary and secondary schools, like the young people it was to serve, the new structure was called the "middle school."

The middle school concept has evolved around several ideas meant to create a responsive and appropriate educational experience for early adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; National Middle School Association, 1995). These include:

1 Adults who work in middle schools should understand early adolescence as a stage of development, as well as the cultural backgrounds of students, and apply that understanding to school and classroom climate and instruction.
2 Teachers should work collaboratively in teams to create a coherent program and community for clusters of students with whom they work in a block of time.
3 Adults who work in middle schools should serve as affective/pastoral mentors for early adolescents as they experience the social and emotional transitions of their age.
4 Teachers should provide varied teaching and learning experiences that are intellectually stimulating, actively engaging, and cognizant of diverse learning styles.
5 The curriculum should emphasize an integrated organization around themes that are meaningful for early adolescents and offer contexts for acquiring and applying knowledge.
6 The middle school should involve arrangements that engage early adolescents with issues in their local communities while also engaging the community, especially parents and guardians, with the school.

Some forty years later, the middle school "movement" has shown to be one of the real success stories in educational reform. While the idea often is associated with the United States, serious efforts also are underway in Norway, Japan, Australia, Canada, and elsewhere. Where the middle school platform has been undertaken comprehensively over time, the evidence is quite remarkable (Beane and Brodhagen, in press).

In the largest study to date (Hartzler 2001)[1], students in schools that worked toward the platform with high fidelity for several years demonstrated statistically significant advantages on both academic and affective measures over students in less committed schools. The former also showed statistically larger growth on those measures during their middle school years than the latter. This result discounts the possibility that the results were forecast by prior differences among the students. Subsequently, these data have been verified in additional studies involving large numbers of schools that have pursued the middle school platform. While these recent findings especially are noteworthy due to the scope of the studies that have produced them, they are not the only source of support for the middle school platform.

Exemplary middle schools consistently report that addressing the elements of the platform has been crucial to their success (Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, 1987; Epstein and McPartland, 1998; George and Shewey, 1994; McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins, 1996). Moreover, each of the elements of the platform, listed above, has been substantiated in focused studies using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

As with any attempt at educational reform, especially those that engage progressive and student-centred approaches, the middle school platform and the schools themselves have been the target of criticisms. Most noteworthy among these is the criticism that middle schools eschew academic rigor in favour of developmental appropriateness. This criticism is, of course, unwarranted given the research just reviewed. However, those who use it often build their case by lumping together all schools using the name "middle" and thus fail to justly differentiate between those with serious intentions and those with relatively weak commitment.

Another criticism involves the accusation that graduates of middle schools are not prepared adequately for high school. Again, given the research reviewed above, this is an odd criticism since it fails to explain how this could be so if graduates of exemplary middle schools demonstrate significant academic and affective achievement. Perhaps here, too, the criticism fails at differentiation, this time between the middle

James Beane notable North American educational philosopher and writer on early adolescent education and Dewey scholar is a longstanding professor of interdisciplinary studies in curriculum, and author of numerous books on the integrative curriculum and middle-years curricula design. James Beane was a key note speaker at the 2006 N.Z. AIMS Annual Conference, 13-15th September, Auckland.

school concept and what happens in a particular, local middle school. To be fair, however, this is a criticism that has been levelled at middle level schools by any name for decades and is part of the same cycle by which those in the middle question the rigor of elementary schools.

Finally, the two criticisms highlighted here, and others like them, often are part of a larger attack on the egalitarian aspects of the middle school movement that emerged in force during the 1990s (Beane, 1999). In short, attempts to do away with structures like ability streaming and competitive assessments, with their history of race and class inequity, have been met with strong resistance by upper middle class parents and professionals whose children have been favoured by such structures.

The case for middle schools is well-established. It is made both philosophically and empirically. Its strength lies in the willingness of schools of all kinds, primary, intermediate/middle and secondary that teach early adolescents, to seek a comprehensive platform of reform elements over a period of time and with serious intention. Critics of the platform may find space in popular and professional media, but their arguments have proved less than adequate in the face of evidence about those schools that have moved to implement it. Clearly, the move to middle schools if undertaken seriously is in the best interests of early adolescents and their education. ■

James Beane,
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Madison, Wisconsin, USA

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(Footnotes)

1 After completing a meta-analysis of 30 studies on integrated curriculum, Deborah Hartzler (2001) concluded that:
Integrated curricular programs were successful in all four of the major academic areas, language arts, math, social studies, and science. Programs utilizing thematic instruction and those emphasizing process skills showed the most promise. These programs were especially beneficial for students with below average achievement levels. Students from all socio-economic levels benefited from integrated curricular programs and students in integrated curricular programs consistently out-performed students in traditional classes on national standardized tests, on state-wide testing programs, and on program developed assessment.

Executive Viewpoint

RESPONSE
TO DEBBIE TE WHAITI PPTA PRESIDENT

In this short article the NZAIMS National Executive invites Debbie Te Whaiti, PPTA President to meet with the Executive at its next meeting in 2007 and initiate meaningful dialogue on the future development of middle schooling in New Zealand. The invitation is in response to Debbie Te Whaiti's viewpoint, critical of middle schools and middle schooling, which the PPTA News, Hongongoi, published in July 2006.

The NZAIMS Executive particularly is concerned to note the substantial difference in tone between the (enlightened) speech that Debbie Te Whaiti gave at the NZAIMS National Conference in September 2005 and her view just twelve months later that "There is little evidence so far of any political willingness to resolve the debate, over middle schooling and the creation of middle schools" (PPTA News, July 2006).

In the same PPTA News, Debbie Te Whaiti said, however, that "academics and politicians" support the development of age-appropriate school structures and provisions. As the NZAIMS Executive sees it, the Flatbush Area Strategy in Auckland is one of the clearest indications of the Government's strong political will to explore the development of middle schools for New Zealand, supported by extensive national and international research.

The PPTA suggestion that the development of age-appropriate schools is "largely untested," ignores the long tradition (since 1893) of middle schools in New Zealand. In the 1890s, 1920s and 1940s, New Zealand led the world developing age-appropriate schools to meet the needs of emerging adolescents and identified early adolescence as a stage of schooling. Initiatives to establish middle schools in the 1990s and junior high schools in the 2000s simply is a continuation of the well proven international leadership of New Zealand educationalists in this area of human development and education.

The NZAIMS Executive substantially agrees with Debbie Te Whaiti when she says, following the BES Report on Quality Teaching, that the "subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of teachers are critical to their effectiveness" across the middle years. This same commitment to teacher, and school effectiveness underpins the NZAIMS resolve to promote high quality middle schooling, nationally.

The NZAIMS Executive understands that no single school structure or particular school type has "the answer" to educating early adolescents, but the Executive does know a good deal about the pedagogical and curricula processes that engage and sustain student interest and motivation, and lay solid foundations for ongoing student achievement in the senior secondary school and beyond.

Accordingly, NZAIMS collegially and cordially invites Debbie Te Whaiti, PPTA President and the PPTA, immediately and openly to begin discussions that are non-partisan and inclusive.

The NZAIMS view is that together, not separately, NZAIMS and PPTA may better chart directions for the future that identify curricula and pedagogical practices, which are exemplary and highly recommended for early adolescent education. NZAIMS proposes the three suggestions that Bali Haque made in April 2006 (Haque, 2006) as a good starting point. Bali Haque, long standing member of PPTA, past president of SPANZ and now NZQA Deputy Chief Executive, Qualifications said:

- Find and implement well researched and proven methodologies for all students, particularly in the Years 9 and 10;
- Have conversations across school boundaries that foster shared curriculum thinking and planning; and
- Adopt professional development processes that assist teachers and school administrators to develop a common mind set about how best to teach and support the young adolescent students that primary, intermediate/middle and secondary schools share and inherit through Years 7 -10.

The NZAIMS Executive looks forward to open and productive ongoing discussions with The PPTA and its President. ■

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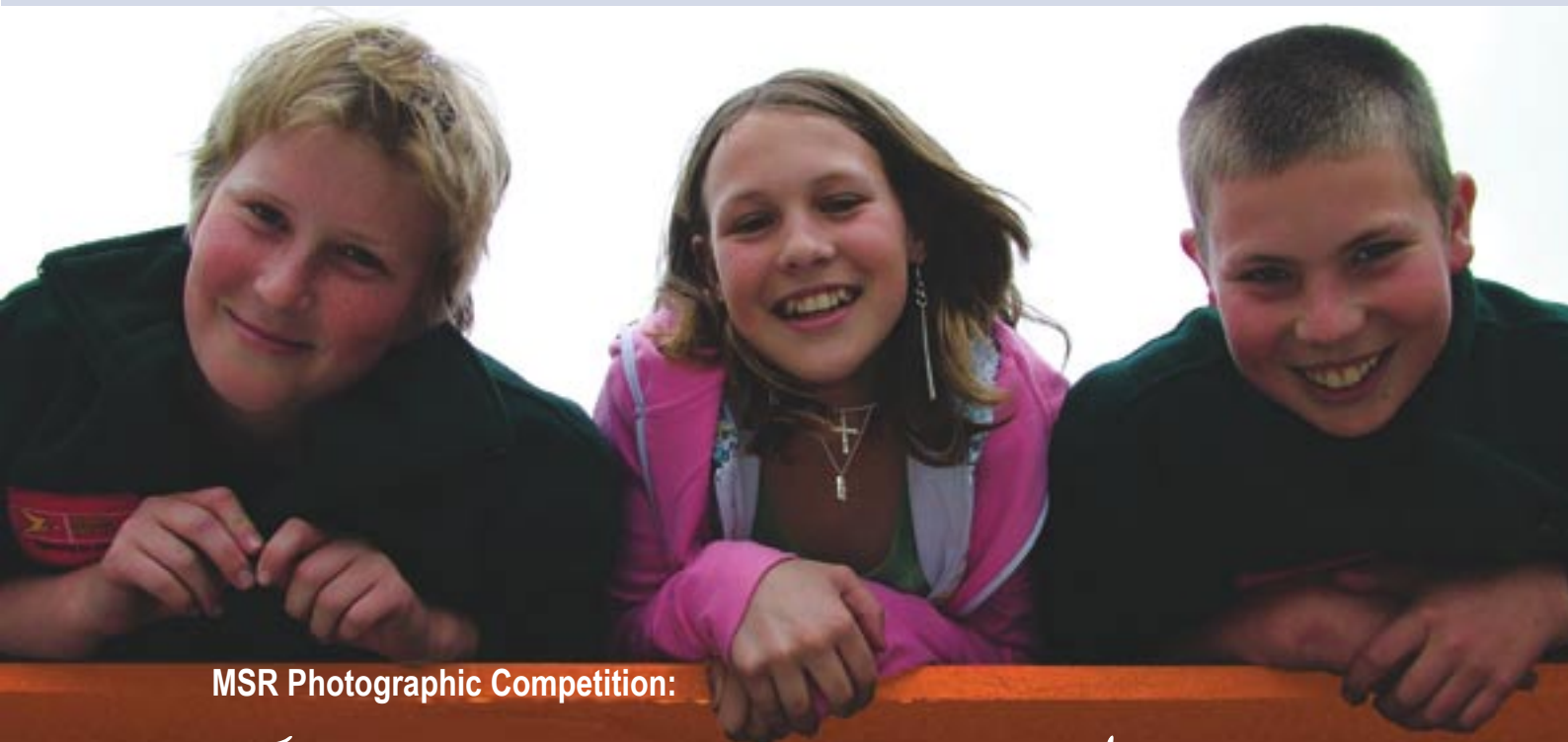


MSR Photographic Competition:

Say it with an Image

The MSR quarterly photographic competition invites students and teachers to submit a digital image accompanied by a piece of written work of no more than 50 words - see instructions below:
Say it with an Image captures and records middle schooling that makes a difference.

Spotlight on: students' and teachers' experiences, perspectives and viewpoints.

The Competition has two Parts:

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

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

The Competition: MSR publishes the wining image and written piece in the next Issue of MSR and highly commended images either throughout MSR or in the 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.

To enter the competition go to www.nzaims.co.nz

The Middle Years of Schooling

STEVE MAHAREY

TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE

I'm pleased to have the opportunity again, relatively soon after the launch in May 2006 of the NZAIMS' Middle Years' Strategic Plan, to thank the members of NZAIMS for your commitment to raising the educational achievement of young adolescents. I am positive about the changes that NZAIMS has been making and particularly the changes that will enhance teaching and learning across the middle years. In the context of the new draft National Curriculum, this is a good time to take two actions: (i) put students and their learning at the centre not phases of schooling and school structures; and (ii) consider curricula and pedagogical practices that are responsive to and work best for early adolescents, in and outside the classroom. If we make these two actions our highest priority, then we more likely will give all our young people the opportunity for success that they need and deserve, as they move through the schooling system and realise their potential through ongoing study and, sooner or later, through gainful employment.

Transforming New Zealand through Education

From the perspective of Government, the transformation of New Zeland over the next decade to become a knowledge-based society is vital. We are bringing this transformation about by focussing on policies that we believe will make the greatest difference to our economy, to our families, to our communities and to our sense of national identity. Education is the key driver to achieving this transformation: our goals for education are high achievement, high standards and lifelong learning for all students.

These, of course, are not new goals but they are the outcome of the direction in which I think the New Zealand education system has been moving since the inception of Tomorrow's Schools and 'self-managing schools'. The changes were at least partly based on developing a strong partnership between schools and communities, linked through Boards of Trustees; and I know that strong school-community relations and partnerships are pivotal to NZAIMS' middle schooling educational strategy.

The Transforming Framework

In response, and since 2000, the Government has developed a framework for schooling that brings together competition and cooperation into an approach to education based on collaboration, a focus on national qualifications, effective teaching for all, high standards for every student and assessment for learning. The real benefits of the new framework are best achieved, and the transformation of New Zeland to a knowledge society realised, when:

1 Schools implement learning systems tailored to individual students and to meeting their needs, not the other way round;

2 All New Zealanders develop the skills to identify their learning requirements and know how to use the skills successfully;

3 Students know how to self assess their progress, set goals and strive to achieve them though effective learning which involves assessment for learning as an integral component; and when

4 Effective teachers build a picture of what every pupil and student knows and how they learn, to help them develop learning pathways.

I advocate these four aspects of school education for the future as a workable strategy to help schools cope with the fact that education never stays still.

The world around us constantly is changing and predicting the types of knowledge that might be needed in ten, twenty or fifty years' time is a difficult if not impossible task. The challenge for all of us, then, is to ensure that students have the skills they need for lifelong learning and provide a foundation for the

The school curriculum-in-action accordingly is owned by every one concerned - the Ministry of Education, the educators, the students and the communities. Schools that teach early adolescents have a key role to play leading the discussion to achieve this outcome.

future, which by and large is unpredictable. I see education for early adolescents as being placed firmly in this context.

Engaging Early Adolescents for the Future

The school education of early adolescents must be responsive both to societal change and to the dramatic physical, emotional and intellectual changes that face early adolescents simultaneously, and which challenge them, their teachers and families.

It won't come as any surprise to teachers that research shows that early adolescence is a time when a significant minority of students make little progress in their learning and, in fact, some begin to switch off from education. Early adolescent students typically seek their own independent identities and begin to make choices that will affect them for the rest of their lives. The challenges for teachers and schools are to work with young people in ways that: respond to their needs; identify their potential; and help them realise their potential by engaging students in ongoing learning development.

The Draft National Curriculum

The draft national curriculum will guide our approach to teaching in New Zealand schools in the 21st century. Already, early adopters are shaping up for the future with teaching that is responsive to the ways that different students learn, and which fit with the directions that the draft curriculum outlines. At Patea School for example, students help run the plant nursery on the local marae, as part of their individual learning plans. In nursery based studies, the students learn about Maori culture, their land and their part in the wider world. Back in the classroom, they increase their literacy, numeracy, tikanga, science, and many other knowledge and skills by researching topics such as native plants, irrigation, environment and links to culture. In a quite different school, gifted and talented Year 9 students at Hamilton Boys' High School use distance learning methods to mentor gifted Year 8 boys who attend smaller rural schools. The focus is on building confidence through new experiences, acquiring and using research skills and developing a passion for learning. A teacher acts as a mentor but the students direct and shape their own study.

While the draft national curriculum outlines the knowledge, values and competencies that all New Zealand students are expected to develop, it also provides schools with the flexibility they need to respond to their own students and to their communities. The school curriculum-in-action accordingly is owned by every one concerned - the Ministry of Education, the educators, the students and the communities. Schools that teach early adolescents have a key role to play leading the discussion to achieve this outcome.

Personalising Learning in the Middle Years

The idea that all students can reach their potential and strive for excellence, but not necessarily on the same day, at the same time, or in the same way underpins the new National Curriculum. It replaces the "production-line model of schooling", which predominates in the Western world and that Jane Gilbert of NZCER says continues to sort students by their ability to learn 'things'. The effect is to produce some students who do very well, many who achieve to a reasonable level and a sizeable number who do not achieve much at all: either the students fit the system or else they fail to achieve.

Today, every student needs higher order thinking skills that, in the industrial age, only those in management or the professions needed. The world outside schools in a knowledge-based society will value more and more the ability to learn – knowing how to learn, how to keep learning over a life-time and how to learn in groups with others.

Middle-years Practitioners Lead the Way

By all accounts middle years practitioners, such as those that I mentioned above and others like them, many of them members of NZAIMS, will lead the way - demonstrating ideas in practice that the draft National Curriculum promotes, and which all students need but early adolescents increasingly need now and in the future.

Learning to Belong to Society

The middle years provide a unique opportunity for teachers to work with young adolescents and with each other collegially: this involves collaboration and innovation – assisting young adolescents to explore real issues and concerns in-depth and relate in a more sophisticated manner to the people living with them and around them.

Developing respect is a key issue for society that I think best can be explored for the first time fully and in depth during the middle years. Here, young adolescents learn to explore the consequences of behaviours like tolerance, acceptance and common decency towards others - their families, their friends and peers, people who are older and people from cultures or religions different to their own. They may learn to develop respect for diversity and understand others who are different – respect for persons, respect for property and the environment and respect for diverse values, attitudes and beliefs that typically young people are curious and concerned about during early adolescence.

Teaching the Middle Years

I acknowledge here, as I did in Issue One, that senior secondary education and the NCEA have dominated our attention in recent years. Now is a good time to shift the focus and examine how the curriculum ought to proceed from the primary years into and through the middle years. The expansion in curriculum in the senior secondary years also affects the curriculum for the years immediately prior to NCEA.

The middle years are a time when the curriculum is not as driven by subject-based external and internal assessment for qualifications. And it seems timely that schools could profitably focus more on such key elements of effective teaching practice such as interdisciplinary teaming of teachers and integrative study programmes that link knowledge, skills and understanding across subject boundaries. Such programmes should include students in decisions about what is taught and use enquiry-based, interactive teaching and assessment for learning techniques.

To work effectively, these approaches require teachers who are well qualified in their subject area and also in the needs of emerging adolescents. Training teachers specifically to handle the needs of early adolescents is a longer-term, but no less pressing, issue for the middle years. It includes understanding and researching what constitutes effective teaching for and with early adolescents.

Looking Ahead

As promised earlier, I now have asked the Ministry of Education to develop proposals for a research project

around practice in middle schooling settings. One of them is the new, stand-alone middle school at Albany named Albany Junior High.

Many educationalists including some members of NZAIMS, believe strongly in a stand-alone, middle school for Year 7-10 students, as a positive schooling option. Many think junior high school students will be able to make a seamless transition to a related senior college (Years 11-13) and this will help them cope better with the senior secondary years, which now involve many more choices through our more flexible qualifications system.

As a result, junior high schools may well take on a predominantly secondary orientation, as they prepare students for the transition to senior schooling and NCEA. If this is the case, then these schools may need to work very much like a secondary school in their third and fourth years, with specialised teaching and the resources to support them; rather than being an extension of an intermediate school: we need more research into the learning and social outcomes for students in these years. We also need to think about the actions that are needed to support students successfully through transitions, both through schools, and to and from schools and further explore the finding of Ministry of Education research that student achievement levels in the middle years of schooling shows little variation attributable to school type. The key factor remains the quality of the learning and teaching that the students experience.

For now, I am more interested to encourage age-appropriate responses, rather than promote a particular schooling model. New networks of schools, built in response to demographic trends and new housing developments, provide a unique opportunity for communities to develop innovative learning pathways and models of school provision. The growth of new school networks and the expansion of others may well give us further opportunities to document the effects of different school structures and identify forms of curricula and teaching practice that are responsive and effective in a wide range of New Zealand school settings.

A recent conversation with senior student leaders at Takapuna Grammar revealed that these accomplished and capable students understood well that during early adolescence they needed something different and better. They said that they needed forms and methods of learning and teaching that helped them to express and construct their voice and work in partnership with teachers and others to construct and co-construct the programmes that best might have helped them to learn and enjoy learning. The programmes, and the methods and approaches, that they recommended remarkably are like those that NZAIMS and the research say that schools should adopt now and for the future. ■

Steve Maharey,
Minister of Education,
New Zealand Government

Pathways to Participation Revisited

HARRY SHIER

NICARAGUA PERSPECTIVE

Why Revisit

Five years ago, after 25 years working in informal education in England, I packed up and moved to Nicaragua, Central America. Here I work with a locally-run rural community education organisation called CESESMA, supporting child workers in the coffee industry in the promotion and defense of their rights.

One of the last things I did before I left England was to submit an article for publication in a respected academic journal called "Children and Society" (Shier 2001). I was pleased with the article because in it I felt I had managed to sum up in a neat and simple conceptual framework, called Pathways to Participation (see the Diagram below), everything that I had learnt from all my years of experience.

By the time the article appeared in print in the UK in April 2001, I was already making a new life for myself in the remote mountains of northern Nicaragua, and had all but lost contact with the professional sphere I previously inhabited. I only found out a couple of months ago that during the five years I'd been away, without my knowledge or involvement, Pathways to Participation had become one of the foremost theoretical models in the field, having been reprinted, translated, applied and adapted in innumerable settings and sectors in many parts of the world.

Having recently discovered this happy fact, it didn't come as a complete surprise when your editor tracked me down to my remote mountain hideaway (tracked me down via e-mail, I mean – he didn't actually come looking for me) and asked me if MSR might publish key aspects of the original article and add comments that might be of interest to early adolescence educators in Aotearoa New Zealand. And so it has come about that, for the first time in over five years, I find myself revisiting Pathways to Participation and asking myself what, five years on, do I have to add?

Differences

One of the biggest differences between the lives of children and young people in Nicaragua and wealthier countries like England, Ireland or Aotearoa New Zealand is that here in Nicaragua young people go to school because they want to, and not because they have to. Here, in Nicaragua, getting an education is a struggle. The quality of the education on offer may be sadly lacking, with run-down, overcrowded, poorly-equipped schools; teachers with little or no proper training, and not enough of them to meet the needs, and a national curriculum that has little bearing on the real lives of rural children. And yet, against all the odds, tens of thousands of children and young people do everything in their power to attend school each day. At harvest time they work long hours in appalling conditions picking coffee so as to pay for the next year's classes. They may walk dusty dirt-tracks an hour or more each day to reach school. And as rural communities in Nicaragua do not have secondary schools, going to secondary school may mean getting up at four in the morning for a long walk followed by a bus-ride to a school in a town many miles away or, especially for girls, leaving home and working as a domestic in the city, with all the risks this entails, and only returning to home on Sundays.

The young people make this effort firstly because education is their right and, here in Nicaragua, rights have to be defended. Secondly, they know that, for all its inadequacies, education offers at least a chance of a different and better life for themselves and their families; provided, that is, that they take it seriously and put in the effort.

In short, for these young people, their education matters to them. And this means that they are prepared to make a big effort - after all it has been a struggle to get there, so "I might as well give it my best shot". It also means they want to be treated with respect, and above all to have a say in the way their education is organised and delivered, which brings us back to Pathways to Participation.

Conditions for Participation

Each school in Nicaragua has its "Student Government", equivalent to a student council, and also it's School Committee, equivalent to a board of governors. Villages have Children and Youth Committees, and municipalities have Children and Youth Commissions and Community Education Committees, among other local bodies actively involved in educational and community development. Part of the work of CESESMA is to prepare and empower children and young people so that they can have a presence and a voice in these decision-making settings. So, for the CESESMA team, it goes without saying that children must be listened to, they must be supported to express their views, and their views must be taken into account in all decisions that affect them (represented by levels 1, 2 and 3 of the Pathways to Participation diagram).

As supporters of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, CESESMA team members understand that they have a clear and undeniable duty to ensure that these things happen. However, we believe that higher levels of participation, where children and young people have a genuine and non-tokenistic role in decision-making, whilst not mandatory according to the UN Convention, are immensely valuable to children and young people, to schools and to communities, and that is why CESESMA actively promotes and facilitates them.

Key writers and agencies in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere (e.g. Auckland Regional Child and Youth Engagement Project 2005, Kirby et al. 2003 and Treseder 1997) have extensively discussed the main reasons for this belief, and the growing evidence to support it. The main reasons that support students experiencing high levels of participation are:

- Better quality curricula and teaching development (service provision);
- Children and young people develop an increased sense of ownership and belonging (and thus, commitment);
- Students' and teachers' self-esteem increases;
- Students experience increased empathy and social responsibility; and
- The experience helps to lay the foundations for citizenship and democratic participation, thus helping to safeguard and strengthen democracy.

One of the challenges CESESMA faces in this work is trying to convince teachers that education should be a partnership between learner and educator, and that therefore the empowerment and pro-active participation of their students is a positive force for

progress and not, as many view it, a dangerous challenge to traditional teacher authority.

Many teachers everywhere, not only in Nicaragua, give a high priority to maintaining authority – by which they really mean control over their students – and I believe this is one reason why schools rarely have been in the forefront of moves to promote children and young people's participation in decision-making. I see many signs, however, that this situation is changing, in Nicaragua and around the world. The fact that you are reading an article like this in a professional journal for teachers is one such sign.

I believe the Nicaraguan experience can help us explore this idea further. In developed countries, a stereotypical teacher mindset can be caricatured as: "The children are here in school like it or not, and it's my job to make them learn. My success as a teacher is measured in terms of how much I can make them learn – by any means necessary".

In Nicaragua, the teacher's mindset is: "The children are here because they want to learn. The fact that it has been a struggle for them to get here, in many cases involving great sacrifice, leaves us in no doubt that this is why they are here. My job is to recognise their desire to learn, and work with them to facilitate their learning to the best of my ability, with the limited resources at hand".

Another thing that it's sometimes hard for teachers to recognise is that it's not the teaching that's important, it's the learning. The learning I am talking about here is the students' learning, not the teachers'. And yet the teacher often considers it his or her job to dominate, control and manipulate the students' learning, especially at the secondary level but at other levels too.

Is this an inevitable result of our school system? Or is it possible to change it; to give back to the learner the ownership of his or her learning process, and make the teacher-student relationship a functional partnership in which both agree to work together to facilitate, guide and enrich this process?
Well, obviously we can't change things overnight. The system includes deep-rooted, learned and internalised pupil and teacher roles. We can't suddenly say to a class of young adolescents who all their lives have depended on the teacher to control their schooling, "OK kids, it's your education, it's up to you now to run it yourselves!"

But I do believe in processes of continual improvement. And I firmly believe that giving children and young people more of a say in their own education is going to improve it substantially. I therefore make the following claim: I believe it is 99% certain that giving the students more say in decision-making at school will lead, directly and indirectly, to improvements in both the atmosphere and the learning environment of the school, and that positive educational outcomes will follow. Conversely, the likelihood that giving young people more say in decision-making will lead to negative outcomes is miniscule. In the very few cases I know about, where giving young people more say led to results that adults were unhappy with, the increased level of participation they experienced, in itself, has never been the problem. Rather poor planning, poor preparation or faulty practice most commonly explains the results.

Pathways to Participation

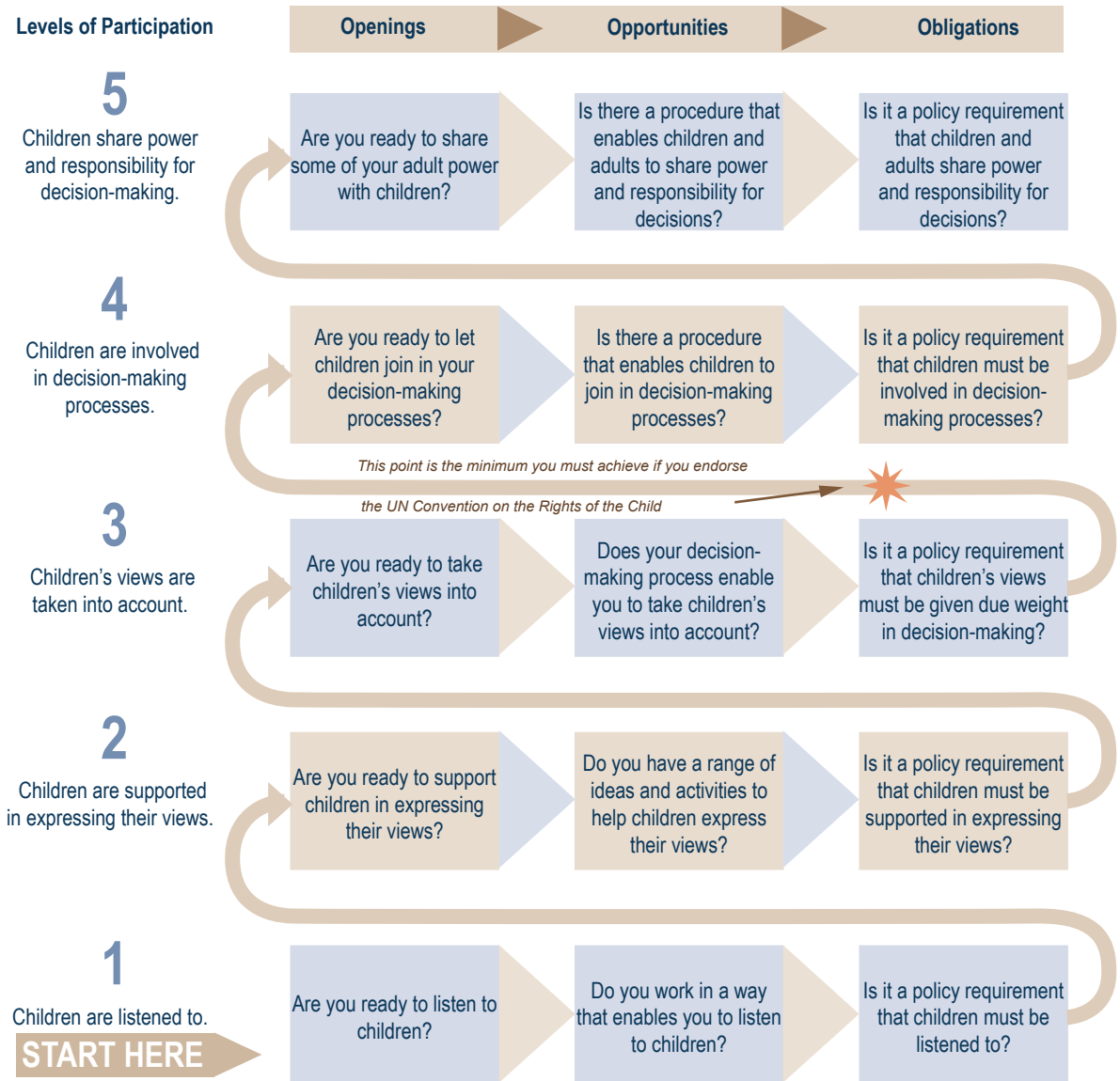
The Pathways to Participation diagram is a practical planning and evaluation tool that can be applied in almost all situations where adults work with children. Its purpose is to help adults to identify and enhance the level of children and young people's participation in terms of five levels of participation, as shown in Diagram 1. According to Owen (2003), the diagram has the logical structure of "a flow chart embedded in a matrix". The adults who adopt it, e.g. teachers and teams of teachers, use the fifteen simple questions spread across the five levels of the matrix not only to assess "Where do we stand?", but to reflect on "Where do we want to get to?" and "What do we need to do in order to get there?" For example, teachers or school staff teams can readily use the levels to enable students to participate more actively in decisions about curricula, learning programmes, school organisation and management, the school environment, equipment, staff and student conduct codes, uniforms and so on.

At each level in the Matrix, teachers and schools may have differing degrees of commitment to the processes for each level. Accordingly, three stages

Diagram 1

Pathways to Participation

Harry Shier 2001



of commitment are identified across the top of the matrix: *openings, opportunities and obligations.*

The first stage at each level is when an opening occurs and a teacher or group of teachers expresses an interest and is ready to operate at that level; i.e., make a personal commitment or statement of intention to work in a certain way. It is only an opening, because the opportunity to make it happen may not be available.

The second stage is when an opportunity occurs as when teacher needs are met enabling them to operate at this level in practice. The needs may include resources (including staff time), professional skills and knowledge, (maybe acquired through teacher PD), and the development of a new teaching method or a new approach to curriculum planning.

The third stage is when consensus establishes an obligation and this becomes the agreed policy of the school, or part of the school, that teachers and staff should operate at this level and in this way. Working in a particular way, enabling a specific level of student participation, thus becomes built-in. It becomes part of the way we do things around here, i.e., part of the school culture.

At each level and each stage, Pathways to Participation provides a simple question to be answered, making fifteen in all. The answers given can be used to identify a teacher's current position or practice, and easily identify the next steps that might be taken to increase students' level of participation. In reality, it is unlikely that a teacher or group of teachers will be positioned neatly at a single point. They may be at different stages and at different levels. Also they may be at different positions in respect to different aspects of their teaching and curriculum work.

Pathways to Participation makes no suggestion that students should be pressed to participate in ways and at levels they do not want, or that are inappropriate for their level of development and understanding. In practice, though, teachers are more likely to deny students developmentally appropriate degrees of responsibility than to force responsibility upon them. Experience indicates that sound policy is to look for areas in the Matrix where, weighing up all the potential risks and benefits, it is appropriate for children and young people (in this case, early adolescent students) to share power and responsibility for decisions, and then help them make the decisions in a supportive environment. As with any innovation in practice, the process and outcomes should be monitored, so that policy and practice may be reviewed and adjusted if necessary.

Commentator reflections

Some commentators (e.g. Madge and Willmott 2004, Sinclair 2004) say that the hierarchical nature of Pathways to Participation pushes teachers and school to move relentlessly from the lower levels to the higher. This feature it shares with Hart's (1992) Ladder of Children's Participation, the best-known and longest-established conceptual model in this field. Some other commentators (e.g. Sinclair 2004, Dorrian et al 2000) have commented that the ladder concept implies that higher levels are better - that a ladder is for climbing up and one must always aim to reach the top. As these commentators correctly point out, this is not always the case, and different levels of participation are appropriate in different circumstances.

In response to these criticisms, the way that people use ladders in real life provides a useful analogy. Sometimes we use a ladder to climb to the top and move on, but very often we just want to get to a rung some way up so as to work at the correct height for the job we are doing, for example painting a window-frame. This may be only half-way up, but if this is the right height for the job in hand, it would be counter-productive to climb higher. Without the ladder, however, it would be impossible to climb to the appropriate height for the job. A set of rungs, however well-crafted, is of little use without the frame that connects them together.

The Pathways to Participation framework, like the ladder, makes visible the relationships between different levels of participation and the stages within each. In this way Pathways to Participation offers teachers and schools the logical system they need, so that, like the worker on the ladder, they can ask of themselves, "Are we at the right height for the task in hand?" "Would it be beneficial to climb higher?", "What are the potential benefits and risks, if any, of moving up a rung?"

In the case of schools, I am firmly convinced that it is almost always beneficial to increase the level of student participation, provided that people are prepared for change, (and it is vital that students are also prepared for change) and that the changes are well planned and sensitively implemented. The purpose of Pathways to Participation is not to argue my corner, however, but to provide a tool that helps teachers and schools to decide what steps to take, to achieve the best outcomes for the school and the students.
A couple of weeks ago, I asked a group of Nicaraguan young people what kind of teacher would best encourage their participation, and I'm happy to give them the last word:

"A facilitator of knowledge who makes space for everyone to participate; who gives everyone their turn to go up to the blackboard; who is dynamic in the classroom, responsible and ethical; who loves us all equally; who understands my problems and respects my decisions". ■

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Note: The original article "Pathways to Participation" (Shier 2001) is available on the internet on a download fee basis from: www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/79503427 or (www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1002/chi.617).

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Biographical note

Born in Belfast, Ireland in 1954, Harry Shier graduated in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Worcester College, Oxford in 1976. He lived and worked in England for the next 25 years, initially on adventure playgrounds, then training adults working with children out of school. In 1986 he founded PLAY.TRAIN, an independent charity and training agency specialising in children's rights, play and creativity and developed the Article 31 Children's Consultancy Scheme, which enables young children to act as specialist consultants to the senior management of cultural institutions, helping them develop child-friendly facilities and programmes.

From 2001, Harry Shier has lived in Nicaragua, Central America, which now is his permanent home. He works in community education, helping local colleagues to develop alternative education programmes with children and young workers on the region's coffee plantations.

In November 2002, local delinquents attacked and beat up Harry Shier in his new home town of Matagalpa. Left for dead in a pool of blood by the roadside, locals found him the next morning barely alive and rushed him to hospital. He made an almost complete recovery and, against professional advice, returned to Matagalpa to continue his work with CESESMA. To contact Harry Shier go to: www.cesesma.org.

From Data to Learning

LISA RODGERS
ERIKA ROSS

USING THE EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Information on student achievement helps us understand how well our education system is performing and how our students are developing the skills they will need for their future lives.

Here, we look at where we get our evidence on student achievement, what that evidence shows, and what it means for national policy and for individual schools – illustrated by our three vignettes on middle schools that are using assessment data to improve student learning.

What data do we gather?

Information on student achievement comes from a wide range of national and international studies and collections of data. They include:

1 National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP), a solely New Zealand study of Year 4 and Year 8 students;
2 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), an international study of Year 5 students' achievement in reading literacy;
3 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an international study of Year 5 and Year 9 students' achievement in maths and science;
4 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international study of 15-year-olds; and
5 National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), New Zealand's national secondary qualification.

What do we know?

Each study or source of data has its own focus of interest, objectives, methodologies and types of assessment, done at different times and with different student populations. Nevertheless, together they provide a broadly consistent picture of achievement and areas of concern. Eight common findings from across the studies are identified:

1 New Zealand students achieve in reading and mathematics at a high average level compared to other countries.
2 The highest achieving students are comparable to the best in the world particularly in reading at secondary school.
3 New Zealand students have a wide spread of achievement in reading compared to other highly achieving countries.
4 The spread of achievement in reading is wide within individual schools.
5 The Literacy Professional Development Project and the Numeracy Development Project have produced positive shifts in reading, writing and maths for low achieving students and in low decile schools. Writing achievement is lower on average than reading and maths achievement.
6 Though some boys achieve at a very high level, boys are over-represented among all the students who achieve at a low level, particularly in writing.
7 Though some Maori and Pasifika students achieve at a very high level, their achievement on average is lower than their Pakeha and Asian peers.
8 Students whose home language is English achieve on average at a higher level than others when English is the language of the test.

A straightforward analysis of the data by achievement and school type also appears to show that children at intermediates perform better than those at full primaries in some areas of the curriculum. When a more detailed analysis was conducted, which takes account of factors such as school decile and whether a school is rural or urban, however, the results show that contributing primaries, full primaries and intermediate schools all show similar performances; the type of primary school makes no difference to student achievement across the primary school years. Also, the data show that students make

rapid progress from the early years through to about Year 8, when performance seems to plateau and then picks up again when students enter secondary school. No explanations are offered here since the reasons for the plateau are unclear or unknown and they warrant further investigation.

How should we use the data?

None of the studies establishes causal links between interventions (or student, family, teacher or school attributes) and achievement, nor did they aim to. Rather, they provide associations or correlations. We can use the information from the studies, together with other knowledge and research findings about teaching and learning, to build an evidence base to improve our policy and practice, and to develop effective interventions. Three vignettes (see below) illustrate the ways in which middle schools are developing an evidence-based approach to improving teaching and learning school-wide.

Papatoetoe Intermediate School - Learning to use the data

Papatoetoe Intermediate's commitment to using an evidence-based approach means raising every teacher's skill level and it does this by engaging teachers in professional debate on what counts as data.
The school has been involved in literacy professional development for the past three years - the first two focused on reading, and the third on writing.

Teachers have had training in specific assessment tools and they use STAR to feed data to the School's literacy team leaders who track individual students from Years 6 to 8. Next year, this team will go into the local college and test all the Year 9 students (although only 70% come from this intermediate) to monitor and document their progress.

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Papatoetoe Intermediate School -

Principal Brian Hinchco says the school also uses the STAR data for other key purposes, to:

i) Identify the level of support and priorities for school-wide professional development and resourcing;
ii) Set targets for each student and for groups of students; &
iii) Assess the effectiveness of various interventions or programmes.

Flexibility of professional development is the key: it is important to target professional development to each teacher's needs. Brian says that his school (and others to) needs to develop a much deeper understanding about data gathering and analysis, and to address and debate three key questions: What constitutes data? What does the school consider achievement to look like? What achievement do they need to track over time?

His conclusion was that "Our school needs to be very clear about why these questions are important. Teachers are very good at doing exactly what is asked of them, so we have to be sure that we are asking them to do the right things." □

Building on success

Research shows that many New Zealand students achieve very highly indeed when compared both with New Zealand Curriculum expectations and also when their achievements are compared with those of students from a wide range of countries. We should continue to build on the successes of New Zealand students. Their successes should be acknowledged in schools, and at an education system level, as we develop and implement into practice initiatives for improving student achievement in specific areas.

Continuing with successful initiatives

Results on within-school variability of student achievement reinforce the need for initiatives that support teaching, and the learning of the diverse range of students who are learning within the same school environment. Accordingly, the Ministry view is that we should continue with initiatives, developed in the light of research evidence, that support quality

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teaching for the diverse range of students in our schools. Three projects in particular should be continued: the Literacy Professional Development Project, the Numeracy Development Project, and School Improvement Projects that are focused on resolving achievement issues. These projects, which use professional development for teachers and evidence-based teaching, very clearly lead to substantial improvements in student achievement, especially for low performing students and students in low decile schools.

Waimea Intermediate in Nelson, for example, found that the Literacy Professional Development Project gave its staff the language they needed to engage in professional discussions and to clarify their thinking about effective teaching. Principal Cleve Shearer sums up: "Our teachers knew how to manage and organise students and programmes. Now they understand how to teach more effectively. They have a greater understanding about what they do and why. They know the tools to use to gather and analyse achievement information and they understand the importance of clarifying the learning for students." In a similar way at Papatoetoe Intermediate, class teachers use the achievement data they collected to track individual students' progress and to group and regroup students according to needs. The school uses two strategies: (i) senior teachers and literacy leaders, act as coaches and mentors, support class teachers on a 1:1 basis; and (ii) the school uses teachers it has identified as effective to model effective practice to other staff members.

Waimea Intermediate School - Developing a Professional Learning Community

At Waimea Intermediate School, the leadership is developing an evidence-based approach and it is committed to ensuring that that evidence is valid and has integrity. In recent years, the School has participated in the Assess to Learn (AtoL) and Literacy Professional Development Project (LPDP) initiatives. Principal Cleve Shearer believes that the impact of the two programmes has been to help teachers and the school more effectively work in an evidence based approach.

The school's experience showed that it took a long time to develop teachers' in-depth understanding and confidence to really embed the new teaching methods into their practice. Cleve said that the staff had professional development to support their use of several assessment tools. The teachers developed confidence using them, but they still needed ongoing support.

As the schools professional development leader for the initiatives, Cleve also developed systems that promoted and modelled an evidence-based approach. He built up a senior management team that reflects the characteristics of a professional learning community. These are observation, reporting, reflection on findings, collective identification of implications and discussion of alternatives for development and action. To do all this, the four team members had to be open and honest with each other and engage in critical discussions and debate. The focus was on working together with integrity, managing conflicting ideas positively and being open to deep, critical analysis, and working with staff in the same way.

The senior management team monitors the school-wide data carefully to ensure that targets for student learning are based on the data and aimed at improving achievement.

"It has to be seen as a developmental process. We want the results to be valid and to maintain the integrity of our work. The danger in the drive for evidence-based results is that we might be tempted to use the data as a marketing device rather than as a means to see what we are doing well and where we need to target more effort for specific individuals or groups of students," Cleve says.

The school expects everyone to take responsibility for sharing and using the data and to focus effort on those individual students and groups of students not succeeding.

The deputy principal and the literacy lead teacher continue to analyse the data and give teachers feedback on student progress and to students also, to help them to learn. Professional development focuses on supporting teachers to meet each individual student's needs and create opportunities to share knowledge. Teachers share data at staff meetings to track students' progress. Cleve says it is important to track data across the school as well as drilling down into specific groups to make sure no groups are missed or needs overlooked. He says that having outside "expert" input ensures that the school keeps challenging what it is doing and keeps up-to-date with new ideas and research. □

LISA RODGERS
ERIKA ROSS

Improving writing

Findings overall consistently demonstrate that the teaching of writing is a particular challenge for many teachers, though recent findings from the national Literacy Professional Development Project show significant improvements in writing. Nonetheless, schools should remain vigilant: improving writing within the context of literacy achievement should continue as an important focus. Performance gaps also exist in reading too, which indicates that schools should continue to concentrate on improving students' achievement in both reading and writing, but particularly writing as a key aspect of literacy achievement.

If these foci are maintained, then in the future, we would expect to see improvements in student achievement from stronger links formed between reading and writing, supported by an emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, which is the Approach that the Projects recommend, and from which the findings of this paper are drawn.

Focusing on within-school differences

Almost all schools have a wide spread of student achievement. This wide spread within individual schools is more significant overall than differences between different groups of schools – for example schools of different deciles. Nearly every school has students who achieve very well and also students who are not achieving.

At Waimea Intermediate, for example, the student cohort overall was doing well, but in a recent analysis of data, the school identified a group of 59 high needs students who were most at risk of not achieving. The school set specific targets for this group, and teacher professional development focused on strategies to best meet the group's learning needs. Principal Cleve Shearer says of the strategy: "The results initially were fantastic, to the extent that we thought we had set the targets too low." As a result, the school set stretching targets and the teachers are keen to push the limits by extending students further.

LISA RODGERS
ERIKA ROSS

Otahuhu Intermediate School - Making learning transparent

Like many others, Otahuhu Intermediate is a school with high expectations of its staff and students, and it works hard to develop assessment for learning within an integrated curriculum. The school became involved in the literacy professional development project after analysing its students' writing achievement data. Principal Athol Cartwright says the school uses achievement data in a variety of ways – curriculum teams use it to identify needs and develop an action plan, with individual and group data analysed and used to set mini-benchmarks. The data is used also to identify professional development needs in relation to the professional knowledge and skills that already teachers possess or lack, and which they will need, and balancing between meeting school-wide and individual teacher needs linked to specific and achievable goals. Athol said that by using achievement data in this way, the school makes teachers' learning transparent and it has developed a culture of collaboration to support the teachers.

Deputy Principal Marilyn Robert keeps an eye on teachers' workloads to keep them manageable and she has supported Athol's commitment to building leadership across the school, which is a key element to ensure sustainability. In this way, the School's focus on distributed leadership has helped to strengthen the role of curriculum and syndicate leaders who help teachers to maintain an ongoing focus on learning and make sure that teachers use assessment to inform class and school decisions about programmes and curriculum.
For more information, go to http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz and www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/bestevidencesynthesis □

Using the broad picture findings

The findings present a broad picture that can help school communities see how their local setting relates to a national context. Schools can use the findings to develop practical solutions and initiatives that will help them and their teachers to deal with the specific situation of their students, as the vignettes demonstrate.

Developing an evidence-based approach requires commitment and leadership, which the experiences of Papatoetoe and Otahuhu Intermediates show. The principal of Papatoetoe Intermediate, Brian Hinchco, sums up the key challenges of developing an evidence-based approach as:

- Finding the time it takes to develop teachers' understanding and practice;
- Sourcing the funding needed to support the teacher professional development required;
- Meeting the need to maintain a balance between paperwork, testing and pastoral care;
- Accomplishing the level and kind of upskilling needed - the coaching/mentoring approach was one way to provide this but required in itself ongoing professional development of all involved; and
- Managing the impact of providing teacher release time and conducting in-class observations of ongoing classroom programmes, which requires a skilled teacher to manage the process without disrupting student learning.

Athol Cartwright, principal of Otahuhu Intermediate, echoes Brian Hinchco's observations, as well as making some of his own. He said that if assessment is to be used successfully, a school's leadership must know about:

- Teachers needing to take time to develop in-depth knowledge, understanding and confidence in specific content knowledge (in this case, literacy), and how to use assessment tools and analyse and use the data;
- The huge and expensive (in time and money) demands on a school's resources to meet the ongoing professional development needs of teachers;
- Modelling high expectations and maintaining the focus at all times on improving learning;
- Aligning the gathering of data across the school, and in class, with its use;
- Setting up structures that permit more experienced/competent teachers to work as professional mentors to other staff members who need greater support;
- Reflecting the school's character in the initiatives, e.g., a strong Pasifika culture at Otahuhu Intermediate required that the School develop collaboration and learning from each other as the preferred way of working together; and
- Ongoing moderation to ensure quality and consistency of teacher professional development and that teacher performance is maintained. ■

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What Matters in the Transition to Secondary Level?

CATHY WYLIE

RESULTS FROM NZCER LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

When one adds up all the changes that can be involved in moving from primary or intermediate schools to secondary schools, they can look challenging or negative on paper. Students often move to much larger schools, sometimes from co-educational to single-sex, and they experience more teachers, and more subjects. But this is also a time when young adolescents are interested in change, and flexing their growing independence. So what are their experiences of the transition? How much should adults worry that they are changing schools at this time?

In this article, I'll draw on material from the longitudinal Competent Children, Competent Learners project. Funded by the Ministry of Education and NZCER, it has followed some 500 students from their final early childhood education in the Wellington region, through their schooling years. We have gathered data on the students from the students, their teachers, and parents, every two years. So in looking at the transition to secondary school, we can compare views of school and performance levels at age 12 and age 14.

At age 12, 59 percent of the sample was looking forward to going to secondary school, and 26 percent fluctuated or were unsure. Only 15 percent were definitely not looking forward to moving on to secondary school. Girls were unsure more than boys. There were no differences in student views about moving on to secondary school related to differences in family resources, or ethnicity.

The main reasons why students felt positive about going on to secondary school were that they felt ready for a change (32 percent), they thought they would learn interesting things or have more challenge (25 percent), and they looked forward to having more choice and being more independent (22 percent). Those who were not looking forward to secondary school, or who felt unsure about it, did so because they thought the work could be too hard (18 percent), or because they feared the social environment of secondary school (14 percent).

But these prior views had no bearing on how long it actually took students to settle into secondary school. Most said they had settled into secondary school within two terms, but 17 percent took longer. Those who took longer to settle were more likely to experience the co-occurrence of a number of the factors below. Some of these are to do with the new environment; some are to do with their previous school experience; and some to do with the transition itself.

Students could take longer to settle into secondary school if:

- the school was not their first choice;
- they thought the discipline was stricter than at their primary school;
- they found teacher expectations hard to get used to;
- they thought there was more work to do than at primary;
- they thought the work was more challenging than at primary;
- getting to school took longer;
- they did not find school enjoyable;
- they had regular paid work;
- their parents had concerns about them at school at age 12;
- they had not had friends to help their transition;
- they were not used to having more than one teacher at their primary school;
- they had little experience of changing schools; or
- they were in schools where it was less likely that information about them from Year 8 was used.

We did not find that it was harder for students to settle in if they had moved to a much larger school than their previous one, or from an intermediate school. Nor did we find that students who had lower performance on our competency measures at age 12 found it harder to settle into secondary school.

We didn't find any negative effect on student competency levels associated with their going to new schools: students can cope with going to much larger schools, and with making two transitions in three years if they have previously attended an intermediate.

Does it matter if students take longer to settle into secondary school? We found that current performance levels on our competency measures were most strongly related to how well students had performed at age 12. The time it took to settle into secondary school did not affect how well students did on our reading comprehension and mathematics tests, but it did have some negative effect on how teachers rated them in terms of their attitudes – perseverance, communication (listening and speaking), self-management, curiosity, and social skills. These attitudes are now part of the curriculum, as the Key Competencies. Other analysis within the Competent Children, Competent Learners project has shown that these are important for student learning and growth over time, including reading and mathematics (Wylie 2006).

Cathy Wylie is a Chief Researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The most recent reports from the Competent Children, Competent Learners' project include Completely different or a bigger version? Experiences and effects of the transition to secondary school, and Growing Independence. These can be downloaded from www.minedu.govt.nz, or www.nzcer.org.nz, as can a summary of all the age-14 phase findings.

Taking two terms or more to settle was also negatively related to students' confidence in their new school - feeling they belong, get all the help they need, and that it is important to do their best.

We didn't find any negative effect on student competency levels associated with their going to new schools: students can cope with going to much larger schools, and with making two transitions in three years if they have previously attended an intermediate.

Nor did we find any major patterns associated with differences in social experiences and resources: no gender, ethnic, family income, or parental education differences.

On the whole, the transition to secondary school in New Zealand is not the threat to young adolescent growth that some have feared. We did not find any dip in student performance – student performance was just as likely to improve as decline – and in fact, the degree of change in performance over this transition period was no greater than any other two year period in the lives of our study participants.

But we did find some aspects of concern. While these adolescents were on the whole as positive about secondary school as they had been about their intermediate or primary school, there was an increase in the level of boredom (from 12 percent at age 12 to 34 percent at age 14), and in those who thought they could do better work if they tried (46 percent cf. 31 percent at age 12). Eighteen percent wanted to leave school as soon as they could.

What this indicates is that in supporting young adolescents into the secondary level, as it is currently

constituted, we do need to pay particular attention to some students, both before they reach the secondary level, and at that level. Longer term, the inclusion of the key competencies into the curriculum does offer the opportunity for taking a new approach, with more project-based learning (Hipkins 2006) that is likely to engage a wider range of students, and better equip all students for a fast-changing world (Gilbert 2005). ■

Cathy Wylie,
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Aristotle – Greek philosopher

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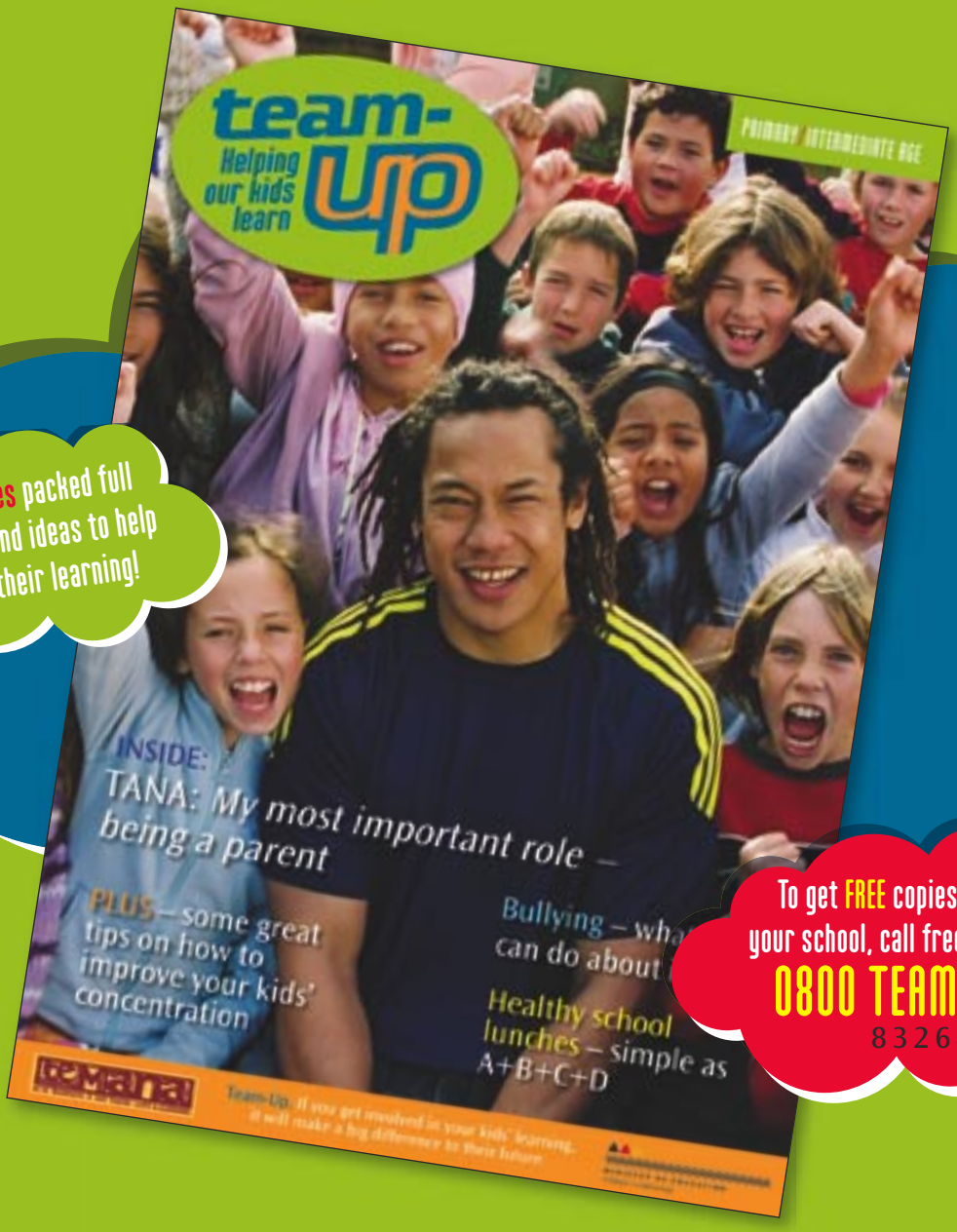

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