

Why focus on the middle years?

TARGET



- How well do we know our middle years students?
- How well do our curriculum, learning activities and school structures meet the needs of our middle years students? How do we know?
- How can we build a culture of care and respect in our middle years classes?
- What strategies would we like to try that could improve educational outcomes in our middle school classes?

'The term "middle years" is used to describe young adolescents at the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school (Year 5 to Year 8). Students in the 10 to 15 years age group have particular needs that are different from those of young children or older adolescents. In the middle years students generally identify strongly with their peers. They experience heightened emotions, progressively seek greater independence and develop their individual identities and value systems. Intellectually they have a growing capacity for reflective and abstract thinking and begin to make decisions about adult roles.

Most students progress satisfactorily during the middle years but it is a time when some students "switch off" from schooling... Real empathy and an understanding of the variety of ways in which young adolescents learn and think is required if we are to meet their needs.'

NSW DET 2004

Excellence and innovation, p.14

Classes for middle years students, 'in every context, need to both strengthen their academic core, and establish caring, supportive environments that value the young people they serve. Above all, each and every middle school teacher needs to develop strong relationships with his or her students. Such relationships are the foundation for powerful learning.'

A middle years program cannot be implemented in isolation. It requires 'a schoolwide culture that is supportive and collaborative, and also challenging and equitable ... [and with an] emphasis on teaming and professional collaboration'.

Turning points: transforming middle schools 2000

At the turning point: the young adolescent learner, www.turningptw.org, accessed 10.6.04