Big Fish, Little Fish
Teaching and learning in the middle years

Big Fish, Little Fish: Teaching and learning in the middle years provides pre-service and early career teachers with a pathway to understanding the needs of students as they make the important transition from primary to secondary schooling.

The book explores contemporary challenges for teaching and learning in the middle years, with a focus on student experience, identity, engagement and resilience. Key issues, such as teaching academically at risk students, the impact of education policy on middle years students, and teacher preparation and identity, are given comprehensive coverage. Unique to this text is its focus on and analysis of the history of middle years education, as well as its in-depth discussion of the experiences of young Indigenous and Māori students.

Each chapter brings together learning and teaching theory and practice to challenge readers, providing opportunities to engage with the content via case studies, exercises and reflection questions. Drawing on the wide-ranging expertise of its contributors, Big Fish, Little Fish prepares pre-service teachers to best meet the needs of students as they enter the challenging middle years of their education.
Big Fish, Little Fish
Teaching and learning in the middle years

Edited by

Susan Groundwater-Smith
Nicole Mockler
Contents

Contributors xi
Preface xvii

Part 1 Introduction

Chapter 1: Challenges for teaching and learning in the middle years
Susan Groundwater-Smith and Nicole Mockler
The challenges are considerable and ongoing 3
Losing and regaining the momentum 5
Assembling the evidence 8
Conclusion 11
References 12

Chapter 2: Thinking historically about the schooling of young people in the ‘middle years’
Craig Campbell and Kay Whitehead
Age relations, adolescence and organising schools 16
The same age, but different courses and schools 17
Inventing the middle school(ing) movement 20
Rethinking the apparent needs of the adolescent 22
Conclusion 24
References 25

Part 2 The needs of learners in the middle years

Chapter 3: Teaching academically at risk students in middle school:
The roles of explicit instruction and guided discovery learning
Andrew J. Martin
Moving through the middle years at school: An escalation in cognitive demands 30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students at academic risk and escalated cognitive demands</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instruction that addresses the escalation in cognitive demands</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human cognitive architecture: From explicit instruction to</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guided discovery learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explicit instruction</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guided discovery learning</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From explicit instruction to guided discovery learning</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 4:</strong> Success after (dis)continuous transfer? (Re)imaginative</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>praxis for pedagogy, curriculum and assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lisahunter</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So what?</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogies of imaginative praxis</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So what?</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extended reading list for Pierre Bourdieu's ideas</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 5:</strong> A fair go and student agency in the middle years classroom</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Groundwater-Smith</td>
<td>Consulting young people regarding their schooling, leading to participation in decision-making</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students as inquirers</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical considerations in participative inquiry by young people</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 6:</strong> Consulting young people in the middle years in New Zealand</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny Poskitt</td>
<td>New Zealand policy and national context for middle years students</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student voices on being consulted</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural perspectives</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand research literature with middle years students</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 7:</strong> High possibility classrooms in the middle years:</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Hunter</td>
<td>A model for reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background to the case study</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is ‘big learning’? 98
The case study: Big learning for the future 99
Conclusion 107
References 107

Part 3 Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the middle years 111

Chapter 8: Teaching strategies that encourage student effort in Years 8 and 9 113
Sara Murray and Jane Mitchell
What do we mean by effort? And why is it important? 114
Cultural beliefs about the importance of effort 115
How can teachers encourage student effort in their classrooms? 117
Strategies for increasing student effort 118
Conclusion 124
References 124

Chapter 9: Visceral pedagogies: Learning to teach middle years in the margins 126
Sam Sellar
Research evidence for the importance of teacher–student relationships 127
‘Pedagogy is all about relationships’: A simple formula 129
Visceral pedagogies: A thought experiment 132
Conclusion 136
References 137

Chapter 10: The challenges of testing accountability: Understanding limitations and negotiating consequences 139
Greg Thompson
NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) 140
The language of tests 142
What do we mean by ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’, and why are they important? 143
What is a high-stakes test? How is it different from a low-stakes test? 146
What can we do? 149
References 152

Chapter 11: Engaging Indigenous students: The important relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers 155
Peter Buckskin
Cultural competency 158
Languages other than standard Australian English 162
Middle school 164
## Contents

The importance of listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators  
Conclusion  
References  

**Chapter 12:** The experiences of Maori students in the middle years  
*Angus Macfarlane*  
Theoretical understandings  
The New Zealand context  
Culture as the centre of teaching and learning  
Classroom processes and practices  
Conclusion  
References  

**Chapter 13:** Changing scenarios for teaching and learning in the middle years  
*Margaret Mulcahy*  
Why the middle years?  
The power of storytelling: Scenarios from across the globe  
What these stories reveal  
Conclusion  
References  

**Part 4** Preparing teachers for the middle years  

**Chapter 14:** Teacher identity in the middle years  
*Donna Pendergast*  
Teacher professional identity  
Middle years teacher identity  
Visual images and teacher identity  
Conclusion  
References  

**Chapter 15:** A generic teacher education program that meets contemporary schools’ needs  
*Sally Knipe*  
Teacher preparation in Australia  
Expansion of teacher education into universities  
Adolescent education  
Adolescence and middle schooling  
Innovation required for teacher qualifications  
Constraints of school staffing and teacher qualifications  
Conclusion  
References
Chapter 16: Leading teacher professional learning in the middle years

Lyn Kirkby

The middle years teacher and professional learning 237
Compliance and professional learning 238
Connecting teacher and student learning in the middle years 239
The place of external professional learning 245
Conclusion 246
References 247

Part 5 Conclusion 251

Chapter 17: The middle years as a site for reform: From local to global

Nicole Mockler

The middle years as a site for innovation 254
The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) 257
Sustaining the GERM 262
‘Innovation’ and ‘reform’: Walking the line 263
References 265

Index 269
Contributors

About the editors

Susan Groundwater-Smith is an Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. She is the convenor of the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools (CKBS), a hybrid collection of schools, government and non-government, mainly located in Sydney, which share a brief in participating in teacher research that incorporates student perspectives on their learning. The Coalition engages with a series of cultural institutions such as the State Library of NSW, Sydney Living Museums and the National Maritime Museum, with young people contributing to exhibition design and evaluation. Much of this work is published in Mockler, N. & Groundwater-Smith, Engaging with Student Voice in Research, Education and Community: Beyond legitimation and guardianship (Springer, 2015). A number of Coalition schools have initiated innovative practices in learning and teaching in the middle years and have informed much of the growing understanding of what is possible in this area. Susan has an ongoing and deep commitment to equity in the provision of schooling and believes that issues in relation to teaching and learning in the middle years relate not only to pedagogy, but also to ideals of social justice.

Nicole Mockler is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle. She is a former teacher and school leader, and the current focus of her research and writing is teacher professional identity, teacher professional learning and the politics of education. Her most recent books are Engaging with Student Voice in Research, Education and Community: Beyond legitimation and guardianship (with Susan Groundwater-Smith, Springer 2015), Facilitating Practitioner Research: Developing transformational partnerships (co-authored with Susan Groundwater-Smith, Jane Mitchell, Petra Ponte and Karin Ronnerman, Routledge 2013) and Rethinking Educational Practice Through Reflexive Inquiry (edited with Judyth Sachs, Springer 2011).
Peter Buckskin is a Narungga man from the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. He is currently the Dean: Indigenous Scholarship, Engagement and Research at the University of South Australia. As an educator and professional bureaucrat for more than 35 years, Peter's passion has been the pursuit of educational excellence for Aboriginal students. His international work has included being appointed to the Australian National Commission to UNESCO for a term, and to the 2009 Working Group of Experts to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples responsible to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He is currently an Executive Member of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium. Professor Buckskin’s current research projects include increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and leaders in Australian schools; developing an Online Teacher Education Course for Pre-service Teachers ‘Respect-Relationships-Reconciliation’ for the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership; and an Australian Maths and Science Partnerships Program (AMSPP) project to foster Mathematics excellence and equity in schooling and tertiary education choices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Craig Campbell writes social histories of schooling and age relations. *A History of Australian Schooling* (2014) is the first such history in nearly 40 years. He has been a teacher in public high schools in South Australia, and a teacher union leader. As an Associate Professor of Educational History at the University of Sydney, he has authored and co-authored eight books. Currently, he writes for the online Dictionary of Educational History in Australia and New Zealand (dehanz.net.au), edits the journal *History of Education Review* and as an honorary associate of the University of Sydney, is researching and writing a biography of the Australian socialist feminist educator, Jean Blackburn.

Jane Hunter is an early career researcher at the Centre for Educational Research in the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney. She has received several major teaching awards for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning and is now on an international team of educators providing Technology Enriched Instruction around the world. Her doctoral work developed a new model for technology integration in schools; the book from the thesis, titled *Technology Integration and High Possibility Classrooms*, will be published in 2015. Invited to speak at education conferences, she publishes in the areas of pedagogy and professional development.

A passionate teacher of Economics, Lyn Kirkby has made a significant contribution to teacher accreditation and professional review policy development processes at the state and national level. She has been a member of national and state committees responsible for shaping this agenda to ensure consistent quality outcomes for teachers. Lyn’s expertise is grounded in both theory and practice, as
she has led implementation processes at the school and independent sector level in NSW. A recipient of the Deans Medal for her MEd at the University of Western Sydney in 2010, she is now a doctoral candidate. Lyn works as a Senior Policy Officer at the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, and as a tutor at the University of Sydney.

**Sally Knipe** is Associate Professor (Education) in the Faculty of Education at La Trobe University. Sally is an experienced teacher and academic with an extensive background in leadership and in the development of teacher education programs, including working as a national assessor of initial teacher education programs. Sally has published in the area of teacher education, and is on the executive of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA), a major professional association for teacher educators in Australia. Sally draws on existing data and data mining techniques in a range of research projects.

**lisahunter’s** previous research, including the project reported in this book, included transition from primary to secondary school, middle schooling, and middle years teacher education. She now researches in areas associated with sexualities, pedagogy, physical culture, and embodied subjectivities. Employing ethnography, narrative, visual and sensory methodologies, her current projects include female surfing participation, normativity in teacher education, digital literacies in academic work, schooling and sexualities, and surf festivals.

**Angus Hikairo Macfarlane** affiliates to the Te Arawa confederation of tribes in the central north island of New Zealand. His research activities focus on the exploration of cultural concepts and strategies that influence educational practice and sociocultural theorising. He has a prolific publications portfolio and has international standing in the education-psychology community. He has been the recipient of a number of prestigious awards, most of which note his accomplishment of a sustained record of research of the highest quality. He is passionate about Indigenous advancement in education. Dr Macfarlane is Professor of Maori Research at the University of Canterbury.

**Andrew J. Martin** is Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of New South Wales, specialising in motivation, engagement, achievement, and quantitative research methods. He is also Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, Fellow of the American Educational Research Association, and President of the International Association of Applied Psychology’s Division 5 (Educational, Instructional, and School Psychology). He is Associate Editor of the British *Journal of Educational Psychology*, immediate-past Associate Editor of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, and on editorial boards of four journals, including two international journals (*Journal of Educational Psychology* and *Contemporary Educational Psychology*).
Contributors

Jane Mitchell works in the School of Teacher Education at Charles Sturt University. She has a longstanding research interest in student engagement in secondary schools.

Margaret Mulcahy was the inaugural Head of Middle School at Santa Sabina College in Sydney, a position she held for nine years. Her commitment to young adolescents was recognised with a Churchill Fellowship in 2012 which saw her travel to Finland, the United Kingdom and the United States to further investigate best practice in middle years education. She has worked with school communities across NSW supporting their endeavours to engage students and provide a positive transition from primary to secondary school. She has presented at local and international conferences and is a member of the Management Team of Adolescent Success, the association dedicated to the education, development and growth of young adolescents. Currently she is the Executive Principal at a remote school in NSW where she is working to enable staff and students, in partnership with the community, to reach their full potential.

Sara Murray lectures in Adolescent Psychology in the School of Teacher Education at Charles Sturt University. She has many years’ experience as a psychologist working with young people.

Donna Pendergast is Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University. She has an international profile in the field of middle years education. Her work focuses on school leadership for middle years reform, along with developing capabilities to enhance teacher efficacy in teaching young adolescents. Her journey in middle years education has included: leading and developing the first dedicated teacher education program in Australia; influencing state and national policy directions; conducting state and national evaluations; developing a reform model which is currently employed by several Australian states to guide teaching and learning in the middle years; leadership of competitive research tenders commissioned by state and federal authorities valued at more than $1.5 million; more than 100 publications.

Jenny Poskitt a New Zealander, began her career as a primary school teacher and taught in three schools. She was seconded to work as a researcher in schools committed to parent–school–curriculum relationships, and was subsequently appointed at Massey University. Jenny researches and teaches in the areas of assessment, professional learning, research methods, and adolescent learning and engagement. She has led multiple research projects and serves on numerous Ministry of Education Advisory Groups. With three school-aged children (two of whom are teenagers) keeping her grounded, Jenny is renowned for bridging theory and practice.

Sam Sellar is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Sam’s research focuses on education policy and
pedagogy. He is currently involved in projects investigating international and national large-scale assessments, new accountabilities in schooling and working pedagogically with the aspirations of young people in high-poverty regions. He is Associate Editor of two journals, Critical Studies in Education and Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, and has a forthcoming book, titled Globalizing Educational Accountabilities: Testing regimes and rescaling governance (co-authored with Bob Lingard, Wayne Martino and Goli Rezai-Rashti, 2015).

**Greg Thompson** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Murdoch University. His research interests include large-scale standardised assessment programs, education policy, teacher and student subjectivities. Since 2012 he has been an Australian Research Council Fellow investigating the effects of Australia’s NAPLAN testing regime on school communities. He is the Associate Editor of Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education and Series Co-Editor of the AARE’s book series Local/Global Issues in Education.

**Kay Whitehead** is a Professor and Deputy Dean in the School of Education at Flinders University. Her historical research focuses on transnational discourses to do with 19th and early 20th century women educators in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Additionally, she has several publications in the area of contemporary middle schooling.
Preface

When we imagined the structure and content of this book we asked ourselves these questions:

- How has our understanding of provisions for learning in the middle years of schooling evolved over time?
- What are the needs of learners during these critical years?
- What specific issues are associated with curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for students from Australia and New Zealand in the middle years?
- How might teachers, both in initial and continuing teacher education, be best prepared to teach students in the middle years of schooling?

Together, we examined not only the current research and practices that lie behind today’s policies but also the ways in which this has undergone change and development, particularly in relation to the reconstruction and reconfiguration of ‘adolescence’ in contemporary times. As well, we wanted to place these policies in a socio-political context beyond state boundaries and ask critical questions regarding their viability.

To these ends we sought researchers and scholars who have specialised in various aspects of education and schooling that hold particular implications for students in the middle years as contributors to *Big Fish, Little Fish*. In writing for this book, they drew upon those aspects of their academic work that would inform the reader, in clear and well-defined terms, of the ways in which these characteristics could make sense in the complex world of schooling.

At the same time the contributors have avoided the portrayal of simple, recipe-like solutions; rather, they have aimed to challenge the reader to connect the text to their own experiences and transform the information into personal, professional knowledge. As Lawrence Stenhouse is quoted as saying, ‘Information is not knowledge until the factor of error in it is appropriately estimated’ (cited in Rudduck et al. 1983, p. 141). By this it is meant that what you will find in the various chapters in this book important and well-constructed information, but it will be a matter for you as the reader to come to it with a critical eye and connect it to what you already know and understand.
It is possible, in fact highly likely, that you may find no ‘error in it’, but by approaching the chapters in this way you will more intensely interrogate the text and, with your peers and colleagues, ask of it and of each other good critical questions. To this end we have requested that each contributor embed in their chapters reflective prompts to encourage you and your colleagues to pause and engage in conversation and debate.

While most chapters have been written by university-based academics, we have also included some that are from practitioners in the field, thus bringing together the academic and practical voices. We see this incorporation as a form of enrichment.

Finally, a word regarding the title … Over the years we have had the opportunity to interview many young people regarding the transition from primary schooling to the secondary school world, not only with regard to learning, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, but also in relation to managing the social context in which they find themselves. In most of these encounters the phrase ‘going from big fish to little fish’ has occurred – the transition is indeed a critical one in identity formation and should be regarded as such when you consider teaching and learning in the middle years.

Susan Groundwater-Smith
Nicole Mockler

Reference