

MIDDLE SCHOOLING – A CULTURE NOT A STRUCTURE

It is important to understand, Middle Schooling is about schooling, not schools, as per a structure. It is a culture of appropriate teaching – learning relationships that promotes greater engagement by Beaumaris students, teachers and school community towards improving educational, social, emotional, creative and well being outcomes.

Core Elements Of Middle Schooling In Australia (*National Middle Schooling Project 1996-97*)

The following points emerged from State, Territory and National forums conducted during 1996-97 as part of the National Middle Schooling Project. They represent a common Australian view of the needs of young adolescents. The age focus is generally between 10 to 15 year olds. At Beaumaris we believe the culture needs development upon entry in Kindergarten as an ongoing transitional strategy.

It is important to note, however, that young adolescents should not be regarded as a homogenous group. Given the considerable variation that exists among them (especially in terms of culture, socio-economics, gender, age and other factors) we need to be wary of over-generalisation.

Needs of young Australians:

Like all students, young adolescents have a range of personal, intellectual and social needs. With the onset of puberty, however, there are particular physical, emotional and cultural needs that also have to be addressed. Middle schooling should provide opportunities for young people to learn and grow in ways that acknowledge and respect this special phase of development.

The following points represent a collective Australian view of specific needs that must be addressed in the middle years of schooling:

- *Identity:*
Exploring how individual and group identities are shaped by social & cultural groups
- *Relationships:*
Developing productive and affirming relationships with adults and peers in an environment that respects difference
- *Purpose:*
Having opportunities to negotiate learning that is useful now, as well as in the future.
- *Empowerment:*
Viewing the world critically and acting independently, cooperatively and responsibly
- *Success:*
Having multiple opportunities to learn valued knowledge and skills as well as the opportunity to use talents and expertise that students bring to the learning environment
- *Rigour:*
Taking on realistic learning challenges in an environment characterised by high expectations and constructive and honest feedback
- *Safety:*
Learning in a safe, caring and stimulating environment that addresses issues of discrimination and harassment (eg racism)

It is only through re-thinking and changing learning cultures, physical structures and learning organisation that we can address these needs for these youngsters. Middle schooling is a concept, a culture and belief about better ways to engage and meet the needs of this cohort of students and those who teach them. If we at Beaumaris, are to maximise the potential of our most valuable resource, our students, then it is our responsibility, along with every government and education authorities to take up the challenge.

The importance of achieving developmentally responsive middle schooling cannot be overemphasised. The nature of the educational programs young adolescents experience during this formative period of life will, in large, measure and determine the future for all of us.

Principles which Guide Middle Schooling in Australia

(National Middle Schooling Project 1996-97)

The middle years of schooling are likely to be more effective when they are based on a shared philosophy of fundamental values and beliefs. These years constitute a stage of education during which young adolescents can explore themselves and the world in which they live, in a context of 'high expectations'.

At Beaumaris, Middle schooling is founded on a commitment to advance the learning capacity of all students and the achievement of outcomes that are meaningful and beneficial to the student. At the same time, we also provide opportunities, skills and understandings that encourage active and responsible citizenship.

The following principles, which are the result of wide consultation through ten Australian Middle Schooling Forums, constitute essential components of middle schooling:

Learner-Centred:

Coherent curriculum is focussed on the identified needs, interests and concerns of students and with an emphasis on self-directed and co-constructed learning

Collaboratively-Organised:

Powerful pedagogy is employed by teams of teachers who know and understand their students very well and who challenge and extend them in supportive environments

Outcome-Based:

Progress and achievement are recorded continuously in relation to explicit statements of what each student is expected to know and be able to do

Flexibly-Constructed:

Arrangements are responsive to local needs and circumstances, and reflect creative uses of time, space and other resources

Ethically-Aware:

Justice, care, respect and a concern for the needs of others are reflected in every-day practice of students, teachers and administrators

Community-Oriented:

Parents, together with representatives from a diverse range of groups, institutions and organisations beyond the school are involved in productive partnerships

Adequately-Resourced:

Experienced teachers and support staff, supported by high quality facilities, technology, equipment and materials, constitute essential requirements

Strategically-Linked:

A discrete phase of schooling is implemented as a stage within a K-12 continuum and connected to the early and later years

**Characteristics of Effective-Middle Schooling Practices in Australian Schools:
(National Middle Schooling Project 1996-97)**

A significant number of schools around Australia have been addressing the needs of young adolescents and implementing the principles of middle schooling as part their everyday practice. While the work of some schools was published in reports and case studies, other work was recorded on video and presented and discussed at middle schooling forums and professional development activities. An analysis of the expanding data base of good practice revealed a number of distinguishing features associated with middle schooling on the part of students, teachers and school leaders.

Students:

- engage in whole class discussion, group work and individual activities
- negotiate a significant proportion of the learning and assessment tasks
- choose when to start and finish learning tasks
- use multiple intelligences in carrying out their learning tasks
- learn within an integrated curriculum framework
- participate in community based learning by accessing peer tutors & adult mentors
- use up-to-date technologies to assist their learning
- enjoy quality relationships within an organisation that ensure that each student is in contact with a small number of adults
- participate in intellectually challenging and extension activities
- use appropriate time for critical reflection and the development of cooperative learning strategies
- apply acquired learning strategies to new and meaningful contexts

Teachers:

- facilitate students' building of connections between learning areas and between the discourses of home and community
- foster the flexible use of learning time
- cater for individual and dynamic learning groups, as well as whole class learning
- work in teams
- exercise control over budgets, professional development curriculum and work organisation
- share scheduled times for planning and professional development within and across the primary/secondary nexus
- have more contact time with fewer students in secondary settings and work with colleagues to deliver the curriculum in primary settings
- generate genuine partnerships with parents on curriculum and evaluation issues
- facilitate inclusive programs and structures that address adolescent interests and concerns, especially health issues and affective development

- assessment strategies that require students to reflect upon their own and other students' learning

School Leaders:

- are life-long learners who lead by example
- develop whole school community commitment
- develop a learning community within a collaborative culture
- foster a team approach to teaching and learning
- enable teams of teachers to manage time and human, fiscal, and physical resources within a whole school framework
- shift school focus from subject-centred to student-centred learning
- perceive middle school reform as part of a wider, whole school approach to improved learning
- encourage broader community participation in the education of young adolescents
- recognise parents are partners in the learning organisation, and develop strategies to involve parents in their children's learning

1.1.1 What does it mean for Beaumaris School?

For Beaumaris Primary School the term 'middle years of schooling' refers to student cohorts in both Middle and Senior Sub Schools. However, it also implies explicit links with practices in the Junior School that establish foundations for transition. Lifelong learning and middle schooling are not the monopoly of any one sub school or school sector, but rather the responsibility of all stakeholders. Those principles and practices emergent from the national project are whole school appropriate. For Beaumaris this meant a K-7 approach and ownership that could deliver those features associated with middle schooling on the part of students, teachers and school leaders.

Middle Schooling Culture - Planning Framework

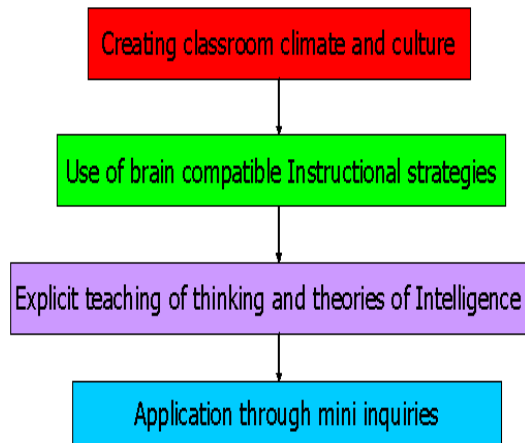
Planning for the future involved the school as a whole, preparing and enabling students to make successful transitions from early childhood to the middle years and beyond. This means we all have a stake and responsibility in shaping the school, teaching-learning relationships and outcomes that enhance transition. Middle schooling culture and lifelong learning are closely linked. One cannot be successful without the other. Both are driven by student centred developmental practices. Both incorporate rich learning tapestries. Both are interwoven by pathways of learning technologies. Both need to be incorporated into [planning frameworks](#), at admin, sub school and classroom levels.

Learning to Learn – Thinking Community

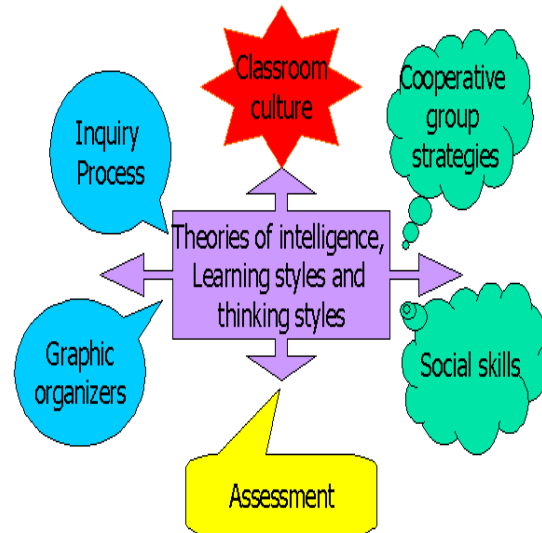
In addition to promoting middle years' pedagogy, the school employs 'learning to learn' strategies that address different student learning/thinking needs and styles as effective ways to problem solving. In essence the focus is about evolving a learning community with a thinking culture. Emphasis is on evaluating student learning strengths and weaknesses so they are aware of them and given opportunity to develop both. It involves implementation of whole school sequential planners introducing students to and consolidating understandings about practices in Brain Theory, as well as Tools for: Thinking; Learning; Evaluation and Assessment; and the Inquiry Process - from Junior to Senior sub schools. (*Hamilton Senior High School*)

These strategies we have borrowed from one of the most progressive and successful Middle Schooling programs, at Hamilton Senior High School, who supported our journey.

Learning to Learn



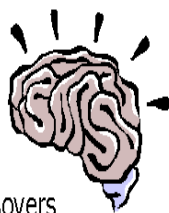
Instructional Strategies



Brain Theory



- The Brain and brain waves
- Multiple Intelligences
- Learning Styles
- Thinking Styles
- Music - Baroque
- Brain Gym - juggling, crossovers
- Switch ons and offs
- Brain food and water
- Colour, keywords, pictures



Tools of thinking, learning and evaluation

- Cooperative group strategies
- Social skills
- Graphic organizers
- Mindmaps
- Evaluative tools
- Criteria and rubrics



Brain Theory and Multiple Intelligences examples from Donnybrook DHS were also reviewed and adapted by all sub schools for implementation. Examples were available from Hamilton SHS as well. The task determined what, when and how these approaches and strategies can be developed and implemented in evolving a [Whole School Thinking Planner](#). Other resources include Blooms Taxonomy and Gardner', 'Multiple Intelligences.'

These are by no means finite, but represent key skills to identify what is developmentally appropriate for successful transition to independent learning. In doing so, the curriculum improvement program is a much richer and more meaningful developmental process that combines a balance of curricular and non-curricular thinking and outcomes. It makes it possible to identify and measure the elusive 'added value' component that economic rationalists overlook or are simply not able to recognise.

Thus the developmental parameters within each sub school are more of a focus about individuals than age levels, enabling students to develop towards levels, standards or benchmarks or whatever they may be called. In turn there is an expectation that all students will do so and can be moved along, as far as possible, when necessary. Learning and development is not a process of osmosis, but rather a guided and directed journey. Some students fly early, while others need more direction and explicit teaching at times.