Case studies in middle schooling
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarkson Community High School Western Australia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton Secondary College Western Australia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton Senior High School Western Australia</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaro Senior High School New South Wales</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oatlands District High School Tasmania</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaford 6-12 School South Australia</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traralgon Secondary College Victoria</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warnbro Community High School Western Australia</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Middle Schooling

The middle years of schooling are defined by the adolescent stage of development between child and young adulthood. This stage typically spans the 11-15 year age group and generally corresponds to years 6 to 10 in Western Australian schools.

Middle schooling reform aims to change teaching and curriculum practices to better suit the needs and interests of young adolescents. Pedagogy is built on relationships rather than authority teaching is student rather than subject-centred and teachers work collaboratively in teams rather than individually. Curriculum is flexible, integrated, negotiated with students and coordinated by teams to more efficiently pursue framework outcomes. Schools often need to restructure to change the type of traditional work cultures and time arrangements that impede middle schooling reform.

Middle schooling reform is multi-faceted. It can range from individual and small groups of teachers engaging in action research and introducing curriculum and pedagogy change at the classroom level, through to developing a new school with foundation policies and purpose buildings, through to the amalgamation of schools to facilitate a whole school introduction of pedagogical and curriculum change.

Eight Case Studies

The eight case studies in this report were commissioned by the Education Department of Western Australia. They contain information relevant to school communities that are considering whether or not to adopt principles and practices of middle schooling.

Each case study contains a thumbnail sketch of the context and rationale for the decision to introduce middle schooling major characteristics of the middle schooling model that was implemented, factors that supported and impeded the move to middle schooling, and an indication of what difference middle schooling has made so far. Collectively, the eight studies contain a smorgasbord of ideas to assist school communities plan, implement, and evaluate middle schooling innovation.

Material for the case studies came from a variety of sources; visits to some of the schools, interviews with school leaders, teachers, and consultants, and information published in the literature and on internet web sites. From this material, draft reports were written and sent back to the schools for comment and validation.

In writing these case studies, we have attempted to portray what happened from the perspectives of the participants in the project rather than present our own.
views. Most participants were school leaders and advocates of middle schooling. At the same time when commenting on preliminary drafts they seemed careful to ensure that our final report would be credible to the diverse membership of their own school communities.

A number of observations can be made about the accounts of middle schooling outlined in these eight case studies. First, they show that middle schooling is not new in Western Australia. Hamilton Senior High School began its middle schooling reform nearly thirty years ago, and possibly some district high schools took up aspects of middle schooling well before that. Interestingly, one school in this study, Clarkson, attempts to recruit at least one teacher with district high school experience for each of its four learning teams.

Secondly, while common themes run through the eight case studies, differences between the schools suggest there is no one true model of middle schooling. Across time, the eight schools have collectively sampled a range of structures, for example year 7-8, year 7-9, year 8-9, and year 8-10 middle schooling delivery. Some operate out of purpose-built middle schooling facilities, others make middle schooling work within traditional school buildings. Similarly, the impetus for middle schooling innovation has varied across the eight schools. In some cases, the impetus was research on adolescent alienation. In other cases, it came from sources such as participation in the National Schools Network, pressure from local community groups, opportunities provided by Local Area Education Planning, and the leadership of an innovative school principal.

Thirdly, within this diversity, some patterns can be identified that apply to a majority of the eight schools, if not all of them. These patterns do not represent the forces of inevitability but they do alert schools to situations they may face when attempting middle schooling reform. One fairly common experience is that middle schooling structures can be implemented more quickly than middle schooling cultures for example, learning teams and block timetabling are easier to establish than student-centred pedagogy and negotiated curriculum. Another common experience is that putting the structure of middle schooling in place occurs in stages over a number of years, there is no instant transformation. A further theme is that at least in the short term, middle schooling seems to make more observable difference to interpersonal relations among and between teachers and students than it does to student outcomes in the different curriculum learning areas. An emerging, if not strong, theme is that despite initial staff resistance after several years of middle schooling, most teachers have no wish to return to traditional arrangements.
Finally the case studies indicate either explicitly or implicitly conditions which the eight schools consider crucial for middle schooling to take root and flourish. For example from experience they found it important to

- At all times remain student focused. Spend time as a staff assessing information regarding youth culture. Understanding the nature and social context of young adolescents will lead to more informed decisions.

- Recruit strong and knowledgeable leaders who understand middle schooling principles. These leaders have excellent communication skills, are skilled change managers, and maintain the vision.

- Establish through quality consultation and presentation of good information a clear philosophical basis. This gives meaning and purpose for change and engages key stakeholder commitment.

Provide teachers with time and resources for professional development and training in teaching strategies and curriculum planning processes that may be incompatible with entrenched practices and beliefs.

Stories told by pragmatic educators when compiling these case studies show that successful middle schooling reform embraces principles of policy development, strategic planning, and change management underpinned by in-depth professional knowledge of school administration, curriculum principles, and issues and processes of teaching and learning.

Their stories show that reform must be bedded in school development planning frameworks and processes. Planners must authorise reform in school vision and mission statements, represent change in school objectives and performance indicators, monitor change implementation and effectiveness through school information systems, and strategically plan for improvement and consolidation.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Ray Downey  Principal  Monaro High School  Cooma  New South Wales

Ron Elliott  Principal  Traralgon Secondary College  Victoria

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Bill Mann  Associate Principal  Clarkson Community High School  Western Australia

Rob Nairn  Associate Principal  Warnbro Community High School  Western Australia

Kathy Ritchie  Foundation Principal  Geraldton Secondary College  Western Australia

Tanya Rogers  Director Planning and Programs  South Australian Department of Education Training and Employment  Foundation Principal  Seaford School

Larry Scott  Senior Superintendent of Education  Tasmanian Department for Education and the Arts  Former Principal  Oatlands District High School

Ross Treadwell  Principal  Seaford 6-12 School  South Australia

Robyn White  Principal  Clarkson Community High School  Western Australia

Noel Woodley  Student Services Coordinator  Warnbro Community High School  Western Australia

The Education Department of Western Australia would like to thank the staff from Edith Cowan University for their contribution in the development of the Case studies in middle schooling planner’s guide.
Context and Rationale

Clarkson Community High School serves a cluster of new suburbs on the northern frontier of the Perth metropolitan area some thirty kilometres from the city centre. Within these suburbs adequate infrastructure continues to be developed with people needing to drive long distances to shops. Families tend to have three or more children with students often attending three primary schools prior to high school. Also, some young adolescents face added difficulty dealing with issues of personal uncertainty, a sense of belonging and recognition, and interpersonal power and negotiation.

Against this background, parents on the CCHS steering committee established in 1995 to begin planning the school made several things clear. They wanted the new school to provide extra help for their children to become active, healthy, independent adults. At the same time, they wanted their children to receive an education in the lower high school years that would keep their options open for years 11-12. These sentiments received support from influential people within the state Education Department who told the newly appointed principal and deputies that they expected CCHS to be different from traditional high schools.

Clarkson’s Middle School Model

CCHS consists of a middle school (years 8 and 9) and a senior school (years 10-12). The middle school is organised around three key principles: an ethos of care, teams of teachers working with teams of students, and the delivery of an integrated, relevant curriculum. The ethos of care is fostered by a written care policy, written codes of practice, and the structures and processes outlined below.

In round figures, the 500 year 8 and 9 students are grouped heterogeneously into four learning communities each comprising 125 students and a team of six teachers. The six teachers are co-ordinated by a teacher who has achieved Level 3 status and who acts as a line manager for the team. Each learning community is given its own set of classrooms and autonomy to determine its own timetable within the boundaries of a common school start/finish time and lunch period.

The four learning communities have flexibility in how they group students, though most are placed horizontally in year level groups rather than in vertical groups across years 8 and 9. During these two years, students explore the following eight themes which comprise their curriculum: communities, enterprise, environment, planet earth, conflict, change, our nearest neighbours, and decision making. While studying these
themes. Students work at their own level and teachers cover all strands in the eight learning areas. They also cover key competencies and self-managing skills. The former include process skills such as problem solving using technology, mathematical ideas and techniques, collecting, analysing, and organising information, and communicating ideas and information. The self-managing skills include qualities that parents asked the school to develop such as anger control, co-operation, goal setting, responsibility, and initiative. Basically, the eight themes generate content and context within which generic skills are practised.

Each team of teachers includes subject specialists in English, health and physical education, mathematics, science, and society and environment. Specialists in the arts, LOTE, and technology and enterprise are attached to a teaching team but they teach across two or four learning communities. The school expects all staff to teach in two learning areas. This is made explicit at the application and interview stage of staff appointments. In general, every teaching team has at least one teacher with distinct high school experience.

Teachers work in a team more than team-teach. At a formal level, they plan collaboratively one hour a week after school. Informally, collaboration takes place because the members of a teaching team share a common workspace where they spend recess and lunch periods apart from a common morning tea every Friday in the main staff room. Informal comparing of notes is further facilitated by teachers being able to observe each other in operation as a result of see-through glass walls separating some classrooms.

Collaboration across the four learning communities occurs at several levels. The four learning community coordinators are members of the school management team. A staff representative from each learning community sits on the school program committee, which takes a leadership role in work on school priorities such as literacy, CAP (care about people), information technology, and the environment. Each learning community selects a student to be a representative on the student council and a representative on the school council. Collegiality also takes place through SRAs mentoring teachers, particularly in the area of information technology, since Clarkson is a technology-focused school.

Teaching and learning strategies at Clarkson range from traditional chalk and talk to small group work and individualised programming, with most teachers using a combination of all three. Similarly, assessment takes a variety of forms including the collection of work samples, common tasks, some tests, student portfolios reporting on student outcome statement strands, and students demonstrating what they can do.
Factors Supporting Change

Last year Clarkson used an instrument developed by EDWA to survey parents teachers and students views of the school The results were mixed On virtually all items parents gave the school a higher than 95% rating Teachers on the other hand were quite hard on themselves while students scored the school higher than the teachers but lower than the parents

Over the past three years four factors stand out as having helped Clarkson to succeed A major factor was local community support parents wanted a high school in the first place and they had a strong presence on the steering group that conducted foundation planning work

Secondly the principal and two deputies had a substantial experential and research background in middle schooling and a common commitment to it For example the principal had taught in Victoria was familiar with work at Huntingdale Tech had been a deputy at Hamilton Senior High School and was well informed about Geraldton s participation in the 1995 DEETYA project on the middle years of schooling One of the deputies began his teaching career at Hamilton SHS as a junior sub school teacher in the mid 70s All three kept up to date with the literature on middle schooling

Thirdly the school chose its own staff through a process of merit selection This involved sending applicants an information package that outlined the type of middle school ethos culture and structure Clarkson intended to develop interviewing shortlisted applicants to identify why they considered they had the qualities required to teach in a middle school and contacting referees to check the applicants claims

Unlike say Ballajura Community School the first buildings at Clarkson were more traditional than middle school in design The commitment of teachers to middle schooling surmounted this difficulty In the end the physical structure at Clarkson proved less important than the quality of teachers For them good teachers make good schools it is the teacher in the classroom that makes the difference

Fourthly Clarkson s success can be attributed also to being given a high level of flexibility by the system EDWA gave Clarkson a blue sky brief to do something different within existing staffing and financial parameters Also overcoming industrial issues such as teachers volunteering an hour a week outside school time to engage in collaborative planning assisted change
Obstacles to Change

From time to time various factors have threatened Clarkson's success. During its first year, Clarkson operated from eight demountables placed at the back of Craigie Senior High School, an arrangement that created a range of difficulties. Also at that time, each learning community consisted of three teachers and 54 year 8 students. This enabled teachers to get to know the children well but to the point where they became too closely involved with parents and their problems. The resulting prominence given to social work placed the teachers' core business of curriculum development and teaching at risk. The present learning community structure of six teachers and 125 students enables the creation of a better balance.

Clarkson also has had to combat some negative publicity in the media arising from a bus incident and the spreading of false rumours about the school by parents in the area who do not send their children to the school. Both situations required the school to reassure parents that being different as a middle school is the best option for their children.

Staff at the school face a minor but ongoing battle at some network meetings and principals forums defending themselves against put downs and stigmatising talk such as middle school teachers become de skilled because they only teach year 8 and 9 students. Middle school teachers suffer because they do not enjoy the status of being say a science teacher and they are denied opportunities to experience the highlight of the profession – teaching year 12s.

A possible threat to Clarkson's middle schooling model is the loss of opportunity to select staff locally if merit selection stops. The ethos of Clarkson could be placed at risk.

Future Challenges and Directions

The staff at Clarkson have identified a number of necessary steps to take them further down their middle schooling road. At present, students are grouped horizontally into year 8 and 9 classes. The four learning communities are keen to introduce vertical grouping across these two years. The curriculum needs to be further integrated and provision made to extend students at the top end of the ability range. Each teaching team would like to have common DOTT times for its own members to enhance collaborative planning, but so far, obstacles created by the four learning community structure have been insurmountable. Also, the learning community culture has not been developed strongly enough to completely detach...
teachers from their traditional subject department identity and loyalty Paradoxically though as the school moves towards enrolling year 11 and 12 students in 1999 and 2000 there could be problems of staffing the upper school program. Some current teachers at Clarkson have indicated an interest in becoming middle school specialists.

Clarkson's Middle School 1998

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<th>Year 10 12 Senior School</th>
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<th>Year 8 9 Middle School</th>
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<td>Learning</td>
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Context and Rationale

A variety of developments led to the opening of Geraldton Secondary College in 1997. In 1993 a broad-based review committee was convened to investigate concerns that the two secondary schools in town, Geraldton Senior High School (GSHS) and John Willcock Senior High School (JWSHS) were not providing year 11-12 students with courses relevant to local industry needs nor allowing students sufficient breadth of subject choice. The committee had no formal status and no middle schooling agenda, its sole focus was post-compulsory education. After consulting with interested parties, it recommended an amalgamation of the two high schools. No action was taken on that recommendation.

In 1995, Geraldton participated along with schools in South Australia and Victoria in a DEETYA investigation of the middle years of schooling. The study found high levels of alienation among young adolescents in traditional schools. This put middle schooling on the agenda for any further inquiries into an amalgamation of GSHS and JWSHS.

In 1996, the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) established a consultative committee to find ways of maximising curriculum choice, educational equity, and opportunity for middle school reform and the efficient use of educational resources across the two high schools. The committee had to make recommendations to the Minister by June 1996. After a six-month consultation process involving stakeholders in the local community, a narrow majority of the committee voted in favour of recommending that GSHS and JWSHS amalgamate. In January 1997, the two high schools merged to form Geraldton Secondary College. GSHS became the Carson Terrace campus of the new college while JWSHS became the Highbury Street campus.

Geraldton's Middle School Model

Geraldton Secondary College began with a year 11-12 senior school on the Carson campus and two year 8-10 middle schools — one at Carson campus and one at the Highbury campus (Table 1). The Consultative Committee opposed the creation of a separate middle school on a single campus and was undecided about whether year 10 should be in the middle school or the senior school. It recommended that the positioning of year 10 students be reviewed in 1997-98. Subsequent developments show that a three-year transition process has been necessary for GSC to establish a single middle school. A significant part of this process entails setting...
Sub-schools, heterogeneous learning teams, block scheduling

Learning teams are tied to student 'houses', and students stay in their homerooms for lessons, except for specialist subjects

Indicators of Achievement

Most of the changes at GSC over the past two years have been structural rather than pedagogical or curriculum reforms. In addition to establishing sub-schools learning teams and block scheduling, the school can point to other achievements.

Prior to amalgamation, several forms of inequity existed between and within the two high schools. First, John Willcock students could only access 60% of their first subject preferences, whereas Geraldton SHS students could access 75% of theirs. Secondly,
in both schools large lower school classes subsidised small upper school classes. There were several other concerns. Across both schools in order to become viable 34 upper school classes had to group year 11 and 12 students together, many being TEE candidates. Also, some students could only access subjects by enrolling in SIDE programs and doing private study in the library.

As a result of amalgamation, GSC offers students a greater range of subject choice than any other school in the state. 98% of students now get the subjects or courses they want. On any one timetable, at least 35 subjects or courses are available. Year 8-9 classes have been lowered to 25-28 students. The 34 combined year 11-12 classes have been reduced to three (e.g., aeronautics and LOTE) and no students are enrolled in SIDE courses. Apart from increasing subject choice in the TEE and non-TEE areas, GSC has also increased the range of vocational education courses for students, e.g., STEP machinery-based programs, health, and child care courses, and TAFE-linked programs.

Another outcome of structural change has been that students and teachers feel they belong to their learning teams. Having a small group of teachers attached to a small group of students has created a strong sense of allegiance and ownership. The learning team teachers have begun to plan collaboratively and to develop integrated and cross-curriculum activities and themes. On the other hand, there has only been a slight drop in year 8-9 student absenteeism and no significant difference in student suspension rates.

The middle school students now have access to wider curriculum offerings than were available prior to amalgamation. These include four languages, aeronautics, classical and modern music, boating, and marine studies. The learning teams have enabled an earlier identification of students at risk. This has facilitated intervention and assistance programs for students with greater parent involvement than was the case before 1997.

Prior to amalgamation, up to 40 teachers across the two high schools transferred out each year. In 1997, this number fell to 18, and in 1998, it was 12.

Obstacles to Change

A number of obstacles stood in the way of change towards amalgamation and the resulting middle schools in Geraldton.

During the mid-90s, the administrations of both high schools met not to consider amalgamation but to determine whether they could offer year 11-12 students a joint...
timetable. Nothing came of this exercise as one school had a six period day and the other an eight period day and compromise was difficult.

Unlike the green field middle schools at Ballajura Clarkson and Warnbro which chose their staff by merit selection Geraldton Secondary College began with staff that included incumbent teachers of two traditionally structured high schools. By training and experience these teachers had become immersed in the culture and teaching of their subject specialisation. Over time they had internalised that culture and developed a strong loyalty commitment and emotional attachment to the teaching of their subject. In large measure their professional identity was bound up with the subject they taught. The integrated curriculum of middle schooling challenged that identity and the deeply entrenched subject based pedagogy that partnered it. Some teachers worried that middle schooling would deny them opportunities to gain upper school teaching experience and thereby weaken their applications for promotion.

Different groups of parents voiced different types of concerns. Some felt uneasy about their children travelling longer distances as a result of having to attend a campus out of their neighbourhood. Some opposed the closure of Geraldton SHS and John Willcock SHS because they had gone there themselves as students and had developed a strong affinity with their school and thus wanted their children to go to it. Some parents from outlying towns with political influence objected that they sent their children to the student hostel in Geraldton to attend GSHS, not John Willcock. And some parents claimed that amalgamation would bring the children of different Aboriginal families into contact and conflict whereas the two separate high schools had provided a structure for keeping them apart. A similar claim was that amalgamation would cause clashes between the Vietnamese students who attended GSHS and Aboriginal children from John Willcock.

Among other grounds such as equity and subject choice the case for amalgamation and middle schooling at Geraldton rested on the argument that these reforms would deliver the best use of educational resources. For some of those who interpreted this to mean cheaper delivery of schooling the need for additional resources to start up Geraldton Secondary College undercut the argument for it.

To allay this concern the college had to develop a Memorandum of Understanding that gave all teachers access to both upper and middle school teaching. Since amalgamation an increasing number of advertisements for metropolitan teaching positions are asking for middle school experience and teachers from GSC have been successful in their applications for these schools.

1. Since amalgamation there have not been any instances of ethnic fighting. The dire warnings of blood in the streets and gang warfare have not materialised if anything tensions were greater pre 1997 when different groups went to different high schools.

2. Some opponents saw amalgamation as only a cost cutting exercise. In 1996 EDWA guaranteed that the new school would be resourced at the same level as the combined resources given to the two high schools pre 1997. That guarantee has been honoured as it needs to be because there are two campuses to administer and resource.
Another threat to success was that the planners did not adequately anticipate the magnitude of changing the infrastructure required by amalgamation. For example, they underestimated the amount of work involved in setting up telecommunication links between the two campuses, rewriting all the old policies of the two schools, and constructing a new school council and new committees meeting protocols, canteens, PD/Cs, bus arrangements, and administrative and clerical processes— to name a few. When the amalgamation decision became official in August 1996, staff had only 16 weeks to get the infrastructure in place for the start of the 1997 year.

Then there was the delicate business of closing down the two schools with dignity and sensitivity, a process made more difficult by the fact that between them they had provided 108 years of valued service to the local community. In the end, there was no time to farewell them properly.

**Factors Supporting Change**

A number of factors helped change occur in the face of all these obstacles. First, pressure for change came from multiple sources over a period of time. In the early 1990s, the business community pushed for reform of post-compulsory schooling in Geraldton. Several years later, the DEETYA alienation study put lower secondary school reform on the agenda. Then there was the substantial work of the 1996 consultative committee without whose agreement, amalgamation would not have gone ahead. Another source of pressure came from a growing number of teachers in the two high schools who had been involved in the 1995 alienation study and research on middle schooling. Many of these teachers were keen to begin reform in the middle school. For example, at John Willcock, a critical mass of teachers were ready for change. This school had some tough kids, a small number of upper school students, and experience in piloting middle school principles partly as a result of its response to the 1995 alienation study.

Initially, the parents of JWSHS students were opposed to amalgamation. Like their GSHS counterparts, they too had formed a strong bond with their school. However, as the debate progressed, they gradually came to the view that the educational advantages of amalgamation for their children outweighed the strength of their emotional affiliation and allegiance to John Willcock.

Feelings of loyalty also led most students at both schools to oppose amalgamation. Over the past two years (1997–8), however, their opposition has subsided for a range of reasons. For example, since amalgamation, GSC has won country week sport, an achievement that eluded both schools before 1997. Also, amalgamation has brought back together students who after seven years of friendships at primary school had been zoned to attend different high schools.
Secondly several critical factors tipped the balance of divided opinion within the 1996 consultative committee in favour of amalgamation. One factor was that senior officers in Perth told the committee that no change was not an option. This made some committee members take the view that change was inevitable and that if we don’t change others will do it for us so we might as well do it ourselves and get proper resourcing for it.

Another factor was that up to the mid-1990s the principal of GSHS held serious reservations about amalgamation. In 1996 he was appointed full-time research and executive officer of the Consultative Committee. During the period of consultation he saw and supported the educational reasons for reform in both the senior and middle schools. At the time the acting principal of GSHS and the principal of JWSHS also supported amalgamation. The combined arguments of these senior administrators was critical to the final outcome.

Finally parents occupied 14 of the 21 positions on the 1996 consultative committee. In the end enough of them became convinced of the educational benefits of reform to tip the scales narrowly in favour of amalgamation.

**Future Challenges and Directions**

When GSC first opened the Consultative Committee recommended that year 8-9 students be split across two campuses. Support for that arrangement was gradually weakened by a range of impracticalities such as 40 teachers having to travel from campus to campus and students having to be bussed to one campus for assemblies and classes. By 1998 agreement was reached for all year 8 students to attend Highbury all year. 10-12 students to be at Carson, one third of year 9 students to be at Carson and two thirds of year 9s to be at Highbury. In 1999 Carson will become a year 10-12 senior school and Highbury will become year 8-9 middle school. That change will represent the culmination of a three-year transition process to put the major structural changes for middle schooling in place.

In addition to structural change middle schooling requires pedagogical and curriculum reforms. According to senior administrators at GSC these reforms will take at least another five years. In their view the new Western Australian outcomes-based curriculum framework will be of major assistance as GSC moves toward an active learning/student-centred pedagogy and a negotiated integrated cross-curriculum program.

The 1999 model of a year 10-12 senior school at Carson and a year 8-9 middle school at Highbury was not adopted in 1997 partly out of deference for neighbouring district high school concerns that a year 10-12 upper school at Geraldton would jeopardise their viability. The Consultative Committee also favoured retention of the split lower school years so that children could attend their closest school.
### Table One 1997 Middle School at Geraldton Secondary College

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<thead>
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<th>Year 11 12 Senior School at Carson Campus</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year 8 10 Middle School</td>
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<td>Year 8 Sub School</td>
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<td>Year 9 Sub School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carson Campus</td>
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<td>at</td>
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<td>Highbury Campus</td>
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### Table Two 1998 Middle School at Geraldton Secondary College

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<th>Year 10 12 Senior School at Carson Campus</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year 8 9 Middle School</td>
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<td>Year 8 Sub School at Highbury Campus</td>
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<td>and</td>
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<td>Two thirds of year 9 students at Highbury Campus</td>
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<td>One third of year 9 students at Carson Campus</td>
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### Table Three 1999 Middle School at Geraldton Secondary College

<table>
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<th>Year 10 12 Senior School at Carson Campus</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year 8 9 Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>(divided into two sub schools)</td>
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<tr>
<td>at</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highbury Campus</td>
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HAMILTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 1970s
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Context and Rationale
Hamilton Senior High School, located 15 kilometres southwest of Perth was a disadvantaged school under the national Priority Schools Project. In 1971, some 1,350 students attended the school. Most students came from low income families. 40% of the parents were non-Anglo migrants. Twenty students were Aboriginal, and half of the year 11-12 students had part-time jobs. In those days, Hamilton had a reputation as a tough school characterised by a high rate of student hostility, disruptive behaviour, fighting, vandalism, absenteeism, and rejection of the school and its program – in short, student alienation. That was the situation Frank Usher faced when he became principal of Hamilton in 1971.

During the first six months of his appointment, Frank, with the help of key staff, investigated the causes of this high rate of student alienation. He found that the subject-centred secondary curriculum and subject department organisation of the school led to each teacher being responsible for teaching a subject to about 200 students. He found that the faculty organisation and sheer size of the school left students without a small, stable, caring group with whom they could identify and feel they belonged to. And he found that the hierarchical relationships between educational administrators and teachers and between teachers and students resulted in the suppression of dissent and a sense of powerlessness.

By mid-1971, Frank Usher and key staff had concluded that any strategy to alleviate student alienation and associated problems must do three things: (1) Improve the climate and process for student learning. This included positive interpersonal relationships, a formal pastoral care system, a non-judgemental learning environment, and heterogeneous grouping of students. (2) Increase the participation of students, teachers, and parents in decision-making, giving teachers more responsibility and power and creating more opportunities for parents to contribute to the work of the school. (3) Make the curriculum more flexible and relevant to life.

The structure selected by Frank Usher and his staff to deliver these three outcomes was sub-schooling.

Hamilton’s Middle School Model
Hamilton’s model of middle schooling was implemented in three stages. Stage one (1973) consisted of one horizontal year 8 sub-school. The rest of the school carried on.

Information for this case study came from a 77 page review of Hamilton Senior High School published in Lovegrove T, Wilson N, Teasdale B, and Jackson P (1982) Schools within schools: Sub-schools in Australian secondary schools. A joint project of the Education Department of South Australia and Flinders University, Adelaide Education Department of South Australia.
on as before Stage two (1974) restructured Hamilton into three sub schools one for year 8, one for year 9 and one for years 10-12. Stage three (after 1975) completed the process by grouping staff and students into three vertical year 8-10 sub schools and one year 11-12 upper school. The following account describes Hamilton’s middle school as it operated in the 1970s. In doing so, the term sub school refers only to years 8-10.

Each year 8-10 sub school consisted of about 300 students and some 20 teachers. Of the 20 staff, 14 taught only in their sub-school; these being 2 English, 1 drama, 2 social studies, 2 physical education, 2 manual arts, 1 home economics, 2 science, 2 maths. The other six staff called crossover teachers spent some of their time in the upper school. They included teachers from English, maths, manual arts, media, business studies, art and home economics. A visiting music teacher and personal development teacher worked in each sub school for about two hours a week.

Each sub school had a head elected by the staff of the whole school, a deputy head, a clerical assistant, and a small office. The three year 8-10 sub school heads, the upper school head, and a deputy principal worked out the school’s timetable in a four-step process: first, the junior sub schools’ specialist rooms were set next; the upper school timetable was completed; then negotiation took place to ensure the sub school grids meshed with the upper school timetable; finally, the junior sub schools inserted their core subjects. Each sub school had its own rooms for English, social studies, and maths but shared specialist area rooms with other sub schools.

Student grouping and curriculum arrangements within each sub school at Hamilton conformed largely to the pattern across most government high schools in the state. In each sub-school, students were grouped horizontally into year-level classes of about 35 students. These classes were taught by a different teacher for each subject. While the three sub schools offered the same four core subjects and options, each sub school was allowed to specialise in one or two areas. This produced some diversity. For example, one sub school became the home base for special education and Aboriginal students. One dropped Italian and took on music. Another offered Italian but not music or computer studies. Because movement of students between sub schools was prohibited, this diversity denied students the same access to all subjects offered in years 8-10.

**Indicators of Achievement**

After six years (1975-81) of middle schooling, the number of students going on to upper school at Hamilton increased by 30%, possibly due to improved student attitudes towards school, added course options, and increased unemployment.
Closer rapport, better relationships, an increased sense of belonging, increased autonomy for students and more professional opportunities for teachers

In a 1981 open ended survey teachers said that sub schooling as they experienced it at Hamilton had led to these outcomes: a closer rapport and increased mutual understanding between teachers and students, improved pastoral care and a more personalised approach to students' problems, an increased sense of belonging for students and teachers as a result of the smaller community, reduced student vandalism and absenteeism, increased responsibility, autonomy, and participation for students, and more professional development and innovation opportunities for teachers.

The 1981 staff questionnaire also found that 95% of teachers agreed with the basic idea behind sub schools; 76% said morale was good in their sub-school; 98% said students got on very well together in their sub-school; and 69% thought teacher-parent relationships in their sub-school were quite good.

The findings of a 1981 survey of year 8-10 students at Hamilton, however, produced more mixed results. For example, on the one hand, 83% said they were happy in their sub school; only 13% said they felt lonely quite often in their sub school; 82% had no difficulty getting to know their sub-school head; 67% felt able to succeed in the sub school; and 86% voted to keep the sub schools rather than have one big school. On the other hand, only 27% said they had a lot of say in how their sub school ran; 90% said that teachers decided what work the students did; and 43% said teachers spent most of their time helping the brainy kids.

Factors Supporting Change

Within Western Australia, Hamilton pioneered middle schools as a strategy for addressing student alienation. It did so without the level of research and development in middle schooling that has occurred across the country over the past decade. Many factors enabled Hamilton's innovation to commence and endure. Four stand out.

First, Frank Usher had no doubts about the existence of harmful nature and causes of student alienation at Hamilton. He was equally clear and certain about the need for middle schooling to alleviate it. Furthermore, nothing shook his determination to take Hamilton down the sub-school road. For Frank, school leadership meant being an agent of school improvement, not system maintenance. He regularly attended meetings of the Professional Teachers Association, read many of the books on open/alternative/radical education published in the 1970s and was on the State Innovations Committee of the Federal Schools Commission from 1974-80. Frank's leadership in relation to getting middle schooling off the ground at Hamilton received added strength from several key supporters who became sub-school heads. One...
was Norm Hyde who had recent experience of student alienation as a teacher in an English comprehensive school with 2500 students. Another was Dick Maisey who had just completed a minor thesis on sub schools for his Teachers Higher Certificate.

Secondly the Hamilton sub school reform was not a top down big bang kind of job. The leadership team allowed staff plenty of lead-time. Two years (1971-2) were devoted to developing a case and planning the process for change. Selling the ideas to staff and increasing the participation of staff in exploring options for restructuring. Furthermore, Frank told his staff that fundamental changes would not be made without a two-thirds majority vote of approval from the staff.

Thirdly, the Hamilton sub school reform received tangible system support. Early in the piece, Frank had discussions with the Director of Secondary Education and gained his endorsement for the change. Later on, he invited the Director General and Minister of Education to the school and secured their approval for a $50,000 annual grant to establish the three vertical year 8-10 sub schools.

Fourthly, the reform was introduced gradually in stages. The first stage (1973) was limited to one year 8 sub school. The success of that stage in terms of reduced classroom tension and improved student behaviour exceeded expectations and enabled Frank to gain approval for the second stage to begin in 1974. Stage two proved equally successful and paved the way for stage three in 1975.

Obstacles to Change

The introduction of middle schooling at Hamilton did not proceed along smooth, unobstructed lines. A range of impediments had to be negotiated, a few of which proved strong enough to force modifications to the pure model of middle schooling and thereby compromised some of its integrity.

Some heads of subject departments (HODs) saw the sub schools as a challenge to their values, interests, power and status. Heterogeneous student grouping clashed with their preference for streaming and opportunity to teach the advanced level classes. The election of sub school heads by peers clashed not only with union and department policies and precedents, but also with the HODs' view that they had to gain their position in a statewide arena, not in a local staff room election. HODs also warned that they would lose control over the development and delivery of the year 8-10 learning program and that the power of veto would reside with the sub school heads. Their concerns had some structural foundation. HODs along with sub-school heads and subject coordinators were members of Frank Usher's full cabinet.

The election of sub-school heads by peers clashed not only with union and department policies but also with the HODs' view that they had to gain their position in a statewide arena, not in a local staff room election.
which met for an hour during lesson time on Mondays. But HODs were excluded from the inner cabinet which consisted only of the principal deputies and sub-school heads and met every Thursday lunchtime.

Subject superintendents steeped in traditional pedagogy posed another obstacle. At times teachers who used middle school alternatives to sit up and shut up lessons were marked down or refused permanency by superintendents who made their assessments without consulting Frank. These superintendents considered that teachers should be more accountable to them than to their principal.

In addition to subject superintendents, other external networks of influence exercised control over core curriculum content and time allocated to core subjects. One example was the Board of Secondary Education and the lower school Achievement Certificate with its grading of student performance into advanced, intermediate, and basic levels. Another example was the power of the tertiary entrance exams over the lower school curriculum. These forces hampered attempts to introduce a negotiated curriculum that created stigmatising labels and reinforced teachers' preferences for streamed classes. As noted earlier, 90% of students felt that teachers decided what work they did. As in other schools at the time, year 8-10 student participation in curriculum decision making at Hamilton was restricted to choosing among pre-determined options.

**Challenges and Directions**

While the sub-schools led to improved pastoral care for students, they made virtually no difference to the way teachers taught in their classrooms. Part of Frank Usher's vision for Hamilton was that restructuring would change pedagogy in the direction of more attention to individual differences, more small group work, and more relevance, particularly for disadvantaged students. By 1976, however, an independent study found what most staff at Hamilton already knew: namely that while the sub-schools had led to improved pastoral care for students, they made virtually no difference to the way teachers taught in their classrooms.

Most teachers maintained their traditional role as directors of learning, few of them had any idea on how to change their classroom practices in ways that would achieve the progressive values to which they subscribed, and most sub schools subverted heterogeneous grouping objectives by adopting various subterfuges to preserve some form of rough setting.

In the 1981 survey, Hamilton staff identified a range of issues still to be resolved. These centred around what they saw to be the logistical inefficiencies of sub-schooling restricted teacher access across the year 8-12 levels' increased complexities.
of time-tableing loss of teacher contact with the school beyond the sub-school tension between faculties and sub schools a weakened whole-school spirit or identity and incompatibility between EDWA staff practices and Hamilton's requirement for year 8-10 teachers to be committed to a middle schooling philosophy.

These challenges can be weighed against the indicators of success listed earlier. A key consideration when attempting to determine which way the scales might tip comes from another finding of the 1981 survey namely that only 8% of the teachers wanted to abandon the sub schools at Hamilton and return to a whole school approach.

Table 1 Hamilton's Middle School 1973

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years 9-12</th>
<th>Traditional Pattern</th>
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Table 2 Hamilton's Middle School 1974

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<th>Years 10-12</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year 9 Sub-School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 8 Sub School</td>
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Only 8% of teachers wanted to abandon the sub-school structure.
Table 3 Hamilton's Middle School 1975

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<th>Year 8 10</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sub School</td>
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<td>Sub School</td>
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Author/s:
Chadbourne, Rod; Harslett, Mort

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Case Studies in Middle Schooling: Planner's Guide

Date:
1998

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