



MYSA Position Paper

Middle Schooling: People, Practices and Places

About MYSA

MYSA is an Australia-wide peak body organisation dedicated exclusively to the education, development and growth of young adolescents. MYSA aims to:

- inform individuals, professional educators, parents and the wider community about the nature of education in the middle years of schooling
- promote the achievements and efforts of individuals, professional educators, parents and the wider community in meeting the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents
- provide a voice for those interested in and committed to the education, development and growth of young adolescents
- identify and encourage relevant research in the areas of the middle years of schooling.

Positions adopted by the Association are based on relevant learning theory, informed practice, research into adolescent development and other research pertinent to the middle years of schooling. This position paper draws together these understandings to locate middle years students in the Australian context, often echoing and affirming the positions of other organisations and educators. This position paper has been developed to be used as an advocacy instrument for middle schooling. MYSA advocates to: middle years educators, including teachers, parents and related professionals; teacher education institutions; systems and organisations providing middle years education.

Middle years

The middle years, from around age ten to fifteen, span the years from childhood to adolescence. Young adolescents in the middle years experience a range of significant physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral changes. During puberty, young adolescents experience more rapid and dramatic hormonal and structural changes than at any other period in their life. The sequence of physical change is generally similar from one person to another, although the onset, rate, and timing of these changes are highly individual, often creating stress and feelings of insecurity for the adolescent. Changes to brain and cognitive development peak during this period. Apart from the first five years of life, at no other time does the capacity and functioning of the brain undergo such an overhaul. This affects the learning ability of young adolescents and their success in managing the emotional, social and moral challenges of this stage. Disengagement, alienation and boredom in school often peak in the middle years and this may lead to a decline in achievement. Hence the middle years, particularly with respect to the productive engagement of young people in schooling and other contexts, is a priority for educators.

Middle schooling

Middle schooling is an intentional approach to teaching and learning that is responsive and appropriate to the full range of needs, interests and achievements of middle years students in formal and informal schooling contexts. Middle schooling has the following elements.

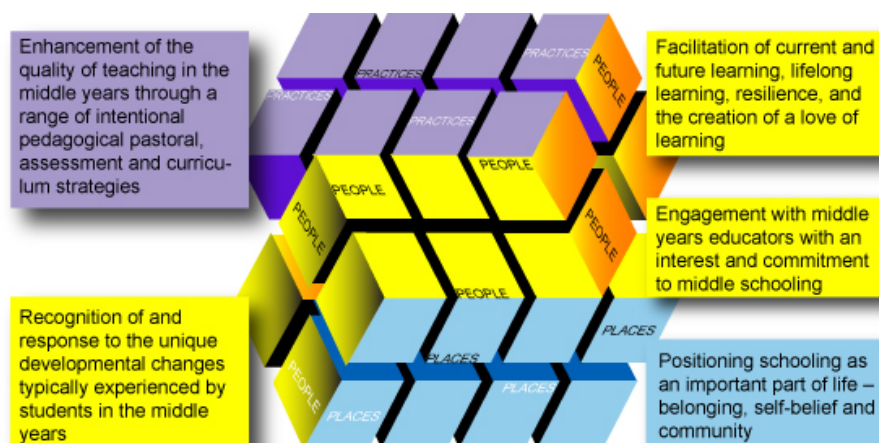
1. Clear philosophy relevant to the context.
2. Comprehensive range of signature practices to engage young adolescents in relevant, meaningful and challenging learning, along with organisational initiatives to facilitate their implementation, such as:
 - higher order thinking strategies
 - integrated and disciplinary curricula that are negotiated, relevant and challenging

- heterogeneous and flexible student groupings
 - cooperative learning and collaborative teaching
 - small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention in a safe and healthy school environment
 - emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort
 - authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations
 - democratic governance and shared leadership
 - parental and community involvement in student learning.
3. Evidence-based approach with clearly articulated outcomes, such as:
 - developing current and lifelong learning attributes
 - enhanced academic outcomes
 - creation of a love of learning.

Middle schooling implementation typically involves three phases: Initiation, Development and Consolidation. The elements of middle schooling should be increasingly evident as the reforms are implemented over time.

MYSA Middle Schooling Model: People, Practices and Places

Below is a model showing the interconnectedness between the three concepts of *People*, *Practices* and *Places*, critical for middle schooling success. Middle schooling optimizes the learning opportunities of young *People* in the middle years so that their potential to live and work successfully in contemporary society, today and in the future, is enhanced. Middle schooling features the adoption of interdependent and aligned *Practices* across the domains of pedagogy, pastoral care, assessment and curriculum; and through organisational initiatives in their learning *Places*. On the following page, a table provides examples and targets for the advocacy of initiatives.



MYSA Middle Schooling Model: People, Practices and Places

Middle years educators, including teachers, parents and related professionals

Middle years teacher education institutions

Systems and organisations providing middle years education

Practices

Enhancement of the quality of teaching in the middle years through a range of intentional pedagogical, pastoral, assessment & curriculum strategies

- feature pedagogies recognised as signifying practices of middle schooling
- implement pastoral practices that facilitate independence, efficacy & resilience
- utilise assessment featuring high expectations & facilitating success for all
- develop curriculum that is challenging, integrated, negotiated & exploratory

- offer specialist middle years teacher education programs which incorporate the development of expertise in Middle Schooling
- allocate adequate time & resourcing for the study & development of the three elements of Middle Schooling
- undertake research connecting theory & practice & use this to inform the education of teachers

- recognise the middle years as a unique stage of learning
- provide a school & systemic culture of innovation & reform where middle schooling practices are supported & evidence-based practice is encouraged
- encourage initiatives & facilitate research connecting theory & practice

People

Recognition of, & response to, the unique developmental changes typically experienced by students in the middle years

- develop expertise about developmental changes typical yet experienced diversely in the middle years & how this impacts on learning
- be capable of incorporating teaching practices for differentiated classrooms
- value & utilise support services such as guidance & counseling

- emphasise knowledge & understanding of developmental changes typical yet diversely experienced in the middle years & how this impacts on learning
- undertake research about the unique developmental changes experienced by middle years students & use this to inform the education of teachers

- employ staff with specialised knowledge & abilities to teach & lead in the middle years
- provide ongoing professional learning to enhance teacher knowledge & understandings of the middle years & how this impacts on learning
- encourage initiatives & facilitate research about the unique developmental changes experienced in middle years students

Facilitation of current & future learning, lifelong learning, resilience, & the creation of a love of learning

- model lifelong learning & resilience attributes
- use learning experiences which promote academic achievement along with the development of attributes of lifelong learning, resilience, & love of learning
- cultivate adaptability, curiosity & creativity

- develop capacities for educators to model & teach middle years students to develop the attributes of lifelong learners, future learning, resilience & the creation of a love of learning
- undertake research about the connection between middle schooling & lifelong learning, resilience & love of learning & use this to inform the education of teachers

- resource systemic processes for ongoing professional learning of capacities for individuals to model & to teach middle years students the attributes of lifelong learners, future learning, resilience, & the creation of a love of learning
- encourage initiatives & facilitate research connecting middle schooling & lifelong learning, resilience & love of learning

Engagement with middle years educators with an interest & commitment to middle schooling

- have a desire & interest, specialist capabilities & a willing commitment to working in the middle years

- offer specialist middle years programs
- undertake research about the construction of middle years teacher identity & use this to inform the education of teachers

- employ specialist middle years teachers & leaders

Places

Positioning schooling as an important part of life – belonging, self-belief & community

- operate in democratic classrooms
- have a shared vision
- create small learning environments
- create positive school & classroom climate
- provide a safe environment
- create a sense of community & of pastoral support

- develop understandings of the role of educators in the wider community
- develop capacities for educators to create a suitable place for learning in the middle years (safe, positive, shared vision, democratic)
- undertake research about the role of education & the development of community & use this to inform the education of teachers

- provide support & resources for creating a place for effective middle years education
- provide a safe community for innovation & reform of teaching & learning in the middle years
- encourage initiatives & facilitate research about the role of education & the development of community & use this to inform the organisational places where middle years education takes place