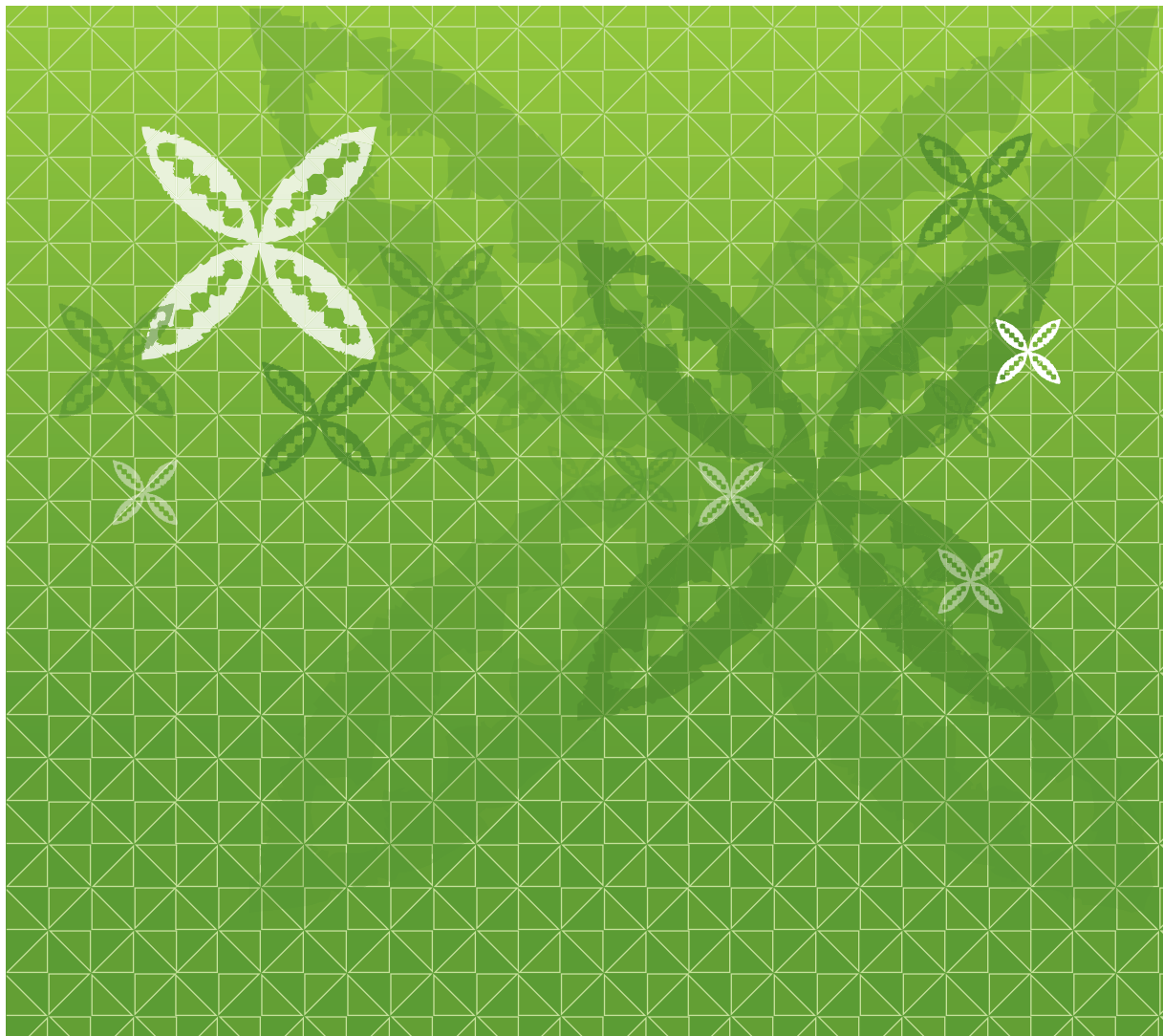




The Education of Years 7 to 10 Students: A Focus on their Teaching and Learning Needs – Summary Report



Introduction

This brochure provides an outline of the study *Education of Years 7 to 10 Students: A Focus on their Teaching and Learning Needs* (Durling, Ng, and Bishop, 2010), together with a summary of key findings.

The study is part of a wider Middle Schooling Research Programme within the Ministry of Education, which has been developed with the support of the New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling (NZAIMS). The purpose of the programme is to establish a strong evidence base within a *New Zealand context* around effective education for students in the middle years of schooling (Years 7 to 10).

Further Information and Contact Details

The full report of the *Education of Years 7 to 10 Students* study summarised in this brochure can be obtained via the following website address www.educationcounts.govt.nz/research

or

by contacting the Research Division, Ministry of Education at

Email: research.info@minedu.govt.nz

Fax: 64-4-463 8312

Phone: 64-4-463 8000

Also, details about the wider Middle Schooling Research Programme and related reports can be found on the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) Online Learning Centre website under the New Zealand Curriculum: <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/middleschooling>

New Zealand Government

Background to the Study

Previous research shows that New Zealand students are generally positive about their school experiences and have relatively high achievement outcomes during the middle schooling years. But at the same time, students' perceptions of aspects of teaching and learning at school become increasingly negative during the middle schooling years. There is evidence that student attitudes to subjects become less positive. There is also evidence that their overall levels of engagement in learning show a decline.

Similar results are evident internationally. For example, US research identifies that students in their middle years of schooling are at particular risk of disengaging from school and of dropping out of school altogether.

This evidence raises questions about the match between the learning needs of middle years students and the learning opportunities that they receive. It also indicates that the middle years of schooling can be an important intervention stage for ensuring students remain engaged at school and achieve successful outcomes.

To help gain greater insights about how this goal might be achieved within our New Zealand context, the Ministry of Education designed and undertook an exploratory study to seek the views of principals, teachers and students regarding teaching and learning in Years 7 to 10.

The Study

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What qualifications do teachers of Years 7 to 10 students in New Zealand currently hold?
- How confident are Years 7 to 10 teachers in teaching various subject areas?
- What relationships exist between teacher confidence and teacher qualifications?
- Do New Zealand educators consider that teachers of Years 7 to 10 require specialised skills, knowledge and personal attributes to effectively teach this age group? If so, what are they?
- What teaching strategies and classroom environments do Years 7 to 10 students find most engaging?
- How well do teacher education and induction programmes prepare Years 7 to 10 teachers to teach this age group?

Gathering the data

Principals and teachers in a representative sample¹ of schools with Years 7 and 8 and/or Years 9 and 10 students were surveyed for their views relating to the research questions. The questionnaire that was mailed out contained a number of rating scale items plus open response questions.

A total of 183 principal and 406 teacher questionnaires were completed and returned. Responses were received from participants in 185 schools.

In addition to the survey, small groups of teachers and students in 13 of the participating schools nationwide took part in focus group sessions; the focus group participants also provided written responses to a small number of questions to help give a more in-depth picture of participants' views overall.

¹ All school types with Years 7 to 10 students (full primary, intermediate, restricted composite, composite, secondary Year 7–13, secondary Year 9–13) are represented in the study. As well, all area types (main urban, minor urban, rural, secondary rural) and decile groupings (1–3, 4–7, 8–10) are represented.

Summary of Key Findings

Teacher qualifications

- The majority of Years 7 to 10 teachers in the study had completed tertiary level study (in addition to teaching qualifications); however, Years 9 and 10 teachers were more likely than Years 7 and 8 teachers to have studied at 300 level or higher.
- Qualifications held by Years 7 to 10 teachers showed some noticeable variation by subject area. Years 9 and 10 science teachers were most likely to have completed subject-related tertiary study (over 90 percent, and mostly at 300 level or higher), whereas their Years 9 and 10 arts and technology colleagues were considerably less likely to have done so (around half, and mostly at a 200 or below level).
- Years 7 and 8 teachers were most likely to have completed tertiary level study in English, social sciences and the arts. However, in terms of qualifications in the particular subject areas they were currently teaching, Years 7 and 8 teachers were less likely than their Years 9 and 10 counterparts to have completed tertiary level study in those subjects². Given that primary level teachers typically teach a range of subject areas during the school day (and/or adopt a cross-curricular approach), this is not surprising.

Teacher confidence levels

- The majority of participating Years 7 to 10 teachers rated themselves as 'very confident' or 'confident' in relation to teaching middle years students; however, Years 7 and 8 teachers were more likely to choose the 'confident' response category, whereas Years 9 and 10 teachers more often selected 'very confident.'
- Years 9 and 10 teachers' self-reported confidence levels tended to be higher overall across all subjects. But it is of note that the highest confidence levels among Years 9 and 10 teachers were expressed by those teaching Māori, other languages, science, technology, and the social sciences.
- Teacher confidence varied by teaching year level and subject. Regression analysis indicated that more years teaching, and completing higher levels of tertiary study in the subject area currently being taught, provided the strongest positive relationships with teacher confidence levels.

Teacher knowledge, skills and personal attributes

- Participating principals, teachers and students indicated a high level of agreement with the idea that teachers do require specialised knowledge, pedagogical skills, and personal attributes to work with Years 7 to 10 students.

2 The data further indicated that of all the subject areas covered at Years 7 and 8, teachers were least likely to have undertaken tertiary level study in 'other languages'.

- Principals, teachers and students particularly emphasised that effective teachers of middle years students should:
 - be aware of and take into account the particular developmental needs of young adolescent students;
 - be responsive to the diversity among middle years students, including individual differences and cultural diversity;
 - ensure that students have opportunities to learn through a variety of approaches and activities, including active, 'hands-on' approaches;
 - ensure that students are able to see learning as both relevant and fun, and have the opportunity to work in small groups at least some of the time;
 - respond to students' expressed need for clear explanations and instructions;
 - have strong classroom management skills and the ability to create a stable classroom environment;
 - set clear boundaries for students and apply these with consistency;
- have strong content knowledge in their different teaching subjects and sound assessment expertise;
- have a deeper level understanding of literacy and numeracy foundations, irrespective of their particular teaching area or year level of the students;
- have an ability to form positive relationships with young adolescent students, including showing a sense of humour, patience and empathy, and generally showing that they 'like young people'.
- While it was acknowledged that the factors identified above could equally apply to 'quality teaching' for students of all age groups, participants emphasised that there are important qualitative differences: that it is essential to hone the different skills, knowledge and attributes specifically with middle years students in mind if teaching and learning for these students is to be effective.

Student Perspectives

Years 7 to 10 students in the study highlighted key aspects of effective teaching and learning in the middle years from their point of view; they also told us what they particularly value in teachers. The students' views show high levels of agreement with those of the principals and teachers.

The aspects students most often emphasised are summarised below.

We like it when teachers:

- Make lessons fun;
- Let us do practical, 'hands-on' work;
- Know their stuff;
- Give us feedback to help our learning;
- Teach us new things that are relevant to our lives;
- Give us work that is challenging;
- Treat us fairly and consistently;
- Understand students of our age;
- Have a good sense of humour.

Students also often talked about:

- how important it was to them to have a positive relationship with their teacher and know that the teacher cared about them as an individual;
"He takes the time to get to know you and then he kind of plays on what he knows about you to make you want to learn."
- the need for teachers to have effective classroom management skills so that a disruptive and/or disharmonious classroom environment didn't interfere with their learning;
*"I find it's real hard if the teacher can't control the class. If one person plays up then the whole class just goes."
"Don't shout at us, because sometimes when teachers are unhappy they are shouting, and we are not learning anything."*
- the necessity for clear instructions and a range of examples to help them understand;
"He gives us examples, and notes, and he always explains it really well. And even if I am having difficulty he always explains to me and it really makes sense. He doesn't get impatient if you still don't understand."
- how valuable it was to have (well-managed) opportunities to work collaboratively with other students in class.
"I always like working in small groups because we all sit at one table and help each other so if someone gets stuck the others would help. You learn more when you are one-on-one and when you are in a small group. I find that in big [whole class] groups, it's always this one person that knows more than anybody else and they kind of take over."

"Make sure you have fun with your class. Make them laugh and we'll enjoy it more, makes us want to learn with you."

"I really like hands-on stuff — building things. You go to the library and research it and you build it as well. It pushed you to research because if you don't get your research done you can't actually build it at the end."

"Some of the desks were a bit broken and we had to do argument writing for the principal on why we should get new ones. And he replaced all the desks for us that needed replacing. It was quite cool."

Teacher development and support

- According to their feedback, middle years teachers experience wide variation in their initial teacher education and subsequent beginning teacher induction programmes; similarly wide variation was reported in respect of ongoing professional development.
- Despite the wide variation, teachers were generally positive about their initial teacher education and induction programmes and about ongoing professional development opportunities in preparing and supporting them for working with Years 7 to 10 students.
- At the same time, however, participating teachers recommended that to better prepare middle years teachers, teacher education, development and support programmes should have a stronger focus on:
 - effective behavioural/classroom management;
 - the teaching and monitoring of literacy and numeracy (especially for those who teach in specialist subject areas at secondary level and do not generally have the opportunity to develop skills in these areas);
 - how to respond to the particular developmental needs within this age group, including teaching and learning strategies known to be most appropriate/effective.

Other Reports within the Middle Schooling Programme

The study summarised in this brochure is part of a wider programme of work to do with middle schooling. Two reports that have come out of this programme are outlined briefly below. To find out more about other studies/reports in the programme (eg. *A Study of Students Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*, which, in part, discusses factors relating to keeping young adolescents engaged in their learning at school) refer to the contact details given earlier.

Teaching and Learning in Middle Schooling: A Review of the Literature

This short report is a summary of a review of literature carried out for the Ministry of Education by Dinham and Rowe of the Australian Council for Educational Research. The key purpose of the review was to provide a critical examination and analysis of the literature, to assess what we know about the impact of teaching and learning during the middle schooling years on student engagement, achievement and attitudes to learning.

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/33825/13

Middle Years Teacher Credentialing in Aotearoa/New Zealand

This study examines the intersection between teacher preparation and registration and the education of Years 7 to 10 students, from the perspectives of a variety of education stakeholders throughout New Zealand.

www.fulbright.org.nz/voices/axford/2008_bishop.html