

Student engagement in the middle years: A year 8 case study

Barbara Tadich

[University of Queensland](#)

Craig Deed, Chris Campbell, and Vaughan Prain

[La Trobe University](#)

Various explanations and solutions have been proposed over the last ten years in relation to the ongoing problem of student lack of engagement with the middle years' curriculum in Australia. Identified contributors to this problem include an irrelevant or trivial curricular focus and ineffectual teaching and learning strategies. In this paper we report on a case study of a group of Year 8 teachers' beliefs and practices about what promotes or constrains this engagement. We found that while the teachers sought to introduce less directive approaches to topics, and were trying to encourage students' sense of task ownership and direction, they struggled to develop effective student self-regulatory practices. We conclude by identifying some practical strategies that support the growth of these practices as one aspect of student engagement.

Introduction

Over the last ten years there have been various attempts in Australia to explain and address the problem of student lack of engagement with schooling in the middle years. The irrelevance of the traditional curriculum, inappropriate or trivial student tasks, ineffectual teaching and learning strategies, changed cultural, technological and social conditions, and outmoded physical settings for learning, have all been identified as contributors to the problem (Luke et al, 2003). Proposed solutions include (a) large scale curricular re-conceptualisation to make learning tasks more motivating, meaningful, and attuned to students' developmental needs, (b) an emphasis on teaching strategies that focus explicitly on how students can succeed as learners, and (c) programs that address negative student attitudes, beliefs, understandings and values that impede engagement with learning (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Munns & Martin, 2005). Such strategies are seen as necessary ways to overcome what Cottle (2001) has termed a peer driven 'culture of distraction'. There is also growing interest in redesigning the physical layout of existing and new schools so that these spaces promote engagement and learning rather than merely 'warehouse children' (Nair, 2002, p.3). As noted by Main and Bryer (2007, p.101), teachers in the middle years "have been challenged to create a curriculum that is relevant, integrative, and exploratory". Varying degrees of success have been claimed, locally and broadly, for these diverse initiatives, (see Hunter, 2007; Pendergast et al, 2005), although the full effects of these changes will take, in most cases, years to assess. However, the problem of student disaffection with schooling persists, with teachers expected to act strategically to address this issue.

In this paper we report on a case study of a group of teachers' beliefs about, and strategies to achieve, effective student engagement in learning in Year 8 in a school in Victoria. Following Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), we support the view that engagement should be understood as a multi-faceted construct. From this perspective, engagement can be characterised behaviourally (strong participation in academic, social and extra-curricular activities), emotionally (affective ties with teachers, classmates and school), and cognitively (investment in effort to master complex problems and skills), with overlap across each area. Therefore, any attempt to increase student engagement with schooling necessarily faces complex challenges, both in terms of the scope for action and the expected role of teachers in promoting this variety of outcomes.

While noting that diverse factors influence student effort at school, we consider, like many other researchers (Ames, 1992; Boekaerts, 1998; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Zimmermann, 2001), that a key element in engaging middle year students is promoting their capacity to self regulate their learning. In this study we were interested in how the teachers at the school understood and sought to develop this capacity. What did they perceive to be appropriate student roles for agency in learning, understood as scope for student initiative in learning processes? This paper first considers the context of curriculum

reform that has shaped current understandings of effective middle years pedagogy and also influenced teachers' views. We review the literature on student disengagement including strategies to address this issue, then report on the teachers' perceptions of barriers and enablers that promote effective learning across the curriculum, including self regulatory strategies. We conclude by reporting on some recent research into a way to increase student engagement, and consider the implications for future successful teaching and learning practices.

A context of curriculum reform

As noted by Luke et al (2003), the middle years of schooling movement in Australia has sought to respond to new understandings about adolescent learning, as well as altered social conditions. In reconceptualising middle years pedagogy, educators have emphasised the need to think of adolescents as young people negotiating various developmental stages as they learn how to be part of society, rather than recipients of career preparation (George & Alexander, 2003). From this perspective, learning tasks need to be strongly meaningful, require extended effort, and connect to the world beyond the classroom. Changes to social and family life are also influencing curriculum conceptualisation, with an increasing focus on the relationship between student wellbeing and curricular initiatives. As claimed by Luke et al. (2003, p.16) this focus on the middle years should be seen as a systematic and concerted effort to "rethink curriculum, pedagogy and institutional structures" in response to "the social facts of the new Australia". Luke et al. (2003) noted that "where many youth in the middle years are not already 'at risk' because of these new conditions, it is quite plausible that unresponsive, irrelevant and inflexible educational structures can make them 'at risk'". At the same time, two contradictory curriculum paradigms have emerged, with many middle school educators committed to a developmentally appropriate curriculum with lesson planning based on the needs and interests of local students and their communities. Counter to this approach are standards based national testing regimes that have also become part of middle years schooling across Australia.

In Victoria, curriculum content for middle years has been redefined in terms of students' developmental stage as set down by the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). The reorganisation of schools and curriculum documents are presented as a means to provide a broader curriculum experience, with more focused learning on large ideas, trans-disciplinary investigations, community development activities, and personal learning projects, particularly at Years 7 and 8. To achieve this, timetables in some schools have been restructured to enable larger blocks of time for all subjects. Core teams of teachers have been established, and learning communities set up where students are organised in groups of up to 125 students, enabling strong relationships to develop between students and teachers. A broader range of assessment methods have been introduced to determine whether learners are ready for the next stage of their development. Higher order thinking, critical thinking, problem solving and the development of lifelong learning are key issues to be incorporated into the middle years' curriculum (Chadbourne, 2001), on the assumption that students at this level need more challenging, engaging, meaningful, authentic learning experiences. These reforms also imply strongly that students will learn more effectively if they have an increased sense of agency in the scope, methods, and processes of learning tasks, thus posing further challenges for teachers in how they might enable this sense of student agency.

Student engagement in the middle years

An extensive literature indicates that student disengagement in the middle years has been a longstanding problem in Australia. Hill, Holmes-Smith and Rowe (1993) reported a decline in young adolescents' willingness to engage with school subjects when compared with younger children. The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (1996) identified stalled progression rates in learning, increased truancy, and greater incidence of disruptive behaviour, alienation and isolation in the middle years, with more recent studies confirming this pattern (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). Concerns about participation also extend to out of school activities which influence school engagement and academic achievement (Eccles & Templeton, 2002). This lack of engagement is also particularly evident with students from lower socio-economic groups. In this regard McGaw (2004) claimed that Australia is performing worse than other developed countries and categorised Australia as high in quality but low in equity. In other words, overall student achievement is high, but wide differences are evident between high and low achievers.

Two broad explanatory frameworks have been proposed generally to account for this student lack of engagement in schooling. The first, drawing predominantly on curriculum development and pedagogical theories embedded within a broader context of social change, proposes that a major problem is an inappropriate curricular content for these learners (Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005), with the need for students to engage with rich tasks and meaningful activities in an integrated curriculum that focuses on big ideas, rather than piecemeal, segmented, trivial content. Various state curricular initiatives in Australia, such as VELS in Victoria, have sought to design courses of study that address these

concerns, with Hunter (2007), Main and Bryer (2007), and others, noting that the long term impact and sustainability of these reforms remains to be evaluated. Researchers within this broad curricular focus, drawing on Bernstein (1996), Bourdieu (1998), and others, have proposed the need for altered pedagogical practices, with debate focusing on different options, such as an integrated curriculum, group learning through project work, and more student oriented choices in teaching and learning methods (Hunter, 2007; Wallace, Sheffield, Rennie & Venville, 2007).

The second framework explains student disengagement in terms of socio-cultural and psychological factors, with some researchers seeking to synthesise these factors into an interlocking totality (Munns & Martin, 2005; Martin & Marsh, 2006). One strand within this research focuses on learners' lack of generative adaptive strategies for knowing how to improve their learning (Dweck, 2000; Sullivan, McDonough & Prain, 2005; Zimmermann, 2000, 2001). Other researchers, such as Munns and Martin (2005), in seeking to explain student engagement in terms of linked psychological and socio-cultural factors, claimed that motivation to succeed at school related to how students perceived themselves, school, and schoolwork, whereas engagement was defined as behaviours arising from these perceptions. Students may be motivated to value school and be effective learners through such behaviours as persistence, planning and student management, or they may dislike school, or be anxious, or avoid failure through behaviours such as disengagement and self handicapping. Therefore, to address student disengagement, teachers need to focus on improving students' views about schoolwork, beliefs about themselves, and their attitudes towards learning, achievement, study skills, and reasons for learning. From a sociological perspective, Munns and Martin (2005, p.3) claimed that students need to develop a sense that "school is a place that works for them and education is a resource that they can successfully deploy in the present and the future". To achieve these outcomes, Munns and Martin (2005, p.5) asserted that, among various strategies, students needed to have learning experiences that promoted key "self regulatory processes such as planning, monitoring and study management".

There is now an extensive longstanding literature on student self regulation of learning, drawing on research from the 1980s and 1990s (Ames & Archer, 1988; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmermann & Pons, 1988). 'Self regulated learning' is broadly defined by Boekaerts and Corno (2005) as the use of strategies to achieve academic growth and well being goals. Pintrich and de Groot (1990, p.38) made the compelling point that "student involvement in self regulated learning is closely tied to students' efficacy beliefs about their capability to perform classroom tasks and to their beliefs that these classroom tasks are interesting and worth learning". In summarising this position, and identifying the challenges teachers still face in promoting student self regulation, Pintrich and de Groot (1990, p.38) emphasised that students need to have both the 'will' and the 'skill' for learning gains to occur. More recently, Dweck (2000; 2002) asserted that students may enable or constrain their capacity to self regulate learning because of beliefs they hold about their intelligence and the value of effort. She distinguished between students who view their intelligence as pre-determined, and who therefore view effort as superfluous, with students who believed that effort could lead to success. She considered that appropriate guidance and feedback by the teacher to students on the value of effort could have a positive effect on students' capacity to self regulate learning experiences.

Consistent with this orientation, other researchers have claimed that teachers need to construct particular kinds of learning environments to achieve student self regulated learning (Grinsven & Tillema, 2006). In such classrooms, students should have a sense of autonomy and responsibility for how and what they learn (Boekaerts, 1999; Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Butler & Winne, 2005; Dembo & Eaton, 2000; Winne & Perry, 2000), as well as self efficacy in using and monitoring effective strategies for this learning. For Boekaerts and Corno (2005) such strategies include motivational engagements, direct teaching of metacognitive skills, and apprenticeship oriented work. Teachers should be less directive, and provide students with multiple opportunities for self evaluation as a basis for developing regulatory learning strategies (Zimmermann, 2000). Tillema, Kessels and Meijers (2000) noted that such an approach shifts the teacher's role fundamentally from monitor and regulator of student learning to activator of learning opportunities. While teachers have been encouraged now for over fifteen years to implement such practices, and accept the logic of such an orientation, they still seem to have problems implementing this approach.

In summary, a very broad range of interlocking plausible factors affecting (and possible remedies for) student disengagement in the middle years has been identified in this literature. We acknowledge, like Main and Bryer (2007), that responding effectively and in a sustainable manner at both local (classroom and school community) and systemic levels (national and state curricular and pedagogical reform, and systematic teacher professional development) poses significant challenges. In interpreting the responses and practices of the teachers in our study, we have focused primarily on the literature relating to student self regulation of learning for the following reasons: first, this literature's emphasis on the key role of student agency in learning is common across the broader literature and therefore provides a useful local classroom starting point for investigation and analysis; second, this focus on student self regulation of learning is consistent with the participant teachers' professed concern with promoting student self

evaluation skills as a curricular goal; and third, this literature is seen as providing a way to conceptualise a practical set of solutions for the classroom, and is therefore likely to be of interest and value to the teachers in the study. We acknowledge that this focus on local classroom practices does not address the broader community and systemic factors and possibilities identified in the larger literature, but consider that our approach provides the possibility of understanding key local matters that affect teachers' thinking and practices.

Research context

This study was conducted at one school in 2006 with 24 teachers who were teaching across all the major areas of the curriculum in Year 8 in a regional school in Victoria, Australia. Nearly all of the teachers who taught in the year level participated in the study, with the exception being teachers who were absent from school on the day, or who had other unavoidable duties. The school has over 300 students at this year level, with the student population coming from predominantly low socio-economic groups with most from an Anglo-Celtic background. The middle years teachers perceived that many of their students were under performing and disengaged from school subjects. The school's concern with the effectiveness of its curriculum for this age group led to the formation of a partnership with the researchers to support subject and general curriculum change to address this problem.

Research questions and design

The general aim of the study was to identify the teachers' current beliefs and practices in relation to engaging Year 8 students in effective learning, and focused on the following questions:

1. To what extent did teachers perceive Year 8 student engagement in learning to be a problem, and what were their perceptions of the causes of this problem?
2. What did the teachers perceive to be effective teaching and learning strategies which could support increased engagement?
3. What factors did they see as enabling or blocking changes to classroom programs to enhance student engagement?

This study used a case study approach similar to the method described by Stake (1995) as it was used in one school to identify the teachers' current beliefs regarding engaging their Year 8 students. One school was used in order to gain an indepth understanding of these teachers' beliefs. The Year 8 teachers were both interviewed, using focus group interviews, and surveyed.

The focus group interviews, which lasted approximately 40 minutes each, were conducted by the four researchers with the Year 8 teachers to ascertain their perceptions on key issues around each question. The teachers were divided into groups of approximately six teachers each based on the subjects they taught, such as English, Mathematics, Science, and Humanities. One researcher interviewed each group of teachers. A case study approach (Merriam, 1998) was used to identify and code participant perceptions based on the literature and emerging themes. The four researchers independently read transcripts of the interviews to identify these themes and perspectives, before analysing collectively emerging patterns to identify key issues. The researchers then discussed the responses of the teachers to confirm the accuracy of identified themes.

Surveys were also conducted of the 24 participating teachers. These contained both open ended questions and statements that used a Likert scale. These were coded and then used to support the focus group interview results.

Year 8 student engagement

There was a general teacher perception that disengagement was widespread amongst Year 8 students. Almost half of the teachers ($n = 11$) believed that their students' learning was restricted by a lack of confidence, apathy, boredom, poor attitudes, absenteeism, disruptive behaviour and a lack of understanding of the need to prepare for the future or the development of post school goals. Several teachers spoke of their exasperation with continuous evidence of disengaged student behaviour. One noted a common disengaged student strategy of "just sit and do nothing"; while another felt that no matter what approach he tried, "it still doesn't matter".

The teachers recognised the diversity of student interests in their classes, ranging from students who responded well to traditional curriculum delivery, to others who demanded a greater degree of freedom to make choices that were relevant to their immediate lives and interests. As one teacher noted, engagement and effective learning were evident when students initiated and sustained independent learning behaviour.

Instead of just sitting back and waiting for it to happen they are actually coming forward and saying look I want to know more ... You can actually see them starting to think beyond what is in front of them ... You have achieved that level of independence for their learning for that particular lesson (Teacher 13).

The 24 teachers suggested various causes for student disengagement. These included peer pressure to not try at school, lack of perceived program relevance, excessive teacher direction resulting in passive student roles, lack of student knowledge of how to structure and succeed with task completion, monotony of classroom routines, and large ill defined tasks that lacked scaffolding.

In summary, the teachers offered a very broad range of reasons for students' failure to engage with learning in the middle years in their school, generally concurring with the variety of factors identified in the literature. Their comments about the symptoms of student disengagement indicated a broad consensus about their role as teachers in developing an effective curriculum. Most teachers (n = 17) had a strong sense of reciprocity between their roles and those of the students. They considered that it was their role to motivate learners by structuring practices where students would show initiative and independent learning behaviours. In other words, the teachers generally considered that they had the dominant role, at least initially, in eliciting and sustaining student engagement. However, many of their comments suggested that they thought that increased student engagement in learning could be achieved by adjusting current teacher practices rather than making major changes to the focus and intent of lessons, and altering roles in the classroom.

Teaching and learning strategies to increase engagement

More than half the teachers (n = 13) considered that they needed to increase their range of effective teaching strategies to address student disengagement. They indicated that they wanted to manage student behaviour more effectively, encourage students to be successful, enable students to be more independent in their learning, make tasks more relevant, cater to the range of abilities in the classroom, and develop assessment criteria as the basis for multiple pathways for knowledge and skill development. They considered that these specific goals could be achieved through the following strategies: managing multiple small group activities, making more effective use of learning technologies, learning about and using a greater range of resources and strategies to engage students, more innovation in structuring tasks, and increased variety in methods of presenting material, and being more adventurous in their approach.

The teachers also identified various practical strategies they considered likely to motivate students. One teacher identified a need for tasks that allowed student choice of content and assessment, diverse methods of assessment where students could choose their preferred assessment from a range of options, and the use of alternative practices including using ICT, rather than "sitting at a desk with pen and paper" (Teacher 3). Effective teaching and learning strategies were typically characterised by the teachers as allowing students to make choices based on their interests. The use of different tasks was seen as an ongoing experiment with the broad aim of engagement:

I might try (different strategies) as an experiment and see how it goes (Teacher 1).

When you start an activity if kids are losing focus straight away you sort of think this isn't working and you change it (Teacher 12).

The teachers discussed specific examples of student outcomes that resulted from tasks that provided for student choice and interest.

If electricity is the topic and that topic is to go and build something ... it is amazing what comes back ... because they have got that control (Teacher 12).

... they get to direct their own learning rather than me being at the front saying 'you have to write this essay on such and such' when I know that half the kids in the class would hate doing that ... they are choosing what interests them (Teacher 7).

The teachers perceived that this kind of task created an environment where students practised self regulatory behaviours. This was characterised as initiating student active involvement in learning. The broad approach of allowing students more choice and control over their learning aligns with recommendations in the research literature. However, there was tendency for their suggested changes to focus predominantly on decisions the teachers made about which goals and strategies they might license to enable students to meet expected learning outcomes. They did not focus explicitly on how students might have increased opportunities to self evaluate their effectiveness as learners, or to evaluate the relative effectiveness of different learning experiences offered by the teacher in normal classroom routines. They also did not focus on students identifying their preferences for particular kinds of

experiences in the classroom over others that might lead to enhanced learning outcomes.

Blocking and enabling factors affecting classroom strategies to promote student engagement

The teachers perceived various constraints to their capacity to implement a highly engaging personalised classroom program, even though most thought such a program would definitely improve learning outcomes. The dominant constraint was the perceived demand for accountability in assessment evident in a prescriptive curriculum, leading to the teacher perception that they needed to control and structure student learning to maximise effective use of time in class, as well as productive homework opportunities. This paradox is captured in the following two views.

There has to be a balance because there has to be certain skills and knowledge that they need and there is sometimes no other way to get it than working through your text (Teacher 2).

Tasks that work best are the ones that tap into something that is going to interest them and that they can see some relevance in it and that they can feel as though they are going to get something out of it ... the ones that don't work best are 'open your text book because you need to do this question' (Teacher 4).

Getting through the required work was achieved at the cost of de-energising students in a highly structured set of learning tasks. While the perception of widespread disengagement enabled the experimentation with different tasks and learner choices, such approaches had to fit in with the routine way of doing school business.

If you go in there and tell them what to do, they will get their backs up. But then if you perhaps give them too much leeway ... they will complain that you haven't structured something enough (Teacher 10).

This mindset represented an ongoing challenge to the teachers. Experimentation with different approaches had led to the development of a number of new tasks and raised levels of student interest, but these innovations were always bound by the need to manage risks of uneven student performance or less overall success. A significant constraint was identified in the form of delivering, monitoring, and assessing the prescribed curriculum. The ideal solution was identified by one teacher as "when the kids are active, when they are involved in doing something, and they have a framework, they have a focus to learn". Some teachers considered that they were able to give their students a degree of agency in how they tackled tasks. The students' overt reaction to a teaching strategy led to a change in teaching practice. One teacher commented that if a strategy was not working, based on the students' behavioural response, then he would immediately change the approach. The teachers' made choices about teaching and learning approaches based on their perceptions of likely student reaction rather than on explicit student commentary on the effectiveness of different teaching strategies.

Conclusions and implications

The teachers in this study recognised that students needed opportunities to feel a sense of ownership of their learning, and that the absence of this perception was a contributing factor in student disengagement across all subjects in Year 8. The teachers had devised some strategies to promote this sense of ownership by (a) giving students choices in the tasks they tackled, and (b) introducing novel teaching and learning approaches to motivate learners. The data show that the teachers were attempting to be less directive and offer tasks that were more interesting and challenging. This approach indicates that the teachers were reviewing the value of a traditional teacher led approach. However, the teachers did not enunciate specific tasks or strategies that might enable students to self evaluate the effectiveness of their current ways of learning, or scaffold approaches that might enable students to work independently, whether in the classroom or beyond. As the teachers noted, the students' lack of self management skills with their own learning created a bind of teacher dependence, producing a reluctance on the teachers' part to introduce new modes or routines of working and task negotiation which were seen as too risky.

While the teachers were moving to a pedagogy supportive of a self regulatory orientation, a range of additional strategies could contribute to further improvement of this aspect of learning. If self assessment followed by the implementation of tactical changes is the key to developing student self regulatory strategies, as noted by Zimmerman (2000) and Perry, Phillips and Hutchinson (2006), then students need self assessment resources to make insightful judgments about the effectiveness of their learning approaches. Such resources might include topic organisers originally designed by teachers, but with scope for modifications by students, that focus on learning goals and ways to achieve these goals over a set time period. Teachers would need to model this goal setting behaviour, but with the intention of

students developing a capacity to devise goals and assess their success in achieving these goals. Teachers could provide opportunities for verbal and written feedback by students on whether particular new or usual classroom routines and strategies enhanced their success in learning. Again, the teachers would need to model these approaches. Explicit classroom discussion could also focus on metacognitive strategies on learning how to learn, with the teacher providing scaffolding and demonstration of her or his tactics for assessing what helps her or him to learn. These kinds of strategies should then lead to negotiation between the teacher and class about possible changes or maintenance of particular classroom routines and opportunities, where the teachers actively take into account student feedback.

If such strategies are to work, then they need to be motivating for learners, acceptable to teachers, and not involve a large additional burden of work on students or teachers. One further possible strategy is the use of online journaling tools that students can use to learn the language of learning and conduct basic self assessments to their responses to classroom tasks. Such tools would need to provide each student with a confidential and personal website where they record their behavioural, affective and cognitive response to certain tasks. Students might also upload work samples and post text, images or sound recordings, thus creating a personal online journaling system. One such tool to guide effective student self regulation is the Assistive eXtra Learning Environment (AXLE, © La Trobe University, Australia) currently being trialled by researchers at La Trobe University (Campbell & Deed, 2007). Results from research on this tool suggest the use of AXLE by middle years students may have a positive effect on student self regulatory behaviour. Although originally conceived as a data collection tool, it effectively became a form of student self evaluation of their learning behaviour. Interestingly, the students' language and capacity to act strategically as learners became more sophisticated after several months of usage. Certainly the use of online journaling as a reflective mechanism provides the teacher with important feedback that can signal opportunities to refine pedagogy (Campbell & Deed, 2007).

The literature on student self regulation of learning implies that (a) self regulation requires explicit student self monitoring and self evaluative strategies, (b) students need to develop a motivating reflective space to learn how to achieve these outcomes, and that (c) the teachers need to take into account student feedback, leading to a negotiated shaping of new classroom practices. In other words, student self regulation should be more than learners pursuing the best tactics for succeeding in an inflexible learning environment. However, where students are given such a space to reflect and signal their intent to improve their learning, as in AXLE, the teacher is provided with valuable data helpful to this aim. In the case of AXLE, students were coaxed into thinking about themselves as learners by being given a space in which they could reframe themselves as potentially more effective learners. The direction the learner took was dependent on the metacognitive question in focus, such as "how can I improve?" Most importantly, students were able to reflect on patterns in their behaviour without overtly seeming to do so in the classroom. They were able to maintain their disengaged persona while imaginatively considering themselves as independent learners. This could be viewed as a potential first step in making efficient choices within the pedagogical space provided by teachers for self regulation.

This paper has suggested that the promise of improved learning outcomes through the development of extensive student self regulation of learning has only partially been fulfilled in a range of contexts, including the one considered in this study. While strategies, such as highly motivational tasks, direct teaching of metacognitive skills, and apprenticeship oriented work, as noted by Boekaerts and Corno (2005), have been advocated, and have promoted student success in some contexts, various factors constrain change. We have suggested that teachers may be constrained by assessment requirements, by the roles and habits of the classroom for themselves and students, and by the perception of high levels of risk associated with introducing new routines, goals, and expectations in this area. Therefore, practicable strategies to increase students' skills in self evaluation and self regulation of learning need to be highly engaging, manageable from teacher perspectives, and not entail a further high imposition of time and effort on classroom learning routines. We have suggested that various practical resources, including explicit discussion of student preferences in how to learn, and evidence of actual change to classroom routines, can contribute to achieving increased student engagement. However, the success of these or any other strategies will depend on the teachers' perception of what is workable in their context and likely to yield learning gains.

References

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84, 261-271.

Ames, C. & Archer, J. (1988). Achievement goals in the classroom: Student learning strategies and motivational processes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 260-267.

Australian Curriculum Studies Association (1996). *From alienation to engagement: Opportunities for reform in the middle years of schooling*, (Vol. 1, 2 & 3), Canberra: ACSA.

- Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Boekaerts, M. (1998). Coping in context, goal frustration and goal ambivalence in relation to academic and interpersonal goals. In E. Frydenberg (Ed.) *Learning to cope: Developing as a person in complex societies* (175-197). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boekaerts, M. & Corno, L. (2005). Self-regulation in the classroom: A perspective on assessment and intervention. *Applied Psychology*, 54(2), 199-231.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason. On the theory of action*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Butler, D. L. & Winne, P.H. (2005). Feedback and self-regulated learning: A theoretical synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 65, 245-281.
- Campbell, C. & Deed, C. (2007). Using an online journaling tool to collect rich self reflection data with elementary school children. In C. Crawford et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education International Conference 2007* (pp. 1926-1930). Chesapeake, VA: AACE.
- Chadbourne, R. (2001). *Middle schooling for the middle years. What might the jury be considering?* Victoria: Australian Education Union. <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/Middleschooling.pdf>
- Cottle, T. J. (2001). *Review of mind fields: Adolescence in a culture of distraction*. Peter Lang. New York.
- Dembo, M., & Eaton, M. (2000). Self-regulation of academic learning in middle-level schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 100, 473-490.
- Dweck, C. S. (2000). *Self theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Dweck, C. S. (2002). Beliefs that make smart people dumb. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Why smart people do stupid things*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Eccles, J. & Templeton, J. (2002). Extracurricular and other after-school activities for youth. *Review of Research in Education*, 26, 113-180.
- George, P. S. & Alexander, W. M. (2003). *The exemplary middle school*. Australia: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning Inc.
- Fredricks, J., Blumenfeld, P., & Paris, A. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109.
- Fredricks, J. & Eccles, J. (2002). Children's competence and value beliefs from childhood to adolescence: Growth trajectories in two "male-typed" domains. *Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 38, 519-533.
- Grinsven, L. & Tillema, H. (2006). Learning opportunities to support student self-regulation: Comparing different instructional formats. *Educational Research*, 48, 77-91.
- Hill, P., Holmes-Smith, P. & Rowe, K. (1993). *School and teacher effectiveness in Victoria: Key findings from Phase 1 of the Victorian Quality Schools Project*. Centre for Applied Educational Research, Melbourne.
- Hunter, L. (2007). Machinations in the middle. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 34(2), 1-6. <http://www.aare.edu.au/aer/online/0702aa.pdf>
- Luke, A., Elkins, J., Weir, K., Land, R., Carrington, V., Dole, S., Pendergast, D., Kapitzke C., van Kraayenoord, C., Moni, K., McIntosh, A., Mayer, D., Bahr, M., Hunter, L., Chadbourne, R., Bean, T., Alvermann, D. & Steven, L. (2003). *Beyond the middle: A report about literacy and numeracy development of target group students in the middle years of schooling* (Vols 1 & 2). Brisbane: J. S. McMillan Printing Group.
- Main, K. & Bryer, F. (2007). A framework for research into Australian middle school practice. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 34(2), 91- 105. <http://www.aare.edu.au/aer/online/0702f.pdf>
- Martin, A. & Marsh, H. (2006). Academic resilience and its psychological and educational correlates: A construct validity approach. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43, 267-281.

McGaw, B. (2004). Australian Mathematics Learning in an International Context. Paper presented at the Conference of the Mathematics Education Research Group in Australasia, *Mathematics Education for the Third Millennium: Towards 2010*. Townsville, 27-30 June.

http://www.merga.net.au/publications/counter.php?pub=pub_conf&id=181

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd Edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Munns, G. & Martin, A. (2005). It's all about MeE: A motivation and engagement framework. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, University of Western Sydney. <http://www.aare.edu.au/05pap/mun05400.pdf>

Nair, P. (2002). But are they learning? School buildings, the important unasked questions. Paper presented at the International Workshop on Educational Infrastructure, Guadalajara, Mexico, February. <http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED464479>

Perry, N, Phillips, L, & Hutchinson, L. (2006). Mentoring student teachers to support self-regulated learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(3), 237-254.

Pintrich, P. & De Groot, E. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 33-40.

Pendergast, D., Flanagan, R., Land, R., Bahr, M., Mitchell, J., Weir, K., Noblett, G., Cain, M., Misich, T., Carrington, V. & Smith, J. (2005). *Developing lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling*. Canberra, ACT: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Report. http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/lifelonglearn_midyears.pdf

Sullivan, P. McDonough, A., & Prain V. (2005). Student engagement in the middle years: Describing influences and possible teacher actions. *Proceedings of the Australian Association of Research in Education Annual Conference*. Sydney, November. <http://www.aare.edu.au/05pap/sul05134.pdf>

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Tillema, H., Kessels, J. & Meijers, F. (2000). Competencies as building blocks for integrating assessment with instruction. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 25(3), 265-278.

Wallace, J., Sheffield, R., Rennie, L., & Venville, G. (2007). Looking back, looking forward: Re-searching the conditions for curriculum integration in the middle years of schooling. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 34 (2), 29-49. <http://www.aare.edu.au/aer/online/0702c.pdf>

Winne, P.H. & Perry, N.E. (2000). Measuring self-regulated learning. In M. Boekaerts, P. Pintrich, & M. Seidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (p. 531-566). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Zimmermann, B. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: a social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. Pintrich & M. Zeiner (Eds.) *Handbook of self-regulation* (14-28). San Diego: Academic Press.

Zimmermann, B. (2001). *Theories of self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview and analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Zimmermann, B. & Pons, M. (1988). Construct validation of a strategy model of student self-regulated learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 284-290.

Authors: Dr Barbara Tadich is Vice-Principal, Emmanuel College, University of Queensland. Email: b.tadich@emmanuel.uq.edu.au

Dr Craig Deed is a lecturer in Theories of Learning in the School of Education, La Trobe University. Email: c.deed@latrobe.edu.au

Dr Chris Campbell is a lecturer in ICT in Education in the School of Education, La Trobe University. Email: chris.campbell@latrobe.edu.au

Professor Vaughan Prain is Head, School of Education, La Trobe University. Email: v.prain@latrobe.edu.au

Please cite as: Tadich, B., Deed, C., Campbell, C. & Prain, V. (2007). Student engagement in the middle years: A year 8 case study. *Issues In Educational Research*, 17(2), 256-271.

<http://www.iier.org.au/iier17/tadich.html>

