# Contents


**This we believe** ..... 4

**Getting started** ..... 5

**MODULE I – Facing the reality of change** ..... 7

Task 1: Read and reflect
Task 2: Spread the word
Task 3: Why people resist change
Task 4: The depth of change
Task 5: Understanding middle years lingo

**MODULE II – The nature of young adolescents** ..... 13

Task 1: Quiz on young adolescents
Task 2: 'Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder years'
Task 3: 'What does it mean to be thirteen?'
Task 4: Young adolescents and the changing society
Task 5: Characteristics of young adolescents

**MODULE III – Understanding the middle school concept** ..... 24

Task 1: The basics of middle years education
Task 2: *This We Believe* characteristics – 1982, 1995 and 2003
Task 3: *Turning Points 2000* recommendations
Task 4: Examine your middle school program
Task 5: The middle school – in free verse
Task 6: What research says about the middle school concept
Task 7: What a middle years school is not

**MODULE IV – Exploring curriculum, instruction and assessment** ..... 40

Task 1: Essential characteristics of curriculum
Task 2: Organising the middle school curriculum
Task 3: Multiple learning and teaching approaches
Task 4: Assessment and evaluation programs
Task 5: Organisational structures that support learning

**MODULE V – Putting it all together and moving ahead** ..... 44

Task 1: Forming an implementation steering committee
Task 2: Present your findings
Task 3: Mission statement
Task 4: Deciding where to start
Task 5: Involving others
Task 6: Using resources

**Middle years education library** ..... 47

# Getting started

*National Middle School Association seeks to conceptualise and promote successful middle level schools that enhance the healthy growth of young adolescents as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient young people who are optimistic about the future.*

– from ***This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents***

Understanding fully the middle school concept as set forth in *This We Believe* requires a degree of readiness, considerable reflection and professional development. Only initially and partially is establishing a middle school an organisational operation. Experience has made evident the reality that changing the name and the year level doesn't result in a true middle school. To put into practice the essential programmatic conditions of the concept involves changes in the school's culture, the individual and collective philosophies of the faculty and a new level of understanding and support from parents and the community. It is a journey that simply can't be completed quickly, but one that has to be taken step by step and must involve considerable reflection, discussion, experimentation and serious professional conversations all along the way. This kit is designed to assist a school in taking the essential first steps.

While middle schools began almost 100 years ago in the United States, the concept is relatively new in Australia, with very few schools organised in this way. While there are many middle schools and programs in the U.S. that have selected certain elements of the middle school concept, not many have as yet implemented programs that are fully consistent with the middle school concept. Today's middle schools are 'works in progress'.

This professional development kit contains materials and activities that will assist educators in their efforts to understand fully the middle school concept, particularly as they begin to incorporate its tenets in a school and its programs. The tasks in this professional development kit are appropriate for any school where young adolescents, 10- to 15-year-olds, are enrolled regardless of the year level configuration. It is also useful for pre-service teachers and experienced educators not now a part of a middle school faculty.

In trying to determine if this kit would be useful in your school, consider these questions. If you answer *no* to any of them, your school would be a good candidate to use this resource.

- Do all students learn at high levels and demonstrate their learning in multiple contexts?
- Does your school meet the developmental needs of its students intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically and psychologically?
- Is the climate of your school positive, productive and energising for students, faculty and staff?
- Are parents satisfied with the education their youngsters receive?
- Do all students achieve their potential?

## Using this kit

While there may be several ways to use this kit in a school, we strongly recommend that it be used by an entire staff. This will build a common understanding about the middle school concept and will provide the necessary foundation for making the programmatic changes that will inevitably be needed. The staff should be organised in small study groups to carry out most of the tasks presented with a facilitator identified for each team or group. Existing interdisciplinary teams may be such groups, but exploratory teachers and *all* certified personnel should be part of some team or study group. To oversee and direct the entire study, a small committee that includes an administrator should be established. This committee will need to review the entire contents of the kit. The status and needs of those in each school should determine the best use of these materials. For some faculties all of the tasks may not be needed, or some tasks may only be appropriate for faculty new to the middle school. While some sections or activities will need longer periods of time to complete – perhaps scheduled

© 2005 Hawker Brownlow Education HB4042

# Module I
## Facing the reality of change

The human resistance to change has often been illustrated by the quip, 'only a wet baby likes change'. We all prefer the familiar and resist changes in our routines. In light of this reality, efforts need to be made to pave the way for the reforms that will occur as the middle school concept is implemented. The several tasks below will focus all concerned on the reality that change presents.

### *Task 1: Read and reflect*

Read and reflect on the quotes on p. 8 and any others that members of your group may contribute. Arrangements should be made for one quote to be included regularly in the daily bulletin. A few others can be made into posters to hang in the staffroom. In whatever way possible, make change a topic of conversation among the faculty.

### *Task 2: Spread the word*

Select one of the more pithy quotes (p. 8) such as Thoreau's, and prepare a paragraph of elaboration and expansion with implications. Distribute to faculty at an appropriate time, or have it included in the school's newsletter.

### *Task 3: Why people resist change*

Use the handout of 'People resist change in educational practices when …' (p. 9) as the basis for discussion about the points made, and then complete the column provided for ways each condition cited can be countered. Each small group's completed list will then be turned over to a committee to compile a summary statement that will guide plans.

### *Task 4: The depth of change*

Change, if it is to last, has to become a part of the school's culture – and this does not occur overnight or by an administrative decision. In groups, consider the six quotes on p. 10. Each group should prepare two or three statements growing out of the quotes to share with the faculty.

- ✓ Are they valid?
- ✓ Do we see ourselves as a learning community?
- ✓ What evidence supports this?
- ✓ What specific steps can be taken to help make our school a 'learning school'?
- ✓ What are the implications of the last two quotes, and how can their points be incorporated in our plans?

### *Task 5: Understanding middle years lingo*

To communicate effectively, a commonly understood vocabulary is necessary – and the middle school does have its lingo. Make copies of the glossary (pp. 11–12) for everyone to consult in completing this task, and retain for continuing reference.

First, **before** reading the definitions individually, place a mark beside those terms you understand and can successfully explain in your own words. Then read the glossary's definition of the terms marked to see if they match your understanding. Where differences occur, and for those items not checked, discuss those items with a colleague until you both feel comfortable with the meaning of all the terms.

© 2005 Hawker Brownlow Education HB4042