Teachers, Gender and the *Report of the Junior Secondary Review*

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This article focuses on the first Australian report on middle schooling, the *Report of the Junior Secondary Review* (hereafter JSR), (Eyers, Cormack & Barratt, 1992). This report has been a catalyst for the burgeoning interest in middle schooling in South Australia and is used as a key reference for studies in other Australian states. The final report on which this article is based was completed in October 1992, and attracted some media and academic interest (Cross, 1993). The Department of Education and Children's Services subsequently used the JSR as the blueprint for its *Action Plan in Middle Schooling* (1994). Some commentators (Coote & Williams, 1996) suggest that it was a particularly useful resource for schools as they moved to implement middle school practices and over time it has become accepted as an authoritative document.

Teachers as an occupational group are not the main focus of the JSR but the report argues that cultural change in the teaching labourforce is needed if middle schooling is to be successful. The review process was informed by a comprehensive survey of state school principals, primary and secondary teachers (Barratt, Cormack, Eyers & Withers, 1992) but there are no references to the survey in the sections of the report which pertain to teachers. Instead the JSR relies on Canadian research (Hargreaves & Earl, 1990) to discuss primary teachers, explicate secondary school cultures and construct an ideal middle school teacher. Whatever their origin, discourses about teachers in authoritative documents such as the JSR are selective. Nevertheless, they are invoked to mount a case for reform. This article argues that the JSR provided a limited and limiting perspective of existing primary and secondary school cultures in order to persuade its audience about the efficacy of middle schooling. Given that the JSR continues to be used to underpin policy and practice, it is pertinent to ask what kind of critique is being made of current primary and secondary, men and women teachers? Whose interests are being served? Furthermore, how is the ideal middle school teacher being conceptualised and what are some implications for the teaching labour force?

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In keeping with the JSR's acknowledgment that current primary and secondary school structures and staffing arrangements are historically constituted, this article will identify historical continuities as well as contemporary discourses to answer the aforementioned questions. Historical perspectives are particularly valuable in explicating the formation of present day gender inequalities in the teaching labourforce. Unless we analyse the implications and implicit assumptions about gender difference and the ways teaching has been defined we stand to replicate them (Freedman, 1990). This article exposes discourses of gender which underpin the images of primary, secondary and middle school teachers in the JSR.

The caring and controlling upper primary teacher

Much of what is written about teachers in the JSR is not explicit about their gender location. However, in the midst of a discussion about early adolescents, it briefly acknowledges that teaching is women's work in primary schools.

> In one moment, a teacher may feel that she is dealing and reasoning with a virtual adult in mental capacity and insight: at the next with a child needing care, reassurance and direct instructional 'scaffolding'. (Eyers et al, 1992, p. 8)

In fact there has been a gendered division of labour in state schools since the introduction of compulsory education in 1875. In common with Australian education departments elsewhere, the South Australian education department clamoured to attract men into teaching, paid them salaries which enabled them to marry and support a family, protected their career paths and ensured that they would end their careers in administrative positions as headmasters or inspectors. In spite of these efforts men have never constituted more than thirty percent of state school employees in primary schools. Women employees have dominated numerically but the vast majority have spent their careers as classroom teachers. In essence, women have constituted the majority of primary teachers since the introduction of compulsory education in the nineteenth century while administration has remained men's work (Freedman, 1990; Kyle, 1988; Strober & Tyack, 1980; Whitehead, 1996). Notwithstanding equal opportunity policies, this was the case when the JSR was being written and remains so today (Gill & Starr, 1999). So how is the upper primary teacher portrayed in the JSR?

To begin with, she nurtures students in ways that are presumed to typify mothering by white middle class women. The JSR identifies interpersonal nurturance and care as the core construct in primary schools and it claims that junior primary classrooms in particular 'are like nuclear families, albeit with one 'parent', the teacher' (p. 53). Teaching in this context is conceptualised as an extension of mothering. It 'relies on 'natural' female characteristics and talents' rather than being intellectual work (Miller, 1996, p. 76). From an historical perspective it should be noted that the nurturing discourse was first co-opted by male administrators to justify women's numerical dominance in late nineteenth century state school systems. However, many nineteenth century women teachers preferred discourses of professionalism to describe their work (Whitehead, 1996). The JSR is silent about alternative historical and contemporary views of women teachers' work.

Although junior primary teachers/mothers are just doing what comes naturally, the JSR claims that 'care' in the upper primary classroom is linked to control. Control is not seen in terms of providing an orderly institutional environment in which students are able to perform academic tasks to the best of their ability. Rather, it is an oppressive emotion and linked to ownership and restraint of young adolescent students (Hargreaves, 1994). Women teachers are seen to have a natural rapport with young children but in the case of the upper primary teacher this 'can become restrictive to development and learning' (p. 53) in the early adolescent years. In upper primary classrooms it seems that caring is overplayed, mothering becomes smothering and students' academic and developmental needs are not being met. The discourse of the caring and controlling upper primary teacher is ever present in the JSR. Although her classroom is 'warmly nurturing' it is also 'closely controlled' (p. 8), isolated from other adults and resistant to change.

In at least three sections of the JSR the writers seem unsure about the intellectual capacities of the upper primary teacher and question her ability to provide a sufficiently rigorous curriculum for early adolescents. They applaud the intent to develop students' interpersonal skills along with the 3Rs. However, in upper primary classrooms curriculum is seen to be too idiosyncratic as 'other aspects of the program are generally dependent on the skills and teaching of the individual teacher'(p. 76). From the JSR's perspective a generalist teacher might be unable to challenge students intellectually across the curriculum.

The scepticism about primary teachers relates not only to young adolescents' academic needs but also to their differing social and emotional needs. It is doubtful whether the caring and controlling upper primary teacher has the intellectual capacity to cope with such diversity.

> The developing social values of young adolescents with their concerns about their own physical and emotional development and their broadening interests, represent a real challenge to the single class teacher. Young adolescents develop values and ways of thinking that are different from their teachers, and they will also exhibit the same kind of diversity among themselves that is found in wider society (Eyers et al, 1992, p. 54).

Is the JSR implying that the mother/teacher belongs to the private sphere of the family (Acker, 1994; Dillabough, 1999; Freedman, 1990) and can not engage with the public sphere? According to the JSR, young adolescents require

> access to an adult who can act as a mentor or provide useful advice and support (at the most basic level, for example, students can benefit from access to a teacher of the same gender) (Eyers et al, 1992, p. 54).

Given that primary school teaching is women's work, it would seem the JSR is advocating a more masculinised teaching labour force to cater for young adolescents' intellectual and social development. If so, it is continuing the longstanding argument that more men are needed as teachers (Kyle, 1988; Whitehead, 1996).

Andy Hargreaves (1994, p. 146) argues that 'when teaching is seen as the kinds of caring and nurturing relationships that typify parenting', there is little discussion of pedagogical and professional issues. This is the case in the JSR. The upper primary teacher is depicted as an isolated individual who seems not to interact with her colleagues, engage in the micro-politics of the school or the profession. The deficiencies in upper primary schooling are located within individual teachers rather than being discussed as matters of school structure and organisation. However, the JSR takes up this argument in relation to secondary teachers.

The self-serving secondary subject specialist

Although the JSR argues that existing secondary schools are not well suited to young adolescents, it attributes the problems to a culture that sustains a particular form of school organisation rather than the deficits of individual teachers. At no point is the JSR explicit about secondary teachers' gender location but secondary school culture is implicitly coded male, and the report is adamant that in workplaces where primary and secondary teachers are brought together secondary culture will dominate. Secondary teachers are never discussed in familial terms. Instead they belong to the public sphere and are enmeshed in the intellectual, social and political community that constitutes the secondary school. The gender order of the occupation is preserved by privileging secondary teaching as intellectual work and primary teaching as nurturing. It should be noted, however, that although secondary school administration is mostly in men's hands, there are approximately equal numbers of men and women teachers in state secondary schools.

The JSR claims that 'the existing patterns of timetable arrangements, teacher allocations and hard-edged subject divisions act to keep teachers from developing the relationships which are needed' (p. 46) to cater for young adolescents. Teachers, it seems, are locked into organisational arrangements which make it impossible for them 'to get to know their students as learners ... and as people' (p. 55), but also to exercise appropriate control over their behaviour. Whereas in primary schools the problem is excessive care and control, in secondary schools the issue is the absence of care and control. According to the JSR, because secondary teachers do not know their students they become excessively attached to the content of their curriculum specialisation and this leads to didactic pedagogy and authoritarian behaviour management.

Although secondary teachers' pedagogical skills are called into question, their intellectual capacities are not. Secondary teachers, it seems, are victims of their preservice training which did not provide them with the skills of classroom practice. Nevertheless, their specialist curriculum knowledge remains the key to meeting young adolescents' needs. There is no suggestion that, given more appropriate school organisation, secondary teachers would not be able to cater for students' diverse intellectual, social and emotional needs. Indeed, at one stage of the report all problems of young adolescents and their secondary teachers are seen to be 'a direct consequence of the secondary model of schooling.' (p. 56).

While many of the issues regarding the education of young adolescents in secondary schools are attributed to deficient organisation, teachers are portrayed as actively perpetuating fragmentation of the curriculum into discrete subjects. 'Hargreaves and Earl argue that this is because subjects are not simply curriculum classifications but the basis of the political and social structure of the school'(p. 92). Secondary teachers' identities and allegiances are seen to be enmeshed in their subject specialisations. The JSR quotes Andy Hargreaves and Lorna Earl's research: 'School communities are not just intellectual communities. They are social and political communities too'(p. 92). As members of insulated but competing subgroups who 'own' subjects, secondary teachers negotiate for maximum time allocation for their subjects, according to the JSR, rather than considering the needs of young adolescent students. Unlike primary teachers, secondary teachers are seen to be too actively involved in the micro-politics of schools. The JSR claims that 'secondary schools have long had the power to set up a curriculum'(p. 92) which supports young adolescent students. However, the specialist-subject communities are repositories of self interest and do not care sufficiently for their students.

Creating a 'culture gap'

In essence, the JSR works assiduously to polarise the current cohort of upper primary and secondary teachers in South Australian state schools. The 'single teacher working in a single class' in a primary school is excessively caring and restricts young adolescents' development and learning. 'However, the traditional secondary school staffing arrangements go too far in the other direction, leading to a fragmented curriculum'(p. 55). The secondary teacher is excessively specialised and this results in 'a lack of adult guidance and support'(p. 55). These images of primary and secondary teachers reflect ideas of gender difference for which there are many historical continuities. The JSR rarely acknowledges that gender is an issue affecting both teachers and young adolescent students nor does it explain that there are historical precedents for its strategy of marginalising both primary and secondary teachers in order to construct a space for middle schooling. In the 1960s British advocates argued the need for a unique model of middle schooling which would transcend existing primary and secondary cultures (Hargreaves & Tickle, 1980). In 1992 the JSR promulgated the same argument:

> Strong and traditional primary and secondary cultures exist. Warmly nurturing but closely controlled on the one hand, and fragmented into separate subject departments in the other, they seem more appropriate for use towards the ends of the R-12 continuum than in the middle. It is believed that these two basic views of schooling are not well suited for young adolescents, nor for the productive involvement of their teachers and families.
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> These young people need room to grow towards independence and to accomplish their developmental tasks in a caring, purposeful and challenging environment with well-understood limits. A schooling culture gap has been left in the middle which needs to be filled. (Eyers et al, 1992, p. 14).

So who will teach 'in the middle'?

The middle school mentor and monitor

The JSR argues that young adolescents 'need a special kind of relationship with adults' (p. 45) and locates schools as the places which will compensate for the inadequacies of families.

> Extended and two-parent nuclear families have become less common, while in many households a reliable and positive male role-model may not be found. Reliable adults with developmental roles to play are just as important to positive development as they have ever been. However, if anything, their roles are more important than before. Progressively, societal and economic changes have transferred more aspects of these roles to the teachers and other adults who work in schools. (Eyers et al, 1992, pp. 45-46).

By implication the reliable adult middle school teacher will be a male who provides 'productive support'(p. 45) for young adolescents. (Given the JSR's predilection for role models there might also be a place for some women as role models for girls.) However, there is no place for the caring and controlling woman teacher who smothers her students. Instead, the JSR carefully constructs a version of interpersonal caring based on emotional distance and rationality as the appropriate model for the middle school teacher. It argues that students need to develop 'rewarding and non-dependent relationships' and to do this 'extended productive time' (p. 46) with teachers is required. In introducing the latter concept the JSR acknowledges that it is reformulating the 'descriptive phrase 'quality time'' for use in the middle school. It should be noted that this discourse of parenting is mostly applied to the relationships in middle class nuclear families rather than the aforementioned single-parent families. Perhaps the ideal middle school teacher is a middle class man.

The JSR explicates the relationship between the middle school teacher and his students by arguing that it should be paternal rather than fraternal. 'This kind of relationship doesn't mean being a 'buddy' ... It may mean adults being more of a mentor, for young adolescents need to feel there is a reasonable adult who will listen to them and sometimes speak for them' (p. 47). The JSR argues that young adolescents want 'trusted teachers' (p. 46) who will guide them to make the right choices. Mentoring is promoted as a 'productive relationship'. It 'is not some soft and general call for uncritical social warmth' (p. 48). Mentoring is men's work.

The middle school teacher is not only expected to enter into a mentoring relationship with individuals but he is also responsible for 'monitoring student development' (p. 60), especially the personal and social development of those who are at risk. He will 'communicate caring' to these students through 'tough love' and confront them about their transgressions 'in a stern and honest manner' (p. 47). One of the most significant transgressions is truancy. The JSR argues that there should be 'an explicit focus on attendance with proactive measures to maintain high levels' (p. 135). This aspect of monitoring might have historical origins in Bell's monitorial system of teaching in the late eighteenth century. It began as 'an experiment for teaching the illegitimate and mixed-race offspring of military personnel in Madras' (Miller, 1996, p. 270) and was taken up as the chief means of supervising and educating working class children in many countries (Miller, 1998). In contemporary

parlance such students would almost certainly be categorised as 'at risk'. Notwithstanding these historical links, the JSR seems to invoke the discourse of monitoring to describe the middle class male teacher's relationship with at risk students while reserving the mentoring relationship for middle class adolescent boys.

Middle school teachers are expected to 'know their stuff'(p. 57) and be able to teach a broader range of subjects than is typical of the secondary school subject specialist. This does not mean that they will be generalist teachers for they are expected to possess more specialist knowledge than primary teachers. Indeed, the middle school teacher will be much more closely aligned with his colleagues in secondary schools than in primary schools. He will provide productive support that does not stifle young adolescents' personal and social development, and an intellectually challenging curriculum to satisfy their academic needs.

One of the JSR's major recommendations is that middle schools should be organised into 'learning communities', that is groups of four to six teachers who spend most of their working time with the same students. The learning community is acknowledged as a derivative of the house system which was originally introduced into private boarding schools for wealthy boys in early nineteenth century Britain (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996). However, its purposes are more about mentoring and monitoring individuals than building esprit de corps. The JSR claims that learning communities will

> strengthen productive adult-student contact; provide ways in which teachers can build on their close understandings of the students to shape the curriculum; provide ways of monitoring and maintaining attendance in natural ways; more easily identify problems and intervene when students are experiencing difficulties (Eyers et al, 1992, p. 40).

Learning communities are the antithesis of the intellectual, political and social communities which are inhabited by the secondary school subject specialists. 'The concept of learning communities helps to describe structures which are deliberately established to suit groups of young adolescents, and those who work with and/or support them' (p. 68). Middle school teachers are expected to work collaboratively and focus on classroom practice and associated organisational matters. 'In these learning communities important decisions are made about such things as the use of time, grouping of students, curriculum delivery and teaching/learning practices' (p. 67). The learning community is also the main site for teachers' professional development. However, they share their 'good ideas and practices' (p. 155) rather than expanding their subject content knowledge or engaging with broader issues which affect the occupation. In effect, middle school teachers are presented as depoliticised individuals who do not engage in the micro-politics of schools or in the broader political and industrial issues which affect their work. In this view, middle school teachers are technicians, not politicians.

In order to 'nurture bonds between teacher and student' (p. 61), and also 'dramatically' reduce discipline problems, the learning community is subdivided into teams of teachers who are responsible for pastoral care. Threaded through the discussion of team teaching is a similar discourse to the one used in reference to

junior primary schools. The JSR argues that 'special efforts have to be made not to lose the natural benefits of close relationships in the single teacher arrangement' (p. 71) and locates the core teaching team and 'home groups' as the solutions. Is the core teaching team a surrogate family where the middle school mentor and monitor will be the patriarch, the reliable male role model, and will there also be a female role model for the girls? It could be that the mid-nineteenth century husband and wife teaching family which underpinned South Australia's earliest state school system (Lesko, 1994, Whitehead, 1996) is being reconstituted as a core teaching team within the learning community.

How will the middle school teacher be rewarded for his extended productive efforts on behalf of young adolescent students? Given that he is depoliticised, he is unlikely to engage in industrial action to improve his working conditions. Instead, in the time honoured way he will be promoted from the classroom into administration (Whitehead, 1996). The JSR recommends that middle schooling must be underpinned by short and long term career opportunities for teachers and leaders. Indeed, it sees these arrangements as essential to recruiting current primary and secondary teachers who will magically adopt the requisite middle school teacher identity.

Image meets reality - implications for teachers and the occupation

The JSR represents teachers in ways which undermine the current cohort who work in South Australian schools. When negative images are promulgated in authoritative documents such as the JSR they impact on teachers' lives and careers in many ways. This article has demonstrated that representations of primary, secondary and middle school teachers reflect gendered discourses which reinforce the subordination of women in the occupation. The JSR barely acknowledges the gendered division of labour and its approach to middle schooling may further legitimate those divisions. The nurturing discourse, for example, centralises women as junior primary teachers but marginalises them as intellectuals and as teachers of young adolescents. Although men occupy positions of intellectual and administrative authority, their work as teachers is restricted in many ways too. Secondary teachers' capacities to form effective relationships with students are constantly questioned and the middle school teacher's role as a carer is circumscribed. According to the JSR, middle school teachers must adopt emotionally detached relations to mentor and monitor students' behaviour yet, simultaneously, they are expected to form closer bonds to motivate students as learners (Ginsburg, Kamat, Raghu & Weaver, 1995). When these contradictory ideas are presented unproblematically, individual men and women, primary and secondary teachers become vulnerable to accusations of not possessing the desired attributes to teach young adolescents, and the occupation risks further fragmentation.

Although the JSR marginalises both primary and secondary teachers it is well aware that middle school teachers will be recruited from the existing labour force. It argues that the ideal teachers will be those 'who wish to work with these students, and who are skilled and feel confident to teach across several curriculum areas, and

who are prepared to offer consistent and long-term support to their students' (p. 73). Furthermore, it will be necessary 'to blend good practice and insights from people in each sector' (p. 17) and over time create a new culture which serves the needs of young adolescents. Given that primary and secondary teachers are reputed to be 'puzzled and disaffected when they visit each other' (p. 32), it is difficult to envisage how 'a new and distinct 6-9 schooling culture' (p. 186) might develop without addressing these micro-political tensions. Nevertheless, the JSR intends to connect rather than divide the teaching labour force by constructing a middle school teacher who will fill the gap between primary and secondary cultures. In so doing the JSR adopts the same position as British middle schooling advocates (Hargreaves & Tickle, 1980). Both argue that a unique middle schooling identity will transcend the pre-existing primary and secondary cultures and unite the fragmented teaching labour force. This did not happen in the United Kingdom (Bornett, 1980) and there are also unresolved tensions between various groups of teachers in South Australian middle school contexts (McInerney, Hattam, Smyth, & Lawson, 1999).

Perhaps as the middle schooling movement is now beginning to mature it is time to acknowledge the complexities which surround middle schooling rather than deflecting attention from them by promoting its uniqueness. This is already happening in a variety of recent Australian studies: Some have begun to critique transition (Yates, 1999) and the discourses of adolescence (Cormack, 1998). Others explore key issues such as integrated curriculum (Brennan, Sachs & Merritt, 1998) and authentic assessment (Cormack, Johnson, Peters & Williams, 1998) in middle schools. Coote & Williams (1996) have found that middle school teachers' work intensifies with the formation of learning communities. However, besides looking at issues which distinguish middle schooling from primary and secondary schooling it is also necessary to investigate those which are shared by teachers in all sectors. The intensification of teacher's work, for example, is not unique to middle school contexts and nor are the narrow interpretations of training and development which are promulgated by the JSR as appropriate for middle school teachers.

In this article the discourse of caring has been a constant theme across all sectors. A commitment to interpersonal care which focuses on the needs of individuals is constructed as the keystone of teacher-student relationships in middle schools. It is also a problematic benchmark against which men and women in primary and secondary schools are measured. We need to look much more closely at the discourses of care and ask which students' and teachers' interests are being served by constructs that are based on white middle class norms. These theories of caring 'are *not* culturally neutral' (Wilder, 1999, p. 358) and may disenfranchise the students who are most at-risk in schools. According to the JSR, the middle school teacher's relationship with at risk students seems to be one of surveillance rather than emotionally detached mentoring. Perhaps constructs of care which attend to students' gender, culture and economic circumstances and focus on the good of the group as well as individuals (Thompson, 1998; Wilder, 1999) might produce more socially-just schooling. Acknowledging the complexities of teacher-student relationships has implications for all teachers, not only those who work in middle schools.

Conclusion

This article has identified some gendered discourses which seem to be reflected in the images of primary, secondary and middle school teachers as they are portrayed in the JSR. It has also demonstrated ways in which these limited images disenfranchise primary and secondary teachers, men and women and contribute to divisions within the occupation. In order to explicate the issues, historical perspectives have been brought to bear at several points in the discussion. Historical knowledge will not supply 'the answer' to issues. However, it can help to problematise current orthodoxies by providing a framework for critical reflection. This paper has shown that there are many historical continuities for the ways in which schools are structured and for the gendering of educational hierarchies. In the absence of historical analysis, efforts to introduce middle schooling may entrench gendered assumptions about teachers and students, and further institutionalise gendered divisions of labour. If we are to more fully apprehend the nature of middle school teachers' work, including their relationships with students, we need to reflect upon their lineage and critique current 'solutions'. Exploring and understanding ways in which teachers are represented in authoritative documents besides the JSR from historical and contemporary perspectives may well provide fresh insights into the challenges of teaching young adolescents and the issues that confront the occupation.

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