Preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle schooling teacher preparation: a sample of the Australian context

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Southern Cross University

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS
OF THEIR MIDDLE SCHOOLING
TEACHER PREPARATION: A SAMPLE OF
THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

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MEd; BEd; TESOL; TEFOL; Dip Teach

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Original Authorship

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I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

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Abstract

Reviews into teacher education and reform measures, such as implementing professional standards for teachers, are designed to raise the quality of education. Such reviews and reforms also target preservice teachers; hence universities examine their teacher education programs to address these issues, including developing programs that are current with the literature. Over the past fifteen years, concerns have arisen about Australian early adolescents and their disengagement from the schooling system, their “at risk” behaviour and their need for social, emotional and academic support. These concerns have prompted a middle schooling movement in Australia with the literature recognising a need for specialised middle school teachers. As a result, various universities have responded by developing courses specifically designed to graduate teachers who possess the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for engaging early adolescent learners. This mixed-method study analysed the responses of preservice teachers from three universities across two states in Australia near the completion of their middle years teacher preparation program. The three aims of the study were to: (1) investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling; (2) analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident; and (3) describe strategies for enhancing middle schooling teacher education preparation. Data were gathered from final-year preservice teachers ($n=142$) using a survey that was developed in response to middle schooling literature and the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). A questionnaire collected extended information about the participants’ ($n=142$) experiences that made them feel confident. It also gathered
information about strategies for enhancing middle years teacher preparation. One-to-one, 45-minute interviews \((n=10)\) were conducted to elicit in-depth responses aligned with the research aims. Quantitative results indicated that the majority of preservice teachers \((n=142)\) claimed confidence associated with survey items relating to creating a positive classroom environment (range: 70-97%), developing positive relationships for teaching (71-98%), pedagogical knowledge for teaching (72-95%), and implementation of teaching (70-91%). Qualitative findings suggested that the experiences that assisted them to be confident for teaching were practicum and associated field studies coursework, a positive mentor teacher, specifically designed middle years subjects, the pedagogical approaches of university staff, and other real-world experiences such as volunteering in schools and participating in professional development alongside their mentors. This study demonstrated that universities presenting middle years teacher preparation need to consider: the quality of the practicum experience; the suitability of mentor teachers; the significance and practicalities of middle years subjects; university lecturers’ modelling of pedagogical practices; and the inclusion of real-world learning experiences. Although the findings of this study provided evidence as to how preservice teacher confidence for teaching has been influenced by their middle schooling teacher preparation, further research is required to investigate how confidence translates into practice within their first years of teaching.
Preface

I completed my teacher education training in New South Wales, Australia in 1978. After three years of teaching in a metropolitan school I felt I was developing into an effective teacher that could engage, motivate and encourage learning. I had positive student outcomes which instilled a notion that I was doing a “good job”. In my fourth year of teaching I moved to a regional area in northern New South Wales and was allocated to a grade 6 class. I now reflect upon this time as one of the greatest learning experiences of my teaching career. Although I had the content knowledge for teaching, I had difficulty engaging these particular students. My focus each day was on behaviour management and importantly, I was concerned about student achievement levels under my guidance. At this time, I had limited knowledge of early adolescent development or concepts around the middle years of schooling.

In frustration, I sought advice from a colleague who was teaching grade 6 in the classroom next door. She had a range of effective teaching strategies that she shared with me on a daily basis. Her behaviour management approaches, which were geared towards understanding and knowing the students, were explicit with clear expectations, and at the same time, empowered the students with the notion that they were responsible for their own behaviour. Diversity in the classroom was celebrated each morning by students telling stories about their cultural heritage and family life. As she said, it was an opportunity to get to know what “made the students tick”. Emphasis on hands-on learning activities meant that when I visited her class, it was buzzing with the excitement of learning. Parents were invited to assist in the
classroom and I noticed she took the time to speak to those parents who came to collect their children after school.

I began to experience success when I adopted many of the same strategies my colleague had modelled for me. After two terms, I had confidence to implement my own approaches and, it was not long before I shared them with my colleague. My classroom became an exciting place to be with students engaged and interested in learning. Not only was I enjoying the students and teaching, but my colleague and I had a rewarding year comparing our ideas, discussing teaching strategies and talking about our students. Working together made us all the more motivated for teaching and we felt our students benefited from our collegial approach. At the end of the year, we decided to have a parent/student information session about the expectations for the following year at secondary school. We invited teachers from the surrounding secondary schools to present information about the different contexts. Our principal noted this was an “innovative idea”.

The growth of the middle years of schooling movement in Australia over the past fifteen years, combined with my own experiences of teaching early adolescents has been the impetus for this study. I often reflect on my experiences in that year 6 classroom all those years ago, the assistance I gained from my colleague, and how much I benefited from the sharing of conversations about the students and strategies for teaching. Teachers of early adolescents need knowledge about middle schooling philosophies, and the practices and attributes to be effective in the classroom. It is hoped this study provides some insight into the preparation of middle school teachers
and promotes continued dialogue around the need to support early adolescents in our
Australian schools.
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Finally, I wish to acknowledge my colleagues at both Southern Cross University and Queensland University of Technology who made available time to discuss my research and provide advice and suggestions. I feel I have benefited greatly in being associated with passionate high-calibre teacher educators that continually review their work and programs towards producing quality teachers.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wonderful husband and our three fabulous children in appreciation of their patience, love and understanding. They inspire me every day with their perspectives on life and their willingness to share their joy and passion for everything they undertake.

I also dedicate this work to my parents, grandparents and extended family who taught me the value of an education and how it can change lives. I have been blessed to be surrounded by those who believed it was important to strive to make a difference and modelled this in their everyday lives.
Chapter 1

Overview of this thesis

1.1 Chapter preview

This research investigates preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle schooling teacher preparation. Chapter 1 provides an overview of broad issues relating to teacher education reviews (Section 1.1.1), the need to support early adolescents (Section 1.1.2), and teacher confidence for teaching in the middle school (Section 1.1.3). The context for this research is outlined (Section 1.2) followed by the study’s purpose (Section 1.3) and the problem is identified with a direction for the investigation (Section 1.4). The three research aims (Section 1.5) are highlighted and the theoretical framework underpinning this investigation is presented (Section 1.6). The research methods (Section 1.7) show how this inquiry is guided and, as in any research, this investigation presents possible limitations (Section 1.8). The chapter concludes with a summary (Section 1.9) and thesis overview (Section 1.10).

1.1.1 Introduction.

Effective teachers make the difference to education (Bishop, 2008; Hattie, 2003; Rowe, 2004), which is a vision that drives government reviews for ensuring quality teacher education programs in Australia. Striving for excellence in teacher preparation is underpinned by the notion that the quality of the teacher is an important factor for creating positive educational outcomes for students (Nelson, 2002; Queensland Government, 2010; Victoria Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005). Devising programs that
produce quality teachers who are competent and confident to teach is a shared goal of teacher education institutions and government bodies, as indicated over the past three decades by internal and external reviews investigating teacher education and teacher quality (Ingvarson, Elliott, Kleinhenz, & McKenzie, 2006). Recommendations for enhancing teacher education programs in Australia include attributes graduate teachers should possess (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2006).

To promote and acknowledge the need for teacher quality, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2003) developed the National Profiles for Teachers. Profile statements outline the need to raise the status of the teaching profession, ensure quality teacher education programs, and provide for teacher renewal (MCEETYA, 2003). Each Australian State and Territory has responded by developing their own set of standards that underpin key principles of teacher quality (e.g., Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). Consequently, universities have aligned their courses to state standards for ensuring graduates have effective practitioner attributes (Australian Council of Educational Research [ACER], 2004a). More recently, with the release of a national system for accreditation of preservice teacher education programs, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has now established and will monitor and update a set of national graduate teacher standards. As a result, universities will again be required to re-examine their courses (AITSL, 2011).

Universities are obligated to respond to government policies about teacher education, hence, graduates must be provided with teacher education courses that support the acquisition of practitioner standards. These standards emphasise the development of
theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for effective teaching practices that engage learners (AITSL, 2011; Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). For over a decade in Australia, there have been growing concerns over the lack of engagement among early adolescent learners (Carrington, 2006). These concerns have been supported by research and reports both nationally and internationally (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; Barratt, 1998; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Chadbourne, 2001; Cumming, 1998; Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Felner et al., 1997; Hill & Russell 1999; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Luke at al., 2003; National Middle School Association, 2003a; Pendergast et al., 2005). These documents have been the impetus for the realisation that teachers need to be well prepared in understanding and supporting early adolescents. Teacher education institutions responded through the implementation of subjects and courses with a focus on the middle years of schooling.

The need for specialist training of middle school teachers has meant the emergence of Australian universities developing degrees, dual degrees and graduate diploma courses specifically designed to prepare preservice teachers for this distinct period of development (Mitchell et al., 2003; Pendergast, 2010; Pendergast, Whitehead, De Jong, Newhouse-Maiden, & Bahr, 2007). The research, literature, and government recommendations have informed the development of university degrees for teaching in the middle school. Philosophical frameworks underpinning these degrees relate specifically to middle schooling, which includes the need for teachers to deliver curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that is developmentally responsive (Hunter, 2007).
1.1.2 The need to support early adolescents.

The need to support early adolescents in Australia has been strongly influenced by the literature and research that has emanated from the United States (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Pendergast et al., 2005). Although this will be analysed further in Chapter 2, a brief overview of the emergence of middle schooling in the United States provides support for this study in the Australian context.

Prosser (2006) claims that middle schooling emerged in the United States from reforms related to junior secondary schools. This is further substantiated by Manning and Bucher (2005) who purport that junior secondary schools were nationally approved in the United States in 1918 and were the predecessors to middle schools. Junior secondary schools developed as a result of concerns about student retention rates, transition to secondary school, the need to adequately prepare students for college, concerns for immigrants and their lack of literacy, performance at school, poor skills development and subsequent high unemployment rates (Anafara, 2001; Beane, 2005; Cuban, 1992). These junior secondary schools, although touted to be developmentally responsive to students’ requirements, were criticised as there appeared to be an over emphasis on the organisational structures rather than addressing the developmental and social needs of the students (Beane, 2001).

The middle schooling movement in the United States gained further momentum when Alexander, known as a pioneer in middle schooling (Beane, 2005; Lounsbury & Vars, 2005), in his 1963 speech at the Tenth Annual Conference of School Administration held at Cornell University, called for schooling that addressed the specific needs of those
students in the middle years (Anafara, Andrews, & Mertens, 2005). This view influenced the development of the middle school reform movement (Anafara, 2001) and, by the end of the 1970s, Daniels, Bizar and Zemelman (2001) claim there were over ten thousand middle schools. These middle schools were signified by a more liberal attitude to education and racial integration. They were further influenced by the unemployment of early school leavers, the influx of large numbers of baby boomers and their impact on the demographics and culture of schools (Beane, 2005).

In the 1980s, the middle schooling movement received additional support with the formation of the National Middle School Association (NMSA) (Prosser, 2006). NMSA called for specific education that addressed the needs of early adolescents, greater academic challenges and, significant to this study, the need for specially trained middle school teachers to engage and educate early adolescent students (Manning & Bucher, 2005). Pedagogical approaches also emerged that aligned with the notion of early adolescent engagement. Such practices as the integrated curriculum (Beane, 1991) and authentic achievement (Neumann & Associates, 1996) informed teaching approaches and provided strategies for teachers to adopt and enhance the education of early adolescents.

As a result of the implementation of suggested middle schooling practices, debate emerged between progressive and traditional styles of education, consequently, an influential culmination of papers known as Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) were developed. The misalignment between early adolescent development, school structures and curriculum, poor quality teaching, student alienation and absenteeism were identified by the Turning Points report (Prosser, 2006). This prominent report highlighted the need for connected community schooling, opportunities
for success for all students, strong academic focus, promotion of the health and well being of early adolescent students and specialised middle school teacher training (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Just as Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) influenced the directions of middle schooling in the United States, it also influenced the development of middle school reforms in Australia (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). Similar to the United States, the need to produce middle school teachers has arisen from the recognition that early adolescence is a distinct stage of development (Hunter, 2007; Luke et al., 2003; Main & Bryer, 2007; Stevens et al., 2007). Although early adolescence is not distinguishable solely by age, most authors note that it is between the ages of 10 to 15 years (Chadbourne, 2001; Pendergast, 2005; Wormelli, 2001) and is commonly associated with grades 4 to 9 or 5 to 10, depending on the Australian state’s education system (Knipe & Johnston, 2007). This period of schooling is generally referred to as the “middle school”, “middle years” or “middle phase” of learning. Just as it is recognised in the literature from the United States, in Australia it is viewed as a period when young people experience significant physical, emotional, cognitive and psychological changes (McInerney & McInerney, 2006); furthermore, it can be a time where young people make decisions that impact on the rest of their lives (Powell, 2005).

Early adolescents, or those in the middle years of schooling, can be viewed as “at risk” (Carrington, 2002, p. 4), as early adolescence can be a period where young people may experiment socially and sexually, with some becoming disengaged from family, teachers and their schooling (Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Hill & Russell, 1999; Smyth,
McInerney, & Hattam, 2003). As the need to engage middle years students has become apparent, government directions in Australia have recommended that reforms respond to early adolescent needs (Carrington, 2006; Pendergast, 2005; Zevenbergen & Zevenbergen, 2007). Reports such as Queensland’s “Middle Phase of Learning State School Action Plan” (Education Queensland, 2004), New South Wales’s “Our Middle Years Learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful” (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006), and Victoria’s “Strategy for Reforming the Middle Years in Victorian State Schools” (Department of Education and Training, Victoria, 2003) highlight timeframes for reforms and specific strategies to engage middle years learners. An emerging theme from these reports is the universities’ role for developing graduate teachers who are confident and competent to teach early adolescent learners.

1.1.3 Teacher confidence for teaching in middle schools.

While the state and national Standards for Teachers have been developed to provide a framework of desired competences for graduate teachers (AITSL, 2010), there is little evidence to indicate whether those completing teacher preparation courses perceive themselves as confident to teach. Confidence and self efficacy are interrelated (Alias & Hafir, 2009), as self efficacy is often claimed to be the level of confidence individuals may possess to undertake particular tasks or achieve desired outcomes (Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004). Because of the interrelated nature of self efficacy and confidence, in this study the term “confidence” is used because of its ease to be understood by those who participated in the research. Participant understanding of the terms and concepts used in research is important in obtaining responses that are reliable (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).
Bandura (1977, 1997) advocates that people with strong levels of confidence will experience accomplishment, personal well being and higher achievement in the attainment of specific goals. Confidence can influence the way in which a task is initiated and the determination applied in overcoming difficulties that may arise (Bandura, 1977). There is also some evidence to suggest that, in some key learning areas, a teacher’s perception of confidence to teach can be directly related to their teaching ability in the classroom (Jamieson-Proctor, Burnett, Finger, & Watson, 2006; Jamieson-Proctor & Finger, 2006), and can be linked to student success and achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Henson, 2001).

Cripps Clark and Walsh (2002) claim teachers who have perceived confidence in theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for teaching are more likely to be effective teachers. Despite the need for more research to understand the relationship between teacher confidence and student learning outcomes, confidence to teach provides an indicator of a person’s perceived ability to accomplish a task. Lacking confidence may also be an indicator of the person’s perceived skills and knowledge (Bandura, 1994). A learner driver for example, may lack confidence, which largely emanates from a lack of skill and knowledge about driving and, as the learner increases skills and knowledge, confidence grows; though one must be guarded by those who are overconfident with the perception they can complete a task, even though they may not have adequate skills.

There is no one formula for developing confidence in preservice teachers to teach successfully in the classroom but the ability to undertake a task is influenced by a person’s motivation, their experiences, and their perceived skill and ability to successfully complete
the task (Benabou & Tirole, 2002). Studies of teacher confidence (Goddard et al., 2000; Jamieson-Proctor & Finger, 2006; Murphy, Neil, & Beggs, 2007; Ross, McKeiver, Hogaboam-Gray, 1997) demonstrate that by assisting the development of knowledge for teaching and the opportunity to practice the skills to achieve mastery, confidence can be increased.

Universities need to take into account preservice teachers’ perceived levels of confidence to teach as this has the potential to influence effective classroom practices (Cripps Clark & Walsh, 2002). Moreover, as early adolescent success at school has shown direct links to teacher quality and effectiveness (Dinham & Rowe, 2007) the confidence of graduate middle years teachers is foundational to effective educational practice. Pendergast (2010) purports, to be effective, middle schooling teachers require competence and high levels of confidence so they can assist early adolescent learners to meet the required outcomes. She suggests that competence and confidence can be achieved through specialised middle schooling teacher preparation for new teachers and ongoing professional development for teachers in middle schooling contexts (Pendergast, 2010). Hence, if middle years graduates in Australia are to begin their careers with perceived confidence for teaching, teacher education institutions need to carefully consider the attributes of a middle schooling teacher and the way they will embed the pedagogical, theoretical and content knowledge in their course structure, the quality of the experiences provided and the inclusion of opportunities to master the skills and knowledge required for perceived confidence development (Mitchell, et al., 2003).
Government reviews have highlighted that the quality of the teacher makes the difference (Bishop, 2008; Hattie, 2003; Rowe, 2004) and that the profession requires confident and competent teachers (Ingvarson, Elliott, Kleinhenz, & McKenzie, 2006). This is confirmed by middle schooling literature that confident teachers who can engage early adolescents are imperative for positive student outcomes (Pendergast, 2010). Bandura (1977) claims, the level of confidence of an individual can impact on their motivation and psychological state when undertaking a task. He purports (1977) that experiences assist in the construction of confidence. Therefore, positive experiences may empower individuals to be confident to achieve while negative experiences will have an opposite effect. Middle schooling teacher preparation programs need to review the experiences they provide for their preservice teachers taking into consideration university coursework and practicum placements. If university coursework provides preservice teachers with confidence in the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for teaching early adolescents and, they have positive experiences in applying such knowledge to the classroom context through constructivist approaches, graduates will be confident for teaching in the middle years of schooling.

1.2 Context for this study

It is noted in The Top of the Class Report (HRSCEVT, 2007) that there have been numerous reviews of teacher education in Australia over the past two decades. Such reviews are necessary to maintain high quality programs and outline goals for the future. The growth of specialised middle schooling teacher preparation courses necessitates an investigation into the effectiveness of universities in developing confident graduates.
Furthermore, to advocate competency and ensure teacher registration, graduates must meet the required standards for quality teaching.

This study is set across two states of Australia and involves three universities delivering teacher education programs with a focus on the middle years of schooling. Each university has a different approach, but each course is underpinned by research, literature and philosophical frameworks of middle schooling (Pendergast et al., 2007). The preservice teachers involved in this study were in the final year of their teacher preparation degree. The study involved 142 preservice teachers completing one of the following degrees: (1) Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years); (2) Bachelor of Education (middle years pathway); (3) Bachelor of Education (middle years) / Bachelor of Arts; (4) Bachelor of Education (middle years) / Bachelor of Science; and (5) Bachelor of Education (middle years) / Bachelor of Health Sciences. The diversity in the courses demonstrates the different approaches taken by universities; however, the purpose of this study was not to compare the various graduates but to investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle years teacher preparation in relation to advocated teaching practices.

1.3. Purpose of this study

Although there have been concerns for many years in the United States over the disengagement of early adolescents, concerns in Australia have emerged more recently (Bahr & Crosswell, 2011; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). These concerns have prompted suggestions as to how middle school students can be better supported in schools. Reports
produced by state governments (e.g., Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria) outline
school reforms and highlight the need for specialised middle years teachers. There are
reports and articles about school initiatives for implementing middle schooling reforms
(e.g., Bell, 2010; Black, 2007; Garrick, 2010; Lipsitz & Felner, 1997; Pendergast, 2009;
Main & Bryer, 2005); however, there is little literature about preservice teachers’
perceptions of their own ability to teach in the middle schooling context and their views
about their teacher preparation programs. The key purposes of this research is to develop a
deeper understanding of initial teacher education preparation for teaching in the middle
school, to influence future university course designs and contribute to this field of
research, currently recognised as an area requiring further investigation (Hunter,
Newhouse-Maiden, De Jong, & Pendergast, 2005). It is hoped that this research will
encourage discourse around middle schooling and the need to sustain education degrees
and course content that support the development of teachers to be pedagogically and
developmentally responsive to early adolescents.

1.4 The research problem and direction of this study

Reviews of middle schooling university courses are essential to determine their
effectiveness in preparing teachers who can support early adolescent learners. There is
little evidence about preservice teachers’ preparedness for learning how to teach in the
middle school. Although some Australian studies have investigated and reported on middle
schooling teacher preparation courses (e.g., Aspland & Crosswell, 2006; De Jong &
Chadbourne, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2003), these studies focused more on the nature of the
programs rather than preservice teachers’ perceptions of their courses. More recently, a
study by Pendergast, Keogh, Garrick, and Reynolds (2009) investigated preservice
teachers’ interest in middle schooling, the ways middle schooling is conceptualised by the participants, the impact on student teachers practice, and the implications for teacher education reform. The research by Pendergast et al. (2009) varies from this current study as their research was a longitudinal study focussing on graduates from one university only.

Preservice teachers undertaking university courses complete assessments that provide an understanding of preservice teachers’ academic abilities to teach in the middle school. However, there is no research that investigates preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling and their viewpoints towards their Australian middle school teacher preparation course. Indeed, preservice teachers are well situated to articulate aspects of coursework and professional practice that may make them feel more confident to teach (Kessell, Wingenbach & Lawver, 2006). Furthermore, they are suitably positioned for highlighting areas where the course can be strengthened for developing their confidence to teach and also areas of course design they consider to be poorly constructed or of little value. With further investigation of the literature, it became clear a study that provided suggestions for future middle years preservice teacher preparation was required. It was evident this study should not be limited to an investigation of preservice teacher confidence, but also include their perceptions of what was required for future middle years preservice teacher preparation. By referring to the works of Adediwura and Tayo (2007), Hickey, Whitehouse, and Evans (2010), O’Keefe and Bobis (2008), and Yates (2007), it was apparent that participants’ self-reporting information, that is, perceptions about aspects of their experiences, can inform future directions of course and subject designs. These studies substantiated that reporting on participant perceptions necessitated investigating their views, beliefs and thoughts about middle years preservice
teacher preparation; therefore using the term “perceptions” incorporated all three research aims of this study.

The main direction of this research is to determine whether the middle schooling teacher preparation courses offered by three Australian universities assist preservice teachers to develop confidence to teach in the middle schooling context. Furthermore, this study investigates the experiences that assisted preservice teachers to feel confident and their recommendations for improvements for the future. Importantly, this study draws upon those who have had maximum teacher preparation experiences (i.e., final-year preservice teachers) as they will be able to more clearly articulate their needs at an endpoint in their tertiary education. This study will therefore, investigate the views of final-year preservice teachers from three universities in Australia towards their middle schooling teacher preparation and present recommendations to inform future course designs. As this study incorporates more than just an investigation of final-year preservice teachers’ confidence, an appropriate title has been selected to reflect the direction of the study. Hence, the study is entitled “Preservice teachers perceptions of their middle schooling teacher preparation: A sample of the Australian context”. This title summarises the investigation and allows for the inclusion of the three research aims. As noted by Burton and Steane (2004), the thesis title should accurately represent all aspects of the investigation.

1.5 The research aims

This research aims to investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle schooling teacher preparation. More specifically, this research aims to:
1. Investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling.

2. Analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident.


1.6 The theoretical framework of this study

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the “system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs [the] research” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 3). The framework is derived from the literature, which Merriam (2009) claims as appropriate for an interpretive study. This study emanated from the literature about early adolescent development and the need to support them with particular approaches to teaching; furthermore it investigated the importance of graduating preservice teachers with theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for effective teaching of middle years students. Reports from the United States and Australia suggest and substantiate the need for this investigation. Relevant research (e.g., Aspland & Crosswell, 2006; Aspland, Crosswell, & Hunter, 2009, De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; Hunter et al., 2005; Keogh, 2005; Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006; Main & Bryer, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2003; Pendergast, 2002, Pendergast, et.al. 2007, 2009; Rumble & Aspland, 2010) provided further directions and data collection methods considered appropriate for this study. In addition, the gap in the research was identified from these studies. The notion that middle years teachers must possess confidence to engage early adolescent students was recognised (Pendergast, 2010),
however, there was a dearth of research investigating this specific topic. This necessitated an investigation into the confidence of preservice teachers graduating from middle years teacher preparation courses in Australia.

The work of Bandura (1977, 1994, 1997) and Pajares (2000, 2002) relating to confidence and how various types of experiences can impact on someone’s ability to undertake a task, provided theoretical underpinnings for the investigation, as did the work of Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) and the development of her Teacher Confidence Scale. Additionally, the studies of Albion (1999) and Giallo and Little (2003) suggested a need to investigate preservice teacher preparation, which is relevant to the middle years context. With further investigation of the literature, it became clear a study that provided suggestions for future middle years preservice teacher preparation was required. It was evident this study should not be limited to an investigation of preservice teacher confidence, but also include their perceptions of what was required for future middle years preservice teacher preparation.

By referring to the works of Adediwura and Tayo (2007), Hickey, Whitehouse, and Evans (2010), O’Keefe and Bobis (2008), and Yates (2007), it was apparent that participants’ self-reporting information, that is, perceptions about aspects of their experiences, can inform future directions of course and subject designs. These studies substantiated that reporting on participant perceptions necessitated investigating their views, beliefs and thoughts about middle years preservice teacher preparation; therefore using the term “perceptions” incorporated all three research aims of this study.

As the study explored and described the perceptions of the preservice teachers, the selection of an interpretive epistemology was be appropriate, as it allowed the feelings of
the preservice teachers to be reported first-hand (Hittleman & Simon, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Neuman, 2003). The work of Herbert Blumer (1969) informed the epistemological stance of this study as his theory of Symbolic Interactionism, aligned to interpretivism, supported the notion that preservice teachers will form perceptions as they interact with university staff, colleagues, peers and their middle years course content.

1.7 Overview of the research methodology

To investigate the research aims of this study, a mixed-method research design was chosen as it allowed for a deeper investigation of the three specific aims and provided a more in-depth view of the research from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives (McMillan, 2008). Data were gathered using three data collection methods namely: survey, questionnaire, and interview. Qualitative and quantitative data are particularly suitable when a variety of perspectives is sought from a number of participants (Axinn & Pearce, 2006).

As noted, this study investigates the perceptions of final-year preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching. Before the data were collected, research preparation was undertaken in two stages.

Stage one included:

1. Initial research around middle schooling, quality teaching and the development of confidence was undertaken. Literature was gathered and collated to underpin the formation of the data collection methods. The literature relating to middle schooling in the United States and Australia and the Professional Standards for Queensland
Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) informed the development of the survey and focused on preservice teachers’ confidence to teach. This data related directly to the first aim of the research.

2. The development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to collect data that provided feedback as to the experiences that made the preservice teachers feel more confident. It provided data that reflected the final-years’ views as to what aspects of their course required enhancement. This data related specifically to the second and third aim of the study.

3. Devising relevant interview questions. The one-to-one interviews provided data that related to the confidence of the preservice teachers, aspects of the teacher education program that supported the development of their confidence and the areas that required improvements for the future. The interviews supported the data collected by the surveys and questionnaire hence, the interview data related to all three aims of the research.

Stage two of the research preparation included:

1. Peer review of the survey, questionnaire and interview questions. The instruments were peer reviewed by two middle years’ teacher educators and one research mentor, who is an expert in instrument design, to ensure the data collected addressed relevant aspects of middle schooling preparation and aligned with the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006).
2. Obtain ethical clearance from the researcher’s university and contact course coordinators from other universities to ascertain interest in their preservice teachers participating in the study.

3. Seek approval from the various Deans of the universities involved.

4. Gain permission to administer the survey and questionnaire from the course coordinators and negotiate times to administer the instruments to final-year preservice teachers during lectures and tutorials.

The survey was administered to 142 final-year preservice teachers across three Australian universities who were involved in middle years of schooling teacher preparation courses. Qualitative data were gathered through a devised questionnaire (n=142) and individual interviews (n=10). Data collected from the interview questions and the questionnaire elaborated on the statistics (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009) by providing more information about why final-year preservice teachers were confident or lacked confidence in particular areas and what improvements could be implemented in future middle schooling teacher preparation courses.

1.8 Limitations of the study

Teacher education courses that support the development of middle years teachers have increased in Australia since 2001 (Pendergast et al., 2007). The first limitation of this study pertains to the number of participants involved in the study and the way in which they were selected. There were 142 participants from three universities, across two states, involved in this research. Participants from other universities, depending on their course
design, may have elicited different responses than those involved in this study. Those participants who completed the survey and questionnaire were selected using convenience sampling (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Participants were selected according to availability; hence, this sampling process will possibly limit the data and how generalisable it may be (Vanderstoep & Jonhston, 2009). A further limitation pertains to the one-to-one interview data gathered using volunteer sampling. This approach has limitations as the interview participants might not be representative of the total cohort (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). They could involve themselves in the study for different motives such as wanting to contribute to society, helping the researcher or promoting their own agenda on the topic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

A further limitation of this study is that the data collected was self reported by the participants. Self reported data, although effective in providing the views and beliefs of a particular group, has limitations in that the researcher is relying on the participants’ memories of events and experiences and their ability to note their views honestly and accurately (Patton, 2002). Although these limitations are sometimes unavoidable in studies such as this (McMillan, 2008), they need to be taken into consideration when analysing and reporting on the data (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

A final limitation is this study’s duration over which data were gathered (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan, 2008). The survey, questionnaire and interviews were conducted within the one year. It is assumed that the confidence of the preservice teachers can change or alter once they begin teaching. A study that tracked the development and confidence of the participants once they were teaching would provide additional data and more evidence of
the relevance of the middle years teacher education course in preparing the preservice teachers for the middle school classroom context (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

1.9 Chapter summary

Producing quality teachers who are effective in the classroom has remained on the public agenda for many years (HRSCEVT, 2007). More recently, as a response to literature and research around early adolescent development, the need to produce quality teachers who are effective in engaging middle years learners has become apparent in Australia (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). Universities have responded by developing undergraduate and postgraduate courses to prepare specialised middle school teachers. It is thought that, with this knowledge, graduates will have the expertise to develop and deliver teaching programs that are pedagogically responsive to early adolescents (Pendergast et al., 2007; Pendergast et al., 2009; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010).

Although there is research that investigates middle school teacher preparation courses, there is little research that takes into consideration preservice teacher perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. As there are links between confidence and perceived ability to successfully undertake tasks (Bandura, 1977), this research explores the perceived confidence of final-year preservice teachers to teach in the middle schooling context. Through this study, findings will inform the development and directions of future middle schooling teacher preparation courses in Australia.
The foundations for this thesis have been presented in this chapter with an overview of the purpose and nature of this study in relation to the literature. The research problem and aims have been identified and an overview of the research methods was outlined. Finally, the limitations of this research were presented. This thesis now continues with analysis of the literature in the fields related to the aims of this study.

1.10 Overview of this thesis

This thesis contains seven chapters. Reviews of teacher education in Australia, the recommendations and the importance of producing quality teachers who are confident to teach will be highlighted in Chapter 2. The nature of early adolescence is explored and the development of middle schooling both in the United States and Australia is provided. The need to produce specialised middle schooling teachers is discussed and the desired teacher attributes required to support early adolescents. Chapter 3 details the specific research methods employed for investigating the final-year preservice teachers perceptions of their middle years teacher preparation by investigating their confidence to teach, the experiences that influenced their confidence and suggested enhancements for future university programs. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively present the results and discussions of the survey and questionnaire data followed by the interview data. Chapter 6 brings together the quantitative and qualitative data and demonstrates how the three aims of the research have been addressed. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis with a summary of the study and an overview of the limitations of the research. Finally, suggestions for further research will be outlined and the thesis concluded.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Chapter preview

There are seven sections to Chapter 2. Following this preview section (Section 2.1) that lays the foundations for the Chapter, the need to produce quality teachers in Australia will be highlighted through the literature, reviews, reports, and the teaching standards that have been developed in response to societal changes and government imperatives (Section 2.2). One government imperative that will be noted is the need to address the growing attrition rates and disengagement of early adolescents from the schooling context. Early adolescence as a distinct stage of development (Section 2.3) will be discussed to stress the need for reform. The emergence of middle schooling (Section 2.4) as a way to support early adolescent learners will highlight significant studies from the United States and the emergence of middle schooling in Australia. This section will further emphasise the need for reform and advocate for appropriately prepared teachers to support middle years learners. Producing quality middle years teachers (Section 2.5) as a way to assist future early adolescent learners will be advocated, and will lead into middle school teacher preparation and the importance of well situated in-school experiences that assist preservice teachers to make the links between theory and practice. Additionally, the significance of developing confidence to achieve mastery in teaching will be substantiated as an essential aspect of teacher preparation. Middle schooling practices will be identified from the literature as a basis for preparation for teaching early adolescents (Section 2.6). Finally, the chapter will be summarised and an introduction to Chapter 3 provided (Section 2.7).
2.2 Teacher education reviews and standards for teachers

Quality teaching plays a “pivotal role in nurturing the intellectual and social development of future generations” (Interim Committee for a New South Wales Institute of Teachers, 2003, p. 12). Quality teachers can create motivating experiences that engage students in the acquisition of knowledge leading to a path of lifelong learning (Ballantyne, McLean, & Macpherson, 2003). Rowe (2003) purports that no matter what the background or gender of the students, quality teaching is the most influential factor in ensuring positive behavioural and learning outcomes. It is noted in the Top of the Class Report (HRSCEVT, 2007) that, between 1979 and 2006, there were 102 inquiries into Australian teacher education. A consistent theme emerging from these inquiries is that teacher education institutions need to make teacher quality a priority and ensure preservice teachers graduate confidently and competently with theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for effective classroom practice (Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005; Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 2003). Further themes that emerge focus on the importance of preservice teacher school experiences in closing the theory-practice divide and the need for graduates who can successfully teach literacy and numeracy, embed information technology into their pedagogy, support and engage diverse learners, and respond to emerging trends and practices through a commitment to lifelong learning (Caldwell & Sutton, 2010; Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Government, 2005; HRSCEVT, 2007; Masters, 2009; Newhouse, Lane & Brown, 2007; New South Wales Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2005; Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 2003; Ramsey, 2000; Skilbeck & Connell, 2004; Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005).
2.2.1 Implementing standards for teachers

Impetuses for reviews into teacher education are attempts to raise the quality of teaching and teacher education because it is recognised that teacher preparation contributes significantly to the quality and effectiveness of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002). The implementation of standards or profiles for teachers are further measures to raise teaching quality by defining minimum guidelines of desired attributes of teachers (Interim Committee for a New South Wales Institute of Teachers, 2003). Government reviews and reports provide suggestions on the attributes graduate teachers should posses to become effective in their practice (Newhouse, Lane, & Brown, 2007). These suggestions in turn influenced the development of teacher standards. As noted by O’Meara and MacDonald (2004), “Worldwide there has been a range of initiatives in the area of standards for teachers as part of a discourse of professionalism” (p.111).

This move was reflected in the Australian context when, in 2003, MCEETYA produced the National Profiles for Teachers. The statement around the profiles aimed to promote schools as learning communities, raise the standard and status of the teaching profession, ensure the quality of teacher education programs, and the quality of teacher renewal. The National Profiles for Teachers in Australia have provided a framework for Australian states and territories to devise their own standards for teachers aligned with the National Profiles. The authors of these profiles purported that achieving these standards would lead towards an “Australian teacher who can engage with dynamic national and international knowledge contexts, can teach a diverse and changing student and common population, and introduce them into critical engagements with globalised and globalising economies and environments” (MCEETYA, 2003, p. 4).
Embedded in each of the standards implemented by the Australian states and territories is the need to embrace and cater for societal changes, new technologies, and new information about students that can enhance pedagogical practices (Ingvarson, Beavis, Kleinhenz, & Elliot, 2004). Table 2.1 summarises the state documents produced by the States and Territories in response to the National Profiles for Teachers.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State / Territory</th>
<th>Name of document</th>
<th>Governing bodies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Professional Teaching Standards</td>
<td>New South Wales Institute of Teachers (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers</td>
<td>Queensland College of Teachers in (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Professional Standards for Competent Teachers in the Northern Territory</td>
<td>Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Tasmanian Professional Standards Framework</td>
<td>Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania (2007).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Standards of Professional Practice for Full Registration</td>
<td>Victorian Institute of Teaching (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Western Australian Professional Standards for Teachers</td>
<td>Western Australian College of Teaching (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Professional Teaching Standards for Registration in South Australia for Entry to the Register</td>
<td>Teachers Registration Board of South Australia (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The professional standards for teachers across Australia have resulted in increased pressure for universities to align their teacher education courses to these standards to ensure their
graduates meet the requirements of teacher registration and employment bodies (e.g., Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers, 2006). Criticisms of the standards note there is no empirical evidence that their implementation raises or will raise the quality of teachers and education (Hudson, 2009). It is further argued by critics that the standards are merely a checklist of teacher attributes that change the focus of teacher education to teacher training with preservice teachers merely ticking the boxes as they proceed through their teacher education course (Zionts, Shallady, & Zionts, 2006). There is also some concern over the validity and construction process of the standards (Zionts, Shallady, & Zionts, 2006; Hudson, 2009). Put simply, what one person views as teacher quality may vary from another. Supporters however, advocate that professional standards provide graduates with clear guidelines of generally accepted competencies for the profession (HRSCVEVT, 2007). Despite debate over the effectiveness of standards for teachers as a way to increase teacher quality, AITSL (2011) has recently released a national set of graduate teacher standards. With the implementation of these new national standards, further pressure will be placed on states, territories, and universities to revisit their standards and course structures to ensure they meet national teacher accreditation guidelines.

2.2.2 Education reports

As well as national teacher standards being developed as a way to raise the quality of teachers, education reports are written to emphasise aspects of teaching, teacher education and, student needs that are required to be addressed. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) highlighted the importance of addressing the changing nature of society. This report called for quality teaching to
support young people in the 21st century and provided goals as a way forward for the future. Other reports emanate from research that may be informed by test results. For example, the 2008 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results spurred on another review into teaching and teacher education, particularly with the low student results in Queensland compared with the rest of the country. As a result, what has become known as The Master’s Report (Masters, 2009) rationalises effective teachers, schools, and education systems and makes a series of recommendations that target these areas for improvement. Although each area is interrelated, Masters states that on teaching and teacher preparation “There has been a decline in the quality of entrants to teaching” and “Some graduate teachers are inadequately prepared by pre-service teacher education programs” (2009, p. 49). He puts forward a caveat that such statements were made on “more than one occasion by more than one person” (2009, p.49), hence, it could be two occasions with two people but these methodological details are not clear in the report. These statements indicate a lack of empirical evidence that links to the catalyst for the report, namely, low NAPLAN results for Queensland. This raises the question as to whether such a report is motivated with a need to better prepare teachers or political motivation blaming teacher preparation for low NAPLAN scores in Queensland. Nevertheless, Masters presents an old argument that, highly effective teachers combine subject content knowledge with pedagogical knowledge, which has been articulated by numerous educators for two decades (e.g., Burny, Desoete, & Valcke, 2010; Geddis, 1993; Klemm, 1988; Little, 1990; Shulman, 1986a, 1986b; Stronge, 2007).
2.2.3 Improving teaching and teacher education

Improving teaching and teacher education are ongoing agendas for education systems, as both teachers and preservice teachers have direct contact with students, as the facilitators of education. Masters (2009) has advocated the need for graduates to demonstrate proficiency through test performances and proposes tests be linked to teacher registration. As a result, in Queensland in 2012 graduate teachers will undertake multiple choice proficiency tests in literacy, numeracy and science (Ros Bell, Queensland College of Teachers, personal communication, 15th June, 2011). Demonstrating proficiency in the tests will allow graduates to successfully attain teacher registration. Failure will mean the undertaking of further testing and a possible inability to teach in Queensland.

A further examination of teacher education by Caldwell and Sutton (2010), entitled Review of Teacher Education and Induction, focuses on the Queensland context but positions teacher education programs within national and international directions. Caldwell and Sutton (2010) make twenty-one recommendations that confirm the need for suitable teacher standards and the importance of graduates who understand assessment, effectively teach literacy and numeracy, and possess positive behaviour management strategies. Also emerging from Caldwell and Sutton’s (2010) report, is a call for the training of mentor or supervising teachers who can suitably support the development of preservice teachers during the practicum component. In response, the Queensland government has produced a report entitled Government Response to the Review of Teacher Education (Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training, 2011) that recognises the recommendations of Caldwell and Sutton (2010). The authors of this report note that, while Queensland teacher education programs prepare their graduates with the theoretical
knowledge, “beginning teachers also need practical skills to apply that knowledge to a wide range of student needs and classroom situations” (2011, p. 1). Suggestions emerging from this report contend that teacher registration bodies and universities support the suggested recommendations “which include a renewed focus on behaviour management and parental engagement, and support for aspiring teachers to acquire practical skills” (2011, p.1).

At a national level, the need to produce quality teachers is raised in the Smarter Schools National Partnership (Department of Education and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2010) that demonstrates the Australian government’s willingness to provide funding to raise the quality of teachers. In this reform initiative the federal government is implementing programs to “attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders” (DEEWR, 2010, p.1) in Australian schools. DEEWR (2010) propose the need to have further pathways into teaching, a consistent approach to teacher education by universities, more emphasis on graduates who understand the needs of Indigenous people, national consistency in teacher registration, improved performance management, rewards for quality teaching, and an improvement in access to workforce data. Further initiatives include the raising of literacy and numeracy standards in “targeted remote communities in the Northern Territory” (p, 1). Through the implementation of these reforms it is purported that Australian students, no matter what their schooling context will receive a “world class education” (DEEWR, p. 1).
2.2.4 Improving teacher quality

The need to undertake regular reviews into teacher education, the revisiting of teacher standards, the implementation of proficiency tests, and recommendations and funding provided by governments at both state and federal levels, are all measures undertaken to improve teacher quality as an “investment in Education is in the national interest” (Australian Council of Deans, 2004, p. 1). The regularity of reviews and reports is linked to the ever changing nature of teaching and the responsibility of the teacher. Due to societal changes “the role of the teacher is probably more complex than it has ever been” (Victorian Parliament, Education and Training Committee, 2005, p.xvi), with the engagement of diverse learners viewed as one of the greatest challenges (DEEWR, 2010; Ramsey, 2000). It is hoped that with on-going reviews, research and reform initiatives more information will become available that will inform teacher practices towards improving student outcomes.

2.2.5 Improving student outcomes in the middle years of schooling

Over the past fifteen years in Australia, reviews and research focused upon early adolescents have shown a need to improve student outcomes in the middle years of schooling (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2011; Bahr & Pendergast. 2007; Barratt, 1998; Hill & Russell, 1999; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). As a result, early adolescence has become an area that has attracted national research, reviews and reports (e.g., Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2004b; Barratt, 1998; Chadbourne, 2001; Culican, Milburn & Oakley, 2006; Luke et al., 2003; Middle Years of School Association, 2008; Pendergast et al., 2005). Concerns about early adolescents are underpinned by evidence of
disengagement from school and the vulnerability of students during this stage of development for making decisions that impact on their futures (Carrington, 2006).

As a way forward, reports have promoted the need for specialist teachers to support and understand early adolescent development so as to maximise their engagement in the classroom. As this study focuses on the requirement for specialist teachers and the preparation of quality graduates to teach in the middle phase of learning, it is imperative to understand early adolescent development. Early adolescents experience significant cognitive, emotional, physical, and socio-cultural development that impact on their behaviour, learning, and interactions with others. The following sections will demonstrate the significance of early adolescence as a distinct period of development and the emergence of the middle schooling movement in the United States and Australia that will substantiate the need for specialised middle years teachers.

**2.3 Early adolescence as a distinct stage of human development**

New understandings around early adolescence began in Australia in the mid 1990s (Carrington, 2002; Pendergast et al., 2005). From these new understandings it emerged that early adolescence is a significant period in human development that requires particular pedagogical approaches to support and promote learning (Barratt, 1998; Carrington, 2006; Chadbourne, 2001; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, & Mockler, 2007; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005). Teachers of early adolescents need to understand these young people experience considerable cognitive, physical, social and emotional changes as well as a vulnerability to socio-cultural influences (Carrington, Pendergast, Bahr, Mayer, &
Mitchell, 2001; Pendergast et al., 2007). It is a stage of development that can be challenging for young people as they negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood (McInerney & McInerney, 2006; Spear, 2000; Wormelli, 2001). Groundwater-Smith et al. (2007) claim it can be a complex time not only for adolescents but for those around them.

Chadbourne (2003) and Bahr (2007a) suggest it is difficult for educators, researchers and education departments to come to a consensus as to the age markers of adolescence. Although chronological age is not always an accurate indicator of social, emotional and physical development (Lefrancois, 1976), it provides a guide to the developmental sequence of adolescence (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Adolescence begins at around age 10 and possibly ends at 22 years of age (Bahr, 2005). Chadbourne (2003) claims that adolescence has three stages (i.e., early, mid and late adolescence). Although the stages of adolescent development may be noteworthy, the research in this investigation relates to the period known as “early adolescence” or those students who are aged around 10 to 15 years of age; that is, in the middle years of learning (Chadbourne, 2001; Knipe & Johnstone, 2007; Pendergast, 2005; Wormelli, 2001).

Early adolescents experience a variety of developmental influences that work in unison to create a diverse and complex human being (Bahr, 2007a; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007). Cognitively, they are beginning to think in a more conceptual and abstract manner, emotionally they can demonstrate greater fluctuations in mood, and physically they are experiencing significant bodily and neurological changes, including the transition to puberty (Forte & Schurr, 1997). Socially and culturally, the early adolescent broadens their beliefs and values through interactions with their peers, technology, globalisation, and the media.
(Carrington, 2004). These cognitive, emotional, physical and socio-cultural influences can impact on the way early adolescents learn and behave. These influences can affect self identity and attitudes towards families and friends as they develop into adults (McInerney & McInerney, 2006; Saltman, 2005). As claimed by Walker (2004), the early adolescent student “must adjust to peer pressure, new social and sex roles, an emerging self identity and greater independence” (p. 22). Those early adolescence who remain engaged in schooling during this time will most likely remain dedicated and interested to undertake further education and training in the future (Smith, 2003). Teacher education programs need to prepare graduating teachers so they understand the growth and developmental issues surrounding middle years learners, as well as appropriate pedagogical approaches for engaging them. The next section provides an overview of early adolescent development and the socio-cultural influences that affect their development and maturation.

2.3.1 Early adolescent cognitive development.

Cognitive development is influenced by the maturation of the nervous system combined with experience, intellect and socialisation processes (Piaget, 1954). Although the cognitive structures of early adolescents can be viewed as unique to each individual, it is noted in education systems (e.g., Education Queensland, 2004) that middle years students begin to move from Piaget’s concrete operational stage to more formal operations. As a result of this cognitive development, the early adolescent begins to view the world in a more abstract way (Maybery & Reupert, 2007). Studies from the National Middle School Association (2003b) confirm this perspective and present an argument that early adolescents are often capable of more sophisticated and complex thinking. Atkinson and Sturgess (2003) assert that, as a result of this cognitive transition, early adolescents can be
curious, motivated to achieve when challenged, and more capable of critical thinking, which has implications for teaching and the development of teacher preparation programs.

### 2.3.2 Early adolescent emotional development.

Concerns over early adolescent emotional well-being have been significant in reports nationally and internationally (Mission Australia, 2010; Sawyer, et al., 2001; World Health Organisation, 2001; Yamey, 1999). As the child moves into early adolescence, Alexander (2005) claims that emotional behaviour can change from contented to erratic, sensitive to critical, and compliant to argumentative. Powell (2005) describes this “rollercoaster of emotions” as “unpredictable and often difficult to understand” (p. 34). She further extends Alexander’s description by noting that early adolescents can experience “embarrassment, feelings of awkwardness, depression, feelings of isolation, confusion and disappointment” (2005, p. 35). A large study conducted by Mission Australia (2010) revealed that young people have a number of concerns that increase their stress and anxieties. Females aged between 11-14 years noted their greatest concern was about body image. While for boys, body image was second highest after alcohol. Although many negotiate this early adolescent period and emerge at the end with a positive sense of self concept, McInerney and McInerney (2006) claim that some young people will experience emotional problems that may see them disconnect with school, have low self-esteem, suffer from anxiety, and develop depression. Carr-Gregg and Shale (2002) explain that some early adolescents may be at risk of eating disorders, unsafe sexual practices, substance abuse, deliberate self harm or suicide. It is crucial for teachers to understand the emotional factors that impact on early adolescents to ensure their well being can be monitored (Maybery & Reupert, 2007; Newhouse-Maiden, Bahr, & Pendergast, 2005).
2.3.3 Early adolescent physical development.

During these cognitive and emotional changes, physical development can simultaneously impact on the characteristics and behaviours of early adolescence (Bahr, 2005; Beane & Lipka, 1987). This is a period of significant physical development (Manning & Bucher, 2005; Tanner, 1971; Powell, 2005). Early adolescents experience growth spurts and enter puberty, which signifies internal and external physical changes (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Sexual maturation is most often attained during early adolescence and is “evident in changes in physical appearance and biological processes” (Nagel, 2006, p.12). As a result, many early adolescents become preoccupied with appearances, with some experiencing body dissatisfaction (Dohnt & Tiggermann, 2006; Manning & Bucher, 2005; Woolfolk & Margetts, 2007). Tanner (1971) claims the most challenging aspects of early adolescent physical development are the variation and rapidity of the changes and development of sex characteristics. Previous to this time, growth and maturation has been gradual but with early adolescence comes growth that can be inconsistent between individuals. The varying rates of maturation can influence early adolescent social interactions and self-esteem (Beane & Lipka, 1987; Maybery & Reupert, 2007). For example, the female whose breasts are not growing as quickly as those around her can experience social and emotional difficulties impacted by embarrassment from slow physical development (Tanner, 1971).

While early adolescent males who develop before their peers have high levels of self confidence and those males whose athletic prowess or facial hair and genitals are slow to develop may experience low self esteem and difficulty interacting with peer groups (Claasens, 2007; George & Alexander, 2003). Indeed, there appears to be a link between physical development during early adolescence and the attainment of positive self esteem and body image (Beane & Lipka, 1987; Williams & Currie, 2000).
Although physical development can be rapid during this period for both males and females, rates can vary between the sexes. Early adolescent girls may develop up to two years earlier than boys, with girls looking and acting more mature than males of the same age (Claasens, 2007; Williams & Currie, 2000). With earlier development of sexual organs, early adolescent girls may develop feelings towards others and may be interested in forming relationships before their male counterparts. Although males may be slower to commence maturation, most surpass females in height and weight by the age of 15, with males developing greater muscle strength than girls, making them stronger and able to demonstrate greater physical endurance (Tanner, 1971).

Teachers educating early adolescents need to be sensitive and pedagogically responsive to physical changes that may impact on the student’s self-esteem, their behaviour, and ultimately their learning. They also need to consider the sex of the early adolescents experiencing the changes, the differences in the maturation process, and the speed at which it is happening to individuals they are teaching. In addition to external changes such as body hair, body shape and size, and genital development, teachers also need to understand that adolescents experience significant changes in the brain (Feinstein, 2004; Garrick, 2010; Nagel, 2010; Nagel, 2011; Giedd, 2004), which is a key to learning.

2.3.3.1 Early adolescent brain development.

Prior to the development of technology, scientists believed that the brain was fully developed by early adolescence (Ramoski & Nystrom, 2007). Magnetic resonance imaging and positron-emission tomography scans have displayed significant brain development
during early adolescents that can influence behaviour and capacity for learning (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 2005; Spano, 2003). The point where learning occurs is when information transfers from one neuron to another. Technological advancements have shown that learning occurs via an electrical impulse “through the axon, across a small gap known as a synapse and with the assistance of neuro-transmitters (chemical messengers)” (Nagel, 2005, p. 68). Although Garrick (2010) states that neuroscience cannot at this time assess learning that is “emotive and deeply analytic” (p. 17), Nagel (2011) claims that more synaptic connections occur when there is a stimulating learning environment, as well as positive interpersonal interactions.

Also of significance is the restructuring of the brain that occurs during early adolescence (Wormelli, 2003). It has been noted that synaptic connections are part of the process of learning. When synapses are unused or there is a lack of synaptic connection occurring, they become discarded or pruned and the brain can become modelled or hardwired for the future (Ramoski & Nystrom, 2007; Nagel, 2011). Although Weinberger, Elevag, and Giedd (2005) claim that scientists do not fully understand the pruning process or the forces that influence the process, some authors (Feinstein, 2004; Nagel, 2010; Ramoski & Nystrom, 2007; Wormelli, 2003) suggest that, if not all parts of the brain are stimulated during early adolescence, then the synapses may not be regenerated in the future. It is thought that effective pruning can lead to a much more efficient brain (Giedd et al., 1999). Consequently, the educational settings of early adolescents, what is taught, and the pedagogical approaches used can have a “direct impact on how the brain reworks its architecture” (Nagel, 2010, p. 90).
As well as restructuring, the early adolescent brain experiences significant maturation. The maturation process commences with the brain stem (the area responsible for fight or flight), followed by the limbic system (the area responsible for memories and emotions) and finally the cerebrum at the top (the area responsible for logical thinking, conscious thought and reasoning) (Giedd et al., 1999; Ramoski & Nystrom, 2007). This developmental sequence means that many early adolescents may have heightened emotional responses combined with poor reasoning skills and difficulty making rational and moral decisions (Forte & Schurr, 1997). This lack of consequential thinking can lead to risk-taking behaviour that, without guidance, can lead to decisions that may impact on the rest of their lives (Beutel, 2006).

Chemicals in the brain during early adolescence can also have a significant impact on development at this time. Dopamine, a hormone and type of chemical neurotransmitter creates a feeling of “well being” (Nagel, 2005, p. 71). The heightened risk-taking behaviour that occurs during early adolescence can mean some young people may experiment with drugs. The use of cocaine and amphetamines can influence dopamine levels and can impact detrimentally on brain development (Weinberger et al., 2005). Serotonin like dopamine is a neurotransmitter that has a calming effect and is responsible for the regulation of pain, mood swings, and control of eating, sleep patterns, and arousal (Feinstein, 2007). High levels of serotonin are linked to high self-esteem, while low levels can be linked to risk-taking, hostility, and suicidal tendencies (Nagel, 2005). Serotonin levels are naturally low during early adolescence, which can lead to high rates of anxiety and depression (Feinstein, 2004). Of further significance to early adolescents is that serotonin levels can decrease with high levels of stress (Nagel, 2005). Newhouse-Maiden
et al., (2005) claim that fluctuating hormone levels can combine with “the ready availability of alcohol and drugs, powerful media messages, divorce, socio-economic adversity and violence in relationships” to increase the vulnerability of early adolescents (p. 78).

Recent knowledge about adolescent brain development is significant for teachers’ understanding about catering for early adolescent learning. Teacher preparation courses targeting middle schooling need to include knowledge of physical development, including brain development. With knowledge of how learning occurs, the maturation process and the impact of chemicals in the brain, teachers are provided with an understanding of the importance of creating an environment conducive to learning, decreasing stress levels in the classroom and monitoring risk-taking behaviour of early adolescents. Also for inclusion in middle schooling teacher preparation is an understanding of how the socio-cultural influences can combine with cognitive, emotional and physical development to make early adolescence a distinct period of development requiring responsive pedagogical approaches (Mitchell et al., 2003).

2.3.4 Socio-cultural influences on early adolescent development.

Adolescence can be viewed in a socio-cultural context (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007; Saltman, 2005); therefore, early adolescent development can be shaped by social and cultural interactions within society (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 2005). Maybery and Reupert (2007) encourage caregivers to understand the impact of stress levels, social interactions and socio-cultural persuasions on early adolescents so they can support their progression into
adulthood. Early adolescents growing up in contemporary Australia have a vast array of socio-cultural influences, such as family, peers, the media, technology and globalisation (Carrington, 2006), all of which can affect adult development. Transition to adulthood motivates early adolescents to search for their identities (Beane, 1993). Groundwater-Smith et al. (2007) suggest that the development of identity is a particularly critical phase for the early adolescent and at this time they are vulnerable to the socio-cultural persuasions around them. They are exposed to wider values and beliefs extending past their families to their peers and their peers’ families (Saltman, 2005). Bahr (2005) claims that these socio-cultural interactions impact on identity development suggesting that the early adolescents may construct a variety of identities depending on the social situation and with whom they are conversing.

Further early adolescent socio-cultural influences are interconnected with digital technologies. Carrington (2006), Green and Hannon (2007) and Lent (2006) advocate that, as a result of these technologies, changes can occur regarding learning styles, the assimilation of information, hand-eye coordination, multi-tasking, logical thinking, and the speed of problem solving. Digital communication means early adolescents have information from around the world readily available, instant communication and on-line relationships that extend well beyond the family, into the global arena, and often without family knowledge (Zevenbergen & Zevenbergen, 2007).

It is evident from this discussion in section 2.3 that early adolescents have an array of influences on their behaviour and development. The unique nature of their cognitive, emotional and physical development, combined with the vast array of socio-cultural
interactions, clearly defines early adolescence as a distinct group. As discussed, the distinctiveness of their development not only impacts on the early adolescents but also on family members, care givers and teachers. There is further evidence to suggest schooling systems need to consider early adolescent behaviour and characteristics as some can become disengaged during this period in their lives (Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Hill & Russell, 1999; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005). Recognition of these various influences and the acknowledgement of early adolescence as a unique stage of development, have perpetuated the emergence of educational measures to address this distinct group (Mitchell et al., 2003).

2.4 The emergence of middle schooling

Concerns for early adolescents have arisen in Australia and overseas as a result of the number of middle schooling students who exit education (Smyth et al., 2003). These concerns, combined with evidence that early adolescent development is compounded by physical, emotional and societal influences, has seen the emergence of schooling systems aiming to cater to these unique learners (Chadbourne, 2001). To gain an understanding of the emergence of middle schooling in Australia, it is essential to provide an overview of the reports that have shaped its development (Prosser, 2008). Indeed, the historical development, the middle school programs and, the research that has emerged from the United States has influenced the development and directions of middle schooling in Australia (Chadbourne, 2001; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010; Prosser, 2006; Whitehead, 2006).
2.4.1 Middle schooling in the United States.

The predecessors to the development of middle schooling in the United States were the junior secondary schools. Prosser (2006) claims these emerged as a result of discussions and reports that dated back to the 1870s and were in response to the inadequacy of preparing students for college, poor student retention rates at school, large numbers of immigrant unemployment, low literacy levels, growing numbers of youth labour and inadequate skills training. Providing further impetus for the need for an alternate form of schooling were the writings of Stanley G Hall. Lounsbury and Vars (2005) claim Hall brought to the attention of educators the distinctive nature of early adolescent development. In his writings, Hall (1904) discusses the influences of adolescents maturing bodies and the effects on their mind, body and moral development. He called for changes in the teaching of early adolescents and for schools to provide an education that recognised their stage of development (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005).

Between 1909 and 1913 the first junior secondary schools were established (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005; Prosser, 2008). It was thought that this type of education structure would provide both vocational and academic education (Beane, 2001, 2005). These junior secondary schools saw the separation of year seven to nine from primary and secondary schooling. Although touted to recognise the developmental needs of early adolescents (Anafara, 2001; Cuban, 1992), Beane (2001) suggested this was not the reality. After World War II, schooling arrangements needed to be revisited due to pragmatic influences (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). The influx of post war immigrants and the impact of the baby boomers placed further pressure on the education system. Furthermore, Tanner, in his book *Growth at Adolescence* (1962) provided evidence of the
earlier maturation of young people giving further support for the establishment of an education system that would be responsive to the social and emotional concerns of early adolescents (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005).

In his speech and subsequent text, *The emergent middle school* (Alexander, 1968), William Alexander referred to the “middle School” as an alternate form of education (Lounsbury & Vars, 2005) that would support the development of young adolescents through alternate curriculum, pedagogy and organisation. Growing concern over the inadequacies of the junior secondary school meant the middle school suggested by Alexander offered a way forward, as they were designed to meet the “educational needs of young people 10 to 14 years of age” (Anafara, 2001, p.x). Although Dinham and Rowe (2007) claim that distinct and separate middle schools began in the United States in the 1980s, Anafara (2001) and Lounsbury and Vars (2005) note that the middle schooling movement began to take shape with middle schools emerging in the 1970s.

Although planned to support early adolescent learners, these schools did not sustain the interwoven cognitive, emotional, physical and social development of early adolescent life (Alexander & McEwin, 1989). Reports of the time (e.g., *The middle school we need, 1975; Future goals and directions, 1973; An agenda for excellence in middle schools, 1985*) highlighted the need for middle schooling reforms, and the influential *Turning points* report (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) announced the momentum of the middle schooling movement (George et al., 1992). This report sought not only to improve schooling in the middle years but also to improve and facilitate the personal development of early adolescents “both in and out of school” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p.
xi). The Turning points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) report is given credit for strengthening the middle schooling movement and influencing the current beliefs and practices worldwide (Bahr, 2005). As a result of this report, reform in the United States called for: the development of smaller learning communities to assist early adolescents; the teaching of a core academic program; the incorporation of cooperative learning; flexibility in instructional time, and adequate resources; specifically trained middle schooling teachers prepared to teach early adolescence; the promotion of health and fitness of early adolescents; and the building of relationships between schools, parents and the community (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, p. 9).

The middle schooling movement in the United States gained further impetus from encouraging results gained through research. A significant study (Felner et al., 1997) revealed students’ standardised test results improved in the areas of mathematics, language arts and reading when middle schooling practices were adopted in 31 Illinois middle schools. Similarly, 21 schools in the Michigan area that adopted the middle school practices showed significant student gains in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 1998). Students involved in this middle years reform reportedly performed better and demonstrated more improvement in both reading and mathematics over a two-year period compared with students attending schools that had not implemented middle years practices. Moreover, students attending the schools implementing middle years reforms showed positive improvements in behaviour and, self esteem, and a decreased level of alcohol consumption (Mertens et al., 1998).
A subsequent study (Backes, Ralston, & Ingwalson, 1999) investigated the impact of practices for the middle years on student achievement in the North Dakota district. An evaluation of student results on standardised tests were compared between schools that had adopted the practices to those that had not. Results demonstrated that students attending schools adopting middle years practices performed higher in reading vocabulary, language mechanics, study skills, science, and social studies (National Middle School Association, 2003b). These studies were encouraging to the middle years movement and provided a framework for future research on the effectiveness of middle schooling.

The *Turning points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) report presented a framework for teaching in middle schools and the release of Jackson and Davis’s (2000) *Turning points 2000* provided practical suggestions for classroom teachers to support and meet the diverse needs of early adolescents (Pendergast, 2005). In their discussion, Jackson and Davis (2000) called for more intellectual demand and highlighted the importance of linking the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment through “backward curriculum” (Prosser, 2006, p. 5). They advocated a student-centred, interdisciplinary approach to teaching to promote problem solving and stressed the significance of the teachers’ pedagogical practices (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Jackson and Davis (2000) alleged a safe and inclusive learning environment, the development of strong teacher-student relationships and parental and community partnerships would promote the learning of early adolescents (Anafara, 2001; Neumann & Associates, 1996). This report provided much of the theoretical underpinnings of the middle years’ movement worldwide and acted as a catalyst for further research and publications (Chadbourne, 2001).
In 2003, the National Middle School Association in America released a position paper entitled, *This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents* (2003a). The authors of this paper provided a guide for school programs specifically designed to support students in the middle years of schooling and advocated the need for six components in middle schools wishing to support early adolescents. The report suggested, by using such components, early adolescents would be more likely to be engaged in learning in the middle school context (National Middle School Association, 2003a). The National Middle School Association advocated the adoption of: (1) relevant, challenging, integrative and exploratory curriculum; (2) multiple teaching approaches that respond to diversity; (3) assessment and evaluation programs that promote learning; (4) organisational structures that support relationships and learning; (5) school wide efforts to promote health and well being; and, (6) multifaceted guidance and support services. The middle school movement has been guided largely by United States government reports and reviews highlighted by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) report, Jackson and Davis (2000) and the National Middle School Association (2003a, 2003b). Each of these reports shares a common thread that education for the middle years of learning needs to be specific to address the unique nature of early adolescents.

More recently, the middle schooling movement has come under threat in the United States. There has been a decline in the number of separate middle schools, with Beane (2001) purporting the lack of economic support impacting on school reform. Yecke (2005) claims economic support has been diverted to the implementation of policies such as *No child left behind* (United States Department of Education, 2001), which has seen an emphasis away from middle schooling and a stronger focus on standardised curriculum and national
testing (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Although there is theoretical substantiation that supports the middle schooling movement, Lounsbury and Vars (2005, p. 11) claim it “struggles to gain wide acceptance” while Dickinson (2001, p.xi) states it is experiencing “arrested development”. Anafara (2001) notes that middle schooling in the United States is at an impasse and may have difficulties surviving because of economic and political pressures.

### 2.4.2 The emergence of middle schooling in Australia.

For over a decade and a half the momentum around middle schooling has been evident in the Australian educational context (Bahr & Crosswell, 2011; Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Although there are many studies highlighting the need for middle school reform, some key studies have impacted on the growth of the middle schooling movement in Australia (Pendergast & Bahr, 2010; Knipe & Johnstone, 2007). The findings from these studies have informed the need for specialised middle years teachers and their teacher education preparation.

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) undertook a two-year study during 1994-1996 investigating the alienation of students in years 5–8 within school settings. *From alienation to engagement: Opportunities for reform in the middle years of schooling* (Cumming & Cormack, 1996) documented the background of student alienation in schools and its detrimental effects on students in the 5-8 grade levels. It provided suggestions for teachers as to how alienation could be overcome and advocated the acknowledgement of diversity. The authors of this report, along with other Australian
reports, called for an emphasis on an education system that provided greater support for early adolescent students academically, socially and emotionally (Knipe & Johnstone, 2007; Prosser, 2006).

A collective view from research reports in Australia was provided by Barratt’s (1998) *Shaping middle schooling in Australia: A report of the national middle schooling project*. Information gathered from the States and Territories were similar to the findings from the United States. Barratt confirmed that adolescents are at a unique stage of development and noted that they have “particular physical, emotional and cultural needs that should be addressed” (p. 29). Parallel to other studies both nationally and internationally, Barratt’s report recognised the diversity amongst early adolescents in regards to “cultural, socio-economic, gender and other factors” (p. 29). He purported the need to form “a collective responsibility for the development and education of young adolescents” (p. 1) and stressed the importance of shared cooperation and ownership to enact middle schooling reform. The report identified the needs of early adolescents, the essential components of middle schooling practices and referred to strategies that appear to support the learning of students in the middle years.

Attempts to implement middle school reforms were criticised by Hill and Russell (1999). They stated that reforms had been “undocumented with no evaluation of their impact and with little evidence that they succeeded in bringing about institutional change” (p. 6). The report by Hill and Russell called for provisions for early adolescents in schools and noted a need for a resolution. They claimed that reform required a set of strategic intentions, a set of design elements and a commentary on how these can be articulated into the schooling
context. Similar to previous reports, Hill and Russell highlighted the importance of articulating the aims specific to the middle years of schooling and the significance of the implementation of developmentally responsive middle years programs in schools. Indeed, this was a significant report that facilitated further Australian debate on middle schooling (Pendergast, 2005).

Chadbourne’s (2001) report, Middle Schooling in the Middle Years, commissioned by the Australian Education Union, confirmed the middle schooling reforms advocated by Hill and Russell (1999) but stressed the need for specific classroom practices. He noted that adolescents required “a particular type of pedagogy and curriculum rather than a particular type of school structure” (Chadbourne, 2001, p. iii). Chadbourne’s report provided a deeper understanding of what was required within the teaching and learning experience. He purported the importance of higher-order thinking; integrated curricula and collaborative teaching and learning that extended beyond the classroom and included students, parents and teachers. In addition, he advocated that the desired practices for middle years learners would be beneficial across the early years to the senior years and would promote seamless transitions from preschool to year 12. Similar to Hill and Russell (1999), Chadbourne’s (2001) report called for thorough evaluations of middle years practices but questioned whether middle schooling should be made mandatory for all students or “provided only for those who are disaffected, disengaged and alienated within our traditional schools” (p. iv).

To respond to the need for further research into the middle years of schooling the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria (Centre for Applied
Educational Research, University of Melbourne, 2002) commissioned an in-depth study that would “evaluate and refine a research-driven approach to the improvement of student learning outcomes in the middle years of schooling” (p. 1). The study, entitled the Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) project, was to address “long-standing and unresolved” issues surrounding early adolescence (Centre for Applied Educational Research, University of Melbourne, 2002, p. 2). The MYRAD project included 61 secondary schools and 195 primary schools. “An extensive range of data was collected and analysed by schools and the patterns of perceptions and outcomes emerging from various surveys and tests informed program goals and targets” (Centre for Applied Educational Research, University of Melbourne, 2002, p. 4). A slight improvement in early adolescent’s attitude to school was reported in the findings, and the importance of the teacher’s approach towards middle schooling reforms was emphasised. Similar to other studies (Barratt, 1998; Chadbourne, 2001; Hill & Russell, 1999), the researchers’ findings indicated the need to align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and maintain a momentum of improvement (Centre for Applied Educational Research, University of Melbourne, 2002). The authors advocated for specialised middle years teachers and the inclusion of professional development programs for existing teachers.

Many of the schools involved in the Victorian government’s MYRAD (2002) project participated in the Middle Years Reform Program (MYRP) (ACER, 2004b). The purpose of the MYRP was to improve engagement and outcomes for middle years students through improved pedagogical practices in all key learning areas, and in particular, literacy. The research concentrated on students in the years seven to nine. The schools were provided with funding to support and develop programs concentrating on middle years practices
with a focus on staffing, literacy, home, school and community links, and managing the transition from primary to secondary schooling (ACER, 2004b, p. iv). Of the schools involved, 20% reported improvements in literacy and school engagement, and teachers were reported to have enhanced pedagogical skills in the areas of thinking and cognition across all key learning areas (ACER, 2004b, pp. iv – v).

Further evidence to support middle schooling programs in Australia was gathered in the extensive report, *Beyond the middle: A report about literacy and numeracy development of a target group of students in the middle years of schooling* (Luke et al., 2003). The authors of this report investigated the “perceived efficacy of middle years programs in all States and Territories in improving the quality of teaching, learning and student outcomes - especially in literacy and numeracy and for student members of particular target groups in Australia” (p. 2). This qualitative study gathered data from a range of schools from each of the states and territories. Students in the study were from lower socio-economic communities, and included Indigenous peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, students with English as a second language, students from rural and remote communities, and other students experiencing difficulties making the transition to secondary school. This report highlighted the effectiveness of key middle years strategies and suggested a re-thinking of middle schooling with the development of teaching practices, more variety in assessment practices that are aligned with curriculum and pedagogy, and the preparation and development of middle years’ teachers to successfully engage and support early adolescents.
The investigation of the practices, processes, strategies, and structures that best promote lifelong learning in the middle years of schooling was studied by Pendergast et al. (2005). They used an analysis of the literature to construct a model for 25 Australian schools that had reputations for success in implementing innovative programs. The data collected addressed “the broad question of how to ensure the engagement with learning of all middle years students and how to encourage in them a higher order of learning objectives and outcomes both now and throughout life” (p. 1). Findings indicated that teachers needed to model lifelong learning and acquire knowledge, skills and practices to assist middle school students (Pendergast et al., 2005).

As a result of recent reports, many Australian departments of education and individual schools have undertaken reforms to support early adolescent learners. Reforms in middle schooling have manifested in the development of various models of middle schooling including separate middle schools and middle school subjects within existing primary and secondary schools (Chadbourne, 2003). Separate middle school models have also varied, with some being co-educational, others being single sex, some being academically streamed, while others selecting mixed ability organisations (Dinham & Rowe, 2008). Despite the organisational differences in approaches to middle schooling, the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisation (2005) reported that there was no evidence to suggest that one configuration for middle schooling was better than another. As Pendergast (2005) suggests, addressing the needs of early adolescence is more about how the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment meets the needs of early adolescent learners than the organisational structure of the school.
Although some specialised, separate middle years schools have been established (Carrington, 2006; Prosser, 2006), in Australia, the majority of reforms have been implemented within existing two-tiered education systems (primary and secondary). This approach has not been without some difficulties. For example, implementing middle schooling approaches such as integrated curriculum within secondary school settings has been challenging and is often not welcomed by some subject driven teachers (Venville, Wallace, Rennie, & Malone, 2001). Middle schooling has attracted ridicule (Prosser, 2006), with critics claiming that middle schooling has developed more from a need to support those from disadvantaged backgrounds rather than early adolescent learners (Chadbourne, 2001). Critics also claim that the adoption of reforms and appropriate pedagogical practices have been “piecemeal, localised and short lived” (Hill & Russell, 1999, p. 174), with few detailed studies that highlight the benefits of middle schooling (Cumming, 1996; Earl, 1999). Further condemnation has been directed at the middle years of schooling movement’s deficit view of early adolescents education, with claims that such a perspective suggests a stereotypical view that all middle schooling students are troubled (Carrington, 2006).

Despite the criticisms, middle schooling keeps arising as a need in education contexts (Barratt, 1998; Chadbourne, 2001; Cumming, 1998; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People (MCEETYA, 2008) notes that “Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to ensure that schools provide programs that are responsive to students’ developmental and learning needs in the middle years” (p. 10). This view is supported by the literature that demonstrates the need for schools to reconsider their approaches to middle schooling and
employ strategies to support early adolescents cognitively, emotionally, physically and socially. However, if “the quality of the teaching and learning is by far the most salient influence on students’ cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes” (Rowe, 2003, p. 1) and teacher preparation contributes significantly to teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002), then there is a need to have appropriately prepared teachers who have an understanding of early adolescents, with knowledge about middle years school reforms, and associated teaching practices that can engage early adolescents in the middle years of schooling.

### 2.5 Producing quality middle school teachers

Although Australia predominantly has a two-tiered education structure, various departments of education identify and support the need to address the unique learning requirements of early adolescents (Pendergast et al., 2009). A number of government documents have been published advocating the need for middle schooling practices and policies. Table 2.2 summarises the reports in which the states and territories in Australia have demonstrated support for middle schooling and outline how reforms should be implemented within their education system towards supporting quality middle years programs.

These education reforms do not necessarily support the development of separate middle schools; however, they do acknowledge middle years philosophies, structures, and pedagogies within existing curriculum frameworks and policies. As noted in Table 2.2, states such as Queensland (Education Queensland, 2004), New South Wales (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006) and Victoria (Department of
Education and Training, Victoria, 2003) have produced guidelines that specifically outline practices to engage middle years learners. Relevant to this study, they highlight the need for professional development for existing middle years teachers and the need to prepare quality graduate teachers specifically for the middle years of schooling.

Table 2.2

Australian States and Territories’ Approach to Middle Schooling Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State / Territory</th>
<th>Name of reform</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Our Middle Years Learners- Engaged, Resilient, Successful</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Education and Training (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Middle Years of Schooling Principles and Policies Framework</td>
<td>Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Middle Childhood (4-7) Syllabus</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework: Middle Years Band Years 6, 7, 8 and 9</td>
<td>Department of Education and Children’s services, South Australia. (2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As suggested by Hudson (2010), education reforms can be best enacted through the inservice of existing teachers and through teacher education programs. Indeed, tertiary education institutions have concurred with these reports and have recognised the need to
prepare quality teachers for the middle phase of learning (Education Queensland, 2004; Pendergast et al., 2007). In response, some universities have created specific middle schooling teacher education programs (e.g., see Queensland University of Technology, University of Queensland, Griffith University, Flinders University). Taken into consideration in the development of such programs are the inquiries into teacher education, the standards for teachers (see Section 2.2), and the literature pertaining to the skills, knowledge and pedagogical practices that best support and engage early adolescent learners (Barratt, 1998; Carrington, 2006; Chadbourne, 2001; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005; Pendergast et al., 2007). Universities use a variety of approaches for implementing preservice teacher preparation around the middle school. Some teacher education courses are devoted to producing middle years teachers, while others have embedded middle years practices within already existing course structures.

An increase in middle school teacher education programs has been evident in universities over the past decade (Aspland & Crosswell, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2003). These programs are underpinned by the notion that specialised middle school teachers are influential for enhancing the learning of young adolescents (Cooney, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000; McEwin, Dickinson & Smith, 2003; National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2002). However, the implementation of specialist middle school teacher education programs has not been without controversy. The debates have centred on the need for specialised middle school teachers in a predominantly two-tiered education system with concerns that graduates would not be adequately prepared for the range of grade levels and subject areas required in each context (i.e., primary and secondary) (Dinham & Rowe,
Perhaps this view has prompted the development of teacher education programs that offer a combination of primary, middle years or secondary, middle years degrees (e.g., Edith Cowan University, James Cook University, University of South Australia, and University of Southern Queensland) or in some cases, middle years options or electives in existing Bachelor of Education degrees (e.g., see Queensland University of Technology, Caboolture campus). In investigating middle years teacher preparation courses the majority of the universities offering such courses are located in Queensland, South Australia and Victoria (see Pendergast, 2010, p. 16).

In New South Wales, however, despite the claims made in *Our middle years learners – Engaged, resilient, successful* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006) that teachers need to be well prepared to educate middle years learners, a specific middle schooling degree is not recognised with teacher accreditation being awarded to either primary or secondary educators (New South Wales Institute of Teachers, 2010). This may be the reason for limited options to study specialised middle years teacher education programs in New South Wales with Charles Sturt University being, at the time of writing this thesis, the only institution in the state to offer a course noting middle schooling in the title of the degree (e.g. Bachelor of Education K-12 Middle Schooling).

Criticism of middle schooling teacher education courses is underpinned by the view that middle schooling practices are positive approaches across a range of contexts including early childhood and primary (Chadbourne, 2003). Despite the debate, many universities continue to offer middle years teacher education programs in the hope that specialised graduates who can “design and implement innovative pedagogies, have knowledge of the
need for structural reform and philosophical change, and understand the needs and abilities of young adolescents” (Pendergast et al., 2007, p. 75), will engage and motivate early adolescents in future classrooms.

2.5.1 Middle schooling preservice teacher preparation.

The evidence presented about the developmental stage of early adolescence demonstrates the need to have a “new kind of teacher” (Pendergast, 2010, p. 15) that can suitably address the needs of early adolescents by delivering curriculum and pedagogical approaches that can best engage and motivate them for learning. Rumble and Aspland (2010) concur with the views of Pendergast claiming that the middle years teacher needs to be substantively different from the primary and secondary teacher, and advocates a four attribute model that includes the ability to “forge middle school identity”, be a “designer of wholesome curriculum”, be a “specialist in adolescence as a socio-cultural construct”, and have “a capacity to sustain middle school reforms” (p. 8). The notion that middle years teachers require specific attributes is also supported by the reviews and reports completed by the Australian states and territories (Table 2.2). However, the development of such specialist teachers with the attributes outlined by Rumble and Aspland (2010) requires specifically designed university course structures to ensure graduates can meet the desired qualities of a middle years teacher.

As previously noted, universities delivering middle years teacher preparation in Australia are taking different approaches to educating middle school preservice teachers with varied course structures offering flexibility to graduates, with one-year and four year programs
depending on the completion of previous studies (see Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). Although there are differences in the ways universities approach the education of middle years graduates, Pendergast et al. (2007) notes that most of the middle years courses in Australia are underpinned by the National Middle School Association’s (NMSA, 2001) essential elements of teacher preparation. NMSA stresses the importance of middle years educators developing collaborative relationships with middle school contexts and notes that middle years teacher preparation should include the systematic study of early adolescence, middle years philosophy and a deep understanding of developing middle years curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that is culturally responsive. Preservice teachers should develop knowledge in at least two key learning areas and undertake practicum experiences in positive middle years classrooms where they have opportunities to work collaboratively with teachers, parents and community members (National Middle School Association, 2001).

More recently similar guidelines for middle years teacher preparation were released by the National Middle School Association (2006) in the position paper *National Middle Association’s Position on the Professional Preparation of Middle Level Teachers*. They claim that middle years teacher education has six key elements that need to be incorporated into teacher education programs. They include, expertise in young adolescent development, middle schooling philosophy and organisation that frames middle school teaching, a comprehensive understanding of middle years curriculum, thorough subject matter knowledge, effective skills of middle years planning and teaching, and a “high priority” on middle school practicum (National Middle School Association, 2006, p. 1).
Despite the emergence of middle years teacher preparation courses in many states in Australia and the clarity around the essential elements for inclusion, research regarding these courses in preparing preservice teachers is limited. Some recent papers outline the desired attributes of the middle school teacher (e.g., Pendergast, 2002; Rumble & Aspland, 2010), the skills required to teach in the middle years of schooling (e.g., Main & Bryer, 2005), practicum experiences and middle years preservice teachers (e.g., Keogh, 2005; Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2003) and the design of middle schooling teacher preparation (e.g., Aspland & Crosswell, 2006; Aspland, Crosswell & Hunter, 2009; Hunter et al., 2005; De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005), but few provide the perspective of the preservice teacher towards their middle years teacher preparation. With the majority of the universities offering such courses being located in Queensland and the lack of recognition of middle years specialised teachers in New South Wales, much of the literature around middle years teacher preparation has emanated from Queensland. To date, the medium longitudinal study by Pendergast et al. (2007), based on the perspectives of graduates from the University of Queensland’s middle years program, provides informative data regarding the preservice teachers’ perspective of their middle years teacher preparation. This program, noted to be significant in middle schooling teacher preparation (Garrick, Pendergast, Bahr, Dole, & Keogh, 2008), has portrayed the perspectives of the middle years preservice teachers over a period of time. The aims of the research were to gather data about why middle years preservice teachers selected the course, the development of their teacher identities, the impact on their teaching and, the implications for future middle years agendas.
The initial data, collected through qualitative and quantitative methods from the 2003 graduates, indicated that this cohort was considering themselves as developing middle years teachers. Based on their theoretical understandings and their practical experiences they were increasingly aware of the type of middle years teacher they were hoping to become. They demonstrated an understanding of middle years teacher identity and how early adolescents are developing during this developmental stage. There was also evidence to suggest that the beliefs of this cohort had similarities to the beliefs of middle years students. Similarities were described as “middle years as a period of transition and development” and the “importance of relationships for both students and teachers” (Pendergast et al., 2007, p. 86). Finally these preservice teachers indicated concern about the future of middle years as a focus for educational contexts.

More recently, as part of the same longitudinal study, further findings of the research were presented (see Pendergast et al., 2009). With the same aims of the research embedded in the study, data from two cohorts were selected, with one cohort graduating in 2003 and the other in 2008. The data were analysed using the concepts outlined in the Middle Years of School Association Position Paper (Middle Years of Schooling Association, 2008), people, practices and places. Comparison of the data gathered from the two cohorts demonstrated variations in the responses. The two different groups demonstrated different response rates to questions. However, the results of the research showed that the two cohorts demonstrated “an overall range of understanding, knowledge and values about the middle years of schooling” (p. 24). Practicum was viewed as either “helpful or not helpful” depending on whether the preservice teachers perceived the experience as useful in assisting their pedagogical practices and the development of the middle years learners in
their class (Pendergast et. al., 2009, p. 23). It was concluded that the study confirmed the complex nature of middle schooling and the diversity in the perceptions of preservice teachers around the ideas of middle schooling and the role of practicum.

2.5.2 Practicum in middle schooling teacher preparation.

An ideal model of teacher education includes a partnership between universities and schools that promotes and supports quality practicum experiences (Blunden, 2000; Brady, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Groundswater-Smith, 2010; Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 2003; Ramsey, 2000; Ure, Gogh, & Newton, 2009; Zeichner, 2010). This notion is confirmed by the National Middle School Association (2001, 2006) that claims practicum is pivotal in middle schooling teacher preparation. The NMSA note that preservice teachers completing middle years teacher preparation should undertake practicum experiences in authentic settings in middle years classrooms. Practicum, also referred to as field studies, field experience or professional experience, allows preservice teachers to take the knowledge, skills, concepts and theories learnt at university and apply them to classroom practice (HRSCEVT, 2007). This link between theory and practice (known as praxis) assists preservice teachers to make the connections between their university studies and teaching (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Sorin, 2004; Zeichner, 2010). Similar to NMSA, much of the literature pertaining to teacher education in Australia recognises practicum as the core to preservice teacher development (Committee for the Review of Teacher Education, 2003; Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Government, 2003; Ramsay, 2000; Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005; Vinson, 2004).
Practicum provides an opportunity for preservice teachers to develop mastery as they apply their professional knowledge to practice in the classroom. In a study undertaken by Smith & Snoek (1996), it was reported that preservice teachers perceived the practicum to be the most vital aspect of their teacher education program. Furthermore, preservice teachers reported that their practicum experience assisted them to develop their professional identity and recognise the role of the teacher in the school and wider community. Other similar studies that investigated the perceptions of preservice teachers towards their practicum experiences found the in-school experiences positively influenced attitudinal change in regards to the work of teachers (Hodge, Davis, Woodward, & Sherrill, 2002) and any lack of confidence in their ability to teach was overcome (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000). A more recent study by Smith and Lev-Ari (2005), found that preservice teachers valued the theoretical knowledge provided by university, however, 90% of the participants viewed the practicum as the most important aspect of their teacher preparation. Authors of this study advocated a balance between the theoretical content and practical components in the development of future teacher education programs to further enhance preservice teachers’ ability to make the links between theory and practice.

Similar to other parts of the world, the role of the teacher has changed as the socio-cultural nature of Australian society has evolved (Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005). As a result, the work of teachers is more complex (Hargreaves, 2000; Luke, 2004), with teachers being viewed as change agents for educational and societal reform (Pendergast, 2010; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). In designing practicum experiences for preservice teachers, it is important that careful consideration be given to the school and classroom placements so that realistic experiences uncover the complex role of the teacher.
Graduates of specialised middle years teacher education courses have the potential to be vehicles of reform (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Preservice teacher approaches learnt at university and adopted in classrooms can enhance the support and education of early adolescent learners (Pendergast et al., 2007). Keogh et al. (2006) acknowledge the impact of the practicum and the importance of providing preservice teachers with a range of teaching experiences in middle schooling contexts. Of further significance, Keogh et al. (2006) promote that middle years preservice teachers should be given the opportunity to experience the collaborative nature and role they will undertake in middle schooling classrooms by working with teachers employed in such capacities.

2.5.2.1 The role of the mentor teacher

The role of the mentor teacher is pivotal to the development of the preservice teacher during practicum (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hudson, 2007, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). Just as the teacher can make a difference in the classroom, the mentor can make the difference to the preservice teacher’s development (Glickman & Bey, 1990; Hudson, 2004; Hudson & Millwater, 2008; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The preservice teacher in their role of novice looks towards the mentor teacher as a guide, supporter and coach in their role as an expert (Hansford, Ehrich, & Tennent, 2004). For preservice teachers undertaking middle years teacher preparation, Keogh (2005) argues that the newness of middle years teacher preparation can make it challenging to locate suitable practicum places where the mentor or supervising teacher has the depth of knowledge relating to early adolescence, and the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge to adequately support the preservice teacher. She notes that placements are easier to locate in primary settings as opposed to
secondary settings, due to the logistical limitations and organisation of secondary schools. Mitchell et al. (2003) confirms the difficulties that can arise when middle school preservice teachers are placed in practicum situations in which practices are not “consistent with middle years philosophy” (p.79). However, as advocated by the National Middle School Association (2001, 2006), middle years preservice teachers should have opportunities to complete authentic practicum experiences in a range of contexts with diverse middle years learners.

2.5.3 Preservice teacher confidence for teaching in the middle school.

Reviews into teacher education outline the importance of graduates being confident and competent to teach (Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005; HRSCET, 2007; Masters, 2009). Pendergast (2010) suggests the need to have effective middle school teachers with high levels of confidence to achieve positive student outcomes. Despite Pendergast’s claims, there is dearth of research that investigates preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling. As established in section 2.5.1, the Australian studies undertaken by Pendergast et al. (2007, 2009) have focused on middle years preservice teachers’ perceptions of their course, with an emphasis on their middle schooling teacher identities. It is evident there is a need to investigate the confidence of middle school preservice teachers to teach in the middle schooling context.

Bandura (1977, 1994, 1997) claims that beliefs in one’s own capabilities are critical elements of how people behave. Pajares (2000, 2002) confirms and extends this notion by
claiming that a belief in one’s own ability to achieve a task plays a role in attaining successful outcomes. This belief in oneself is often referred to as self efficacy (Evans, 1989), which Pajares (2002) notes is the level of confidence in one’s ability to undertake an activity or perform in a certain situation. Self perceptions about ability does not necessarily equate to skills, motivation, and knowledge but being confident to undertake a task can provide an indication of performance (Lane et al., 2004).

Bandura (1977, 1994) contends that beliefs in one’s ability to succeed are influenced by four sources. The first and most influential is the mastery experience that provides practice for individuals to undertake a task within a realistic situation developing confidence when the task is achieved successfully. The second is the vicarious experience, where others model an activity or situation providing an understanding of how it may be executed. The third influence is social persuasions, where confidence levels are developed from the social messages received from others, and finally, physiological state is the influence of stress, anxiety and mood on levels of confidence. Teachers’ self efficacy or perceptions of their confidence to teach has demonstrated links to their teaching ability and willingness to implement particular concepts and key learning areas in the classroom (Geoghegan, Geoghegan, O’Neill, & White, 2004; Giallo & Little, 2003; Gunning & Mensah, 2010; Jamieson-Proctor & Finger, 2006; Lavelle, 2006). Harlen and Allende (2009) note that confidence for teaching plays a large part in determining whether teachers provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Furthermore, confidence in the areas of theoretical and pedagogical knowledge more often equates to successful teachers who influence positive student outcomes (Cripps Clark & Walsh, 2002). With confidence
playing a role in the success of teachers in the classroom, the confidence of preservice teachers needs to be considered.

2.5.3.1 Investigating confidence and teaching

As already stated, there is little research that highlights the confidence of preservice teachers to teach in the middle years of schooling. However, a study by Woolfolk Hoy (2000) provides a suggestion as to how preservice teacher confidence may be measured. This study investigates teacher self efficacy, or, levels of confidence, during preservice teachers’ (n=53) university course and into their first year in the profession. As a way to gather data, Woolfolk Hoy constructed a Teacher Confidence Scale based on the desired practices of graduates provided by supervising or mentor teachers. “The result was a list of 32 teaching skills such as manage classrooms, evaluate student work, use cooperative learning approaches, teach basic concepts of fractions, and build learning in science on children’s intuitive understandings” (Woolfolk Hoy, 2000, p. 12). The instrument header stated, “I am confident in my ability to...” and participants self reported their level of confidence in a particular skill on a Likert scale. This study by Woolfolk Hoy demonstrates how preservice teachers can self report their confidence for teaching on selected items.

By investigating preservice teacher confidence Albion (1999) and Giallo and Little (2003) note that it can provide evidence of preparedness for teaching. A study by Kessell et al. (2006) concurs with this notion, claiming, by investigating preservice teachers’ perceptions of confidence for supporting special needs practices, an indication of the
participants’ preparedness for teaching special needs students was provided. This study investigated 335 preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching special needs students in agricultural education. Similar to the study by Woolfolk Hoy (2000), participants completed an instrument using a Likert scale to obtain data about the confidence levels of the preservice teachers in relation to special needs practices. Kessell, Wingenbach, and Lawver (2006) conclude this study provided useful and specific information about preservice teacher preparedness by investigating the participants’ confidence on key issues and practices related to special needs students.

Teacher self efficacy or levels of confidence can influence teacher willingness to teach particular key learning areas and their success and effectiveness in the classroom (Geoghegan, Geoghegan, O’Neill, & White, 2004; Giallo & Little, 2003; Gunning & Mensah, 2010; Jamieson-Proctor & Finger, 2006; Lavelle, 2006). The studies by Kessel et al. (2006) and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) demonstrate how preservice teachers can self report confidence on specifically designed instruments. By investigating the confidence of preservice teachers, information about their preparedness for teaching and future directions of their teacher education programs may be gathered (Albion, 1999; Giallo & Little. 2003). Pajares (1992) argues that educational research should investigate the perceptions of preservice teachers as this type of study can inform educational practice for the future. The lack of research related to preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling demonstrates the need for an investigation in this area that will provide information about the perceived areas of confidence, their preparedness for teaching and future directions of middle years teacher education programs.
2.6 Identifying practices for teaching in the middle school

This study draws on middle schooling practices applicable to the preparation of preservice teachers for teaching in the middle years of schooling. As well as identifying middle schooling practices, alignment to the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) is also noted to highlight the need of middle schooling teacher preparation to meet the requirements of teacher registration. As the majority of the preservice teachers involved in this study were from Queensland, the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) have been used, however, it can be identified that some synergies exist between these and those presented by the other states and territories. The following sections identify practices that assist preservice teachers for teaching in the middle school and will be discussed under the following headings that emanate from the literature: creating a positive classroom environment (Section 2.6.1); developing positive relationships for teaching (Section 2.6.2); pedagogical knowledge for teaching in the middle school (Section 2.6.3); and implementation of middle school teaching (Section 2.6.4).

2.6.1 Creating a positive classroom environment.

Unleashing the desire to learn is linked to student engagement, however, this can be coupled with a student’s sense of self worth (Riggs & Gholar, 2009). Early adolescents face numerous issues that can impact on their sense of self worth, one of which is safety in the schools for both boys and girls (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). Cumming (1998) notes the need to feel safe is an essential requirement for early adolescents. Bullying, either physically in the school or emotionally, can impede middle school students’ education. As indicated by Nessin and Brazee (2005) middle school teachers
have a responsibility to ensure their school and classroom environment is safe and the consequences of bullying for “bullies, victims and on-lookers” is realised (p. 41).

Emotional issues arising from physiological changes and personal difficulties such as family or peer conflicts can impact on the early adolescent’s desire to learn (Dinham & Rowe, 2009). Middle school teachers need to be aware of the issues facing students in their class so that support can be offered. As noted by Carrington (2002), it is important for teachers of early adolescents commit to “providing supportive environments in the middle years” (p. 8). A desirable attribute for teachers is the ability to create a safe and supportive learning environment (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) and this is a priority for middle schooling to ensure the safety and well being is at the forefront of teaching practices (Barratt, 1998; Carrington, 2002; Hester, Gable, & Manning, 2003; Jackson & Davis 2000; National Middle School Association, 1995; Rumble & Aspland, 2010).

As highlighted in Section 2.3, early adolescents are in a vulnerable period of human development, where many are moving away from parental influence to that of peers and those they respect around them (Bahr, 2007a; Pendergast et al., 2007). Carrington (2002) notes that some early adolescents may be at risk as they seek independence from family members and investigate new relations among peers. Due to their physiological and social development, some middle school students may search for the excitement of risk taking opportunities (Boyd, Maroulis, & Richardson, 1998; Carrington, 2002; Pendergast, 2006). Middle school teachers are well positioned to create positive relationships with their students, modelling appropriate social interaction and enthusiasm for learning, to guide and monitor students within the school environment (National Middle School Association,
Middle school teachers need to provide an environment where early adolescents are guided to interact with a range of peer groups and have opportunities to experience risk taking in their learning in a well supported classroom. Indeed, Erb (2001) notes that the indicators of a positive learning environment is one that promotes creativity, encourages mutual respect, and, responsible and supportive risk taking where students and teachers feel safe. Middle schooling teacher education courses need to incorporate such practices into their teacher preparation programs to ensure responsive strategies are implemented in middle years classrooms (Bryer & Main, 2005; Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Middle School Association, 2001; Pendergast et al., 2005).

Pendergast (2006) notes that early adolescents in Australia are diverse which is representative of the changing societal, cultural, and economic contexts. Lyon (2009) documents evidence that preservice teachers arrive at university with limited experiences of interacting with the diversity of students they will encounter in school contexts. She further articulates the need for preservice teachers to understand the requirements of diverse students (see also Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). Indeed, “many teachers have not had sustained contact with people of diverse backgrounds, nor have they learned about people different from themselves in other ways” (Nieto, 2005, p. 217). Teachers are in prominent positions where their views presented in classrooms can impact on students’ attitudes and values. Promoting respect of other cultures, backgrounds and difference, including those associated with early adolescent development, can have positive effects on the classroom climate and relationships (Nessin & Brazee, 2005). Cumming (1998) notes that creating a supportive environment in the middle years is about celebrating diversity.
and ensuring that issues relating to discrimination and harassment are addressed. Indeed, catering for diversity is necessary for early adolescent education and middle schooling. Teachers need to possess the skills and practices to engage the diversity of students from the range of cultures and backgrounds indicative of the Australian context (Chadbourne, 2001; Luke et al., 2003).

Australian early adolescents have a great range of learning needs including diverse interests, gifted and talented education, remedial education, and English as a foreign or second language (EFL, ESL). The nature of Australian society, the influence of technology, and globalisation has meant that middle years students come to the classroom setting with a range of learning styles, interests and knowledge (Arnold, 2000; Bahr, 2007b; Chadbourne, 2001; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005). Skills for creating a learning environment that caters for diversity of learning styles and considers the needs and interests of the individual learner are required by the middle schooling teacher graduate. Middle years preservice teacher education coursework must prepare preservice teachers with the skills, knowledge, and practices required to cater to the vast range of learning styles and needs of their students.

Early adolescents can vacillate in their behaviour during their physiological and psychological developments, and middle school teachers claim that behaviour management is a concern in many classrooms (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Behaviour management that is developmentally responsive to the early adolescent is essential in the middle years of schooling to cater for the many changes the learner is experiencing (Barratt, 1998, Braggett, Morris & Day, 1999; Cumming, 1998). A study that collected
data from six public schools in New South Wales with exceptional student welfare programs was documented by Paterson, Graham, and Stevens (2007). The results highlighted that these schools were effective in their middle schooling behaviour management programs because they included: a framework that clearly outlined student rights and responsibilities; teachers who worked together and were innovative in their approaches to behaviour management; a positive environment that demonstrated care and concern for the students and a focus on the development of positive relationships within the school community (Paterson et al., 2007). De Jong’s (2010) six principles of behaviour management for middle school students confirms the need for developmentally responsive behaviour management strategies and concurs with much of the findings of the study noted above, stressing the importance of a supportive classroom environment, schools with teachers that promote inclusivity, a student-centred philosophy and positive relationships within the school and classroom. As suggested by O’Connor (2008), teachers need to demonstrate a caring approach with a professional and philosophical dimension that can influence student behaviour. The development of behaviour management strategies suitable for early adolescents is an essential component of middle schooling teacher preparation (see also Queensland College of Teachers, 2006).

2.6.2 Developing positive relationships for teaching.

Teacher-student relationships have an effect on a student’s education and are seen as an important aspect of teaching regardless of the level of schooling (see also Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). Baker (2006) claims that students with behavioural problems may also have educational difficulties and do not generally have positive teacher-student relationships, while a study undertaken in over twenty schools in Australia demonstrated
the importance of student-teacher relationships in the development and maintenance of student well being (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007). It is well supported that teachers play a fundamental role in students connecting with school, motivation to accomplish, propensity towards lifelong learning and academic achievement (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Pendergast et al., 2005). Considering the development for early adolescents is profound and their search for self identity is influenced by the relationships with others, peer and teacher relationships can become pivotal to their development (Andrews, 2005; Bahr, 2007c; Jackson & Davis, 2000). In particular, the relationship with their teacher may be high stakes for students’ learning and achievement of outcomes (Raider-Roth, 2005). Murray and Malmgren (2005) demonstrated through an intervention program designed to improve early adolescent relationships with teachers that this intervention group gained higher grade point averages as a result of their teacher-student relationships. Teachers can facilitate these relationships by making conscious efforts to understand students and allow students to have a voice in the classroom (Rogers et al., 2007). Teachers can clearly convey their expectations, demonstrate they care, and have empathy and interest in their students’ successes and achievements (Andrews, 2005). Indeed, as indicated in Section 2.6.1, a positive teacher-student relationship will promote an affirming classroom environment that is conducive to student engagement.

It is advocated that teaching in teams can enhance teacher-student relationships and relationships between teachers (Main, 2010; Wormelli, 2000). Teaching involves problem solving and making decisions about students’ learning on a regular basis. Teachers who work in teams share ideas and make decisions about curriculum, instructional approaches, management strategies, grouping, scheduling and assessment (Pate, 1997). Teaching teams
can create a shared vision that is advocated to provide consistency and clear expectations for middle school students (Main, 2010). Furthermore, by working in teams there is evidence to suggest that teachers benefit through professional development, greater diversity in teaching, increase in teaching satisfaction and improved knowledge about teaching middle years students (Pounder, 1999). Greater motivation and knowledge on behalf of teachers will ensure greater support of student learning and consistency in programs that support early adolescent engagement. For example, working in teams can promote the development of transition programs that can assist middle school students to successfully make the transition between primary and secondary settings.

The transition between middle school and high school is a time when the disengagement and dropout rate exceeds any other period of schooling (Smith, 2006). Although Akos (2005, p. 380) states there is limited “outcome research” that investigates the transition to high school, there is evidence to suggest that this period equates to declines in academic achievement and motivation as well as an increase in behaviour problems (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Henson (2005) indicates that although transitions do not affect every early adolescent, when it is difficult, “perceptions of self worth and increases in their feelings of anonymity and other psychological symptoms such as anxiety” can occur (p. 378). As a result, the promotion of a seamless transition from primary to secondary school is identified as a significant middle schooling practice in Australia and in the United States (Akos, 2005; Carrington, et al., 2001; Carrington, 2004; Chadbourne, 2001; Education Queensland, 2004; Hill & Russell, 1999; Masters, 2009; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010).
Although there are Australian transition models created by secondary and their associated (or feeder) primary schools, there is a need for the development of relationships within the school and wider community to support the transition process. As noted above, the development of teaching teams can be beneficial. In particular, teaching teams can assist the transition process by supporting and constructing orientation programs to familiarise students with their new surroundings and, to map, document, communicate and share information about the diverse learning and social needs and interests of the students (Akos, 2005; Andrews, 2005). A positive transition program, whether it is between year levels or between primary and secondary, is facilitated by the development of relationships with parents and carers that will ensure the transition process is consistently supported and understood at home and within the school context (Akos, 2005; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Fenzel, 2005).

The involvement of parents and carers not only supports transition programs but has positive outcomes for students in the middle years of schooling (Epstein et al., 2002). NMSA (2000) claims that families should be actively involved in their child’s education and reports that students perform better academically and have more manageable classroom behaviour. Furthermore, parents and carers are more supportive of schools when they have greater involvement and feel they are part of the school community (NMSA, 2000). Epstein et al. (2002) advocate that to develop relationships with parents and carers schools need to: ensure there is a shared understanding of the needs of early adolescents; communicate on a regular basis using a variety of approaches; encourage parent / carer volunteering in the school; coordinate school work with homework; encourage involvement through the sharing of decision making processes and; collaborate with the
community in a range of activities that support early adolescents. Through these six types of involvement Epstein et al (2002) claim that middle years students will be better supported and perform better at school. Hence, it is necessary that middle schooling teacher graduates acquire the knowledge about these strategies to assist them to develop relationships with students, parents, carers and within school communities.

### 2.6.3 Pedagogical knowledge for teaching in the middle school.

Appropriate and relevant pedagogical knowledge is essential for engaging middle school students (Doda, 2005; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005). Neumann and Associates (1996) note that pedagogy is pivotal to student achievement, while Johnson and Johnson (2005) claim that the “pedagogy used may be the most important factor in helping middle grade students meet their developmental challenges” (p. 159). Preservice teachers in middle years programs need to develop suitable pedagogical practices for engaging middle years learners (National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006). A starting point is an understanding of middle schooling philosophy that underpins the teaching of early adolescents (National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007; Jackson & Davis, 2000). A suitable philosophy resonates with the principles and practices of middle schooling and is informed by knowledge of early adolescent development, the societal influences of the new times in which they live, and the research and theories that have emerged about middle schooling both nationally and internationally (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005).
Middle years pedagogical knowledge also incorporates planning appropriate learning experiences that are developmentally relevant, intellectually challenging, and align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). Learning experiences that are developmentally responsive mean the topics and content are relevant to the lives of the students and allow for differentiation in readiness; learning styles and interests (Doda, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999). Incorporated into the planning of learning experiences are the skills to develop deep understanding, variation in the level of questioning and thinking skills, and opportunities for students to synthesise information and to communicate ideas and conclusions (Beane, 1997, 2004; Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 1993). The alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment within learning experiences means middle years students identify connections between what is being taught, how it is taught, and the relevance of the assessment that becomes embedded within the teaching and learning experience (Anafara & Stacki, 2002; Hayes, 2003; Ross, 2005). Pendergast et al. (2007, p.74) claim that such practices will create “greater consistency and rigour to middle years classrooms”. Carrington (2002) concurs that improvements will transpire into positive early adolescent student outcomes.

Further pedagogical practices that are essential to effective middle school teaching are the ability to plan and to deliver lessons that adopt a range of teaching strategies (Doda, 2005; Rafiq & Woolnough, 2005). Variety in teaching strategies can maximise learners engagement through student-centred activities and meaningful group work. Strategies such as cooperative learning can facilitate positive peer interactions and promote independent learning (Boyd, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Middle years preservice teachers require
a repertoire of teaching strategies that can assist their implementation of real-world connected programs. For instance, understanding how to use frameworks for teaching strategies such as de Bono’s (1985) Six Thinking Hats, Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy, and Gardner’s (1999) Multiple Intelligences can assist preservice teachers to more effectively motivate middle school students in education by challenging, and catering to their thinking styles (Chadbourne, 2001; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2004; Todd, 2005; Vale, 1999). However, the knowledge and skills to apply suitable pedagogical practices can transform as they are informed by new theories, research and societal changes. Just as the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers note that teachers “commit to reflective practice and ongoing professional renewal” (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006, p. 16), it is advocated that middle school teachers need to continually advance their own professional growth by reflecting and refining teaching practices, and engaging in further professional development (De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; Education Queensland, 2004; Hunt, Wiseman & Bowden, 1998; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2007). Such commitment needs to be realised by middle years preservice teachers, with strategies embedded in university programs to ensure graduates are well aware of the changing nature of teaching and the dedication required for continued professional rejuvenation (Romey, 2005).

2.6.4 Implementing middle school teaching.

Middle school learning requires implementing student centred learning experiences through constructivist principles that challenge and evoke higher order thinking (Carrington, 2002, 2006; Chadbourne, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986). Such teaching aligns with early adolescent development and can scaffold learning to assist students to gather
information, question, and reason, synthesise, critically review, formulate informed conclusions and apply the information to real situations (Doda, 2005; Hilton & Hilton, 2010). Indeed, learning may be more effective through hands-on activities and interdisciplinary or integrated programs with real-world and global connections that demonstrate social purposes and are embedded in authentic contexts (Beane, 1997, 2006; Grant & Paige, 2007; Pate, 2005; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). Middle years preservice teachers require knowledge to implement programs that are intellectually rigorous and require significant depth of knowledge. A rich understanding of the repertoire of practices needed to engage with content and contexts of all kinds relevant to the twenty-first century will support effective lesson implementation (Honan, 2010; Dole, 2010).

Implementing middle school education requires links between subjects for enhancing the learning process (Beane, 1997, Pate, 2001). Subject integration aims to combine key learning areas within an activity. This approach is promoted as a way to locate learning in different contexts (Venville et al., 2001) and increase students’ understanding through an integrative manipulation that embraces multiple perspectives (James, Lamb, Householder, & Bailey, 2000). Integrating curricula as a seamless bonding of outcomes from varied subjects may present applications that help students to understand concepts and apply them to the world around them (Beane, 2006). Implementing interdisciplinary (integrated) learning programs is recognised as a positive contribution to a student’s education, and this becomes prominent in middle schooling where students seek new and relevant learning experiences (Beane, 1997, 2006; Carrington, 2006; Hattam, 2006). Devising an integrative curriculum is noted as a way to be responsive to early adolescents’ needs (Dowden, 2007; Pate, 2001) and the use of integrative models (Beane, 1991, 1997, 2006) may assist this
process. Preservice teachers need guidance on how to construct integrated curriculum and implement it in the middle years classroom (Grant & Paige, 2007).

National assessments in Australia (e.g., NAPLAN), The Masters Report (Masters, 2009) and a strong national emphasis on attaining high levels of literacy and numeracy (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Government, 2005) necessitate preservice teacher development in these key learning areas for teaching in the middle school. The authors of the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) advocate that expertise in the teaching of literacy and numeracy is an essential attribute for graduates. Ability to teach in these key learning areas is confirmed nationally from government reports and standards that preservice teacher development for teaching literacy and numeracy needs to be at the forefront of educational change (Chadbourne, 2001; Pendergast et al., 2007).

Findings reported in one study (Coltheart & Prior, 2007) showed that in some teacher education courses, “less than 10 percent of course time was devoted to preparing teachers to teach reading; in about half of these courses this percentage was less than five percent” (p. 6). The importance of literacy and numeracy are basic to ensure the academic success of all learners (Luke et al., 2003).

While Luke et al. (2003) claim that the teaching of literacy has been given more focus in schools than numeracy, it is clear that both literacy and numeracy have the potential to be integrated by teachers across the curriculum to ensure connections between key learning areas and confirm their relevance to early adolescents’ daily lives. Middle years preservice teachers require adequate instruction and opportunities to plan, deliver, and incorporate
literacy and numeracy experiences that draw on the students’ prior learning, include a range of digital technologies that are purposeful, meaningful and successful in making connections for early adolescent learners (Borko & Whitcomb, 2008; Honan, 2010; Pendergast et al., 2007).

Globally, technology has a significant role as a tool for educating all students, including middle-school students (Prensky, 2005). Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has advanced considerably over the last 20 years, with the Internet and a wide range of interactive applications that can facilitate learning (Jonassen, 2004). As today’s middle school students are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2005) growing up with ICT, lifelong learning has become a developing lifestyle for many early adolescents (Flecknoe, 2002; Gronow, 2007). ICT has changed the way education is implemented in many schools (Creighton, 2003; Scrimshaw, 2004; NSW Department of Education & Training, 2006). There has been a paradigm shift for implementing teaching over the last two decades, where ICT has facilitated more student-centred learning in many areas of the school curricula (Theriot, 2005).

Interactive whiteboards are further tools used for targeting early adolescent learners. The teacher’s role aids in creating optimal conditions for learning, such as selecting appropriate, timely and challenging applications, tracking students’ learning, and questioning students about their learning (Osborne & Hennessy, 2003). Middle school teachers and preservice teachers’ implementation of learning programs that incorporate ICTs, combined with supportive pedagogy, can lead to “increased student interest and motivation in learning, more student-centred classroom environments, and increased real-
life or authentic learning opportunities” (Muir & Scott, 2005, p. 364). There is evidence to suggest that ICT integration can assist to address student needs, societal requirements, increase student self esteem, and open up opportunities to advance middle school students’ future prospects (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006).

As well as incorporating Information Communication Technologies into the classroom, teachers need to possess the expertise to assess and report on student learning (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). Assessment is viewed as vital to the teaching and learning process of early adolescents as it provides information that directs effective instruction (Wyatt-Smith, Cumming, Elkins, & Colbert, 2010). The alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment has already been discussed (see Section 2.6.3) as a way forward to assist the consistency of learning for early adolescents (Carrington, 2002; Education Queensland, 2004; Hayes, 2003; Pendergast et al., 2007). Developmentally, middle school students are generally ready to make the connection between conceptual learning and meaningful situations, hence, supporters of middle school practices advocate the need for authentic assessment that link to real-life situations (De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; Pate, 2005). Authentic assessments are noted to be more motivating for early adolescents as it complements their learning characteristics as they synthesise, critically analyse and apply the knowledge to meaningful contexts (Groundswater-Smith et al., 2007; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010).

The National Middle School Association’s (2011) Second Draft Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards to be implemented in 2013, confirm the importance of graduates who can successfully assess student learning using formal, informal and performance-
based assessment. In addition, they assert the importance of knowledge and experience in constructing a range of assessment tasks to provide variety for middle years learners. Indeed, students need a variety of assessments that challenge each individual to demonstrate competencies in non-threatening ways (Brady & Kennedy, 2007; Harlen, 2004; Pate; 2005; Wyatt-Smith, et al., 2010). Knowing how to interpret data and report on middle years students’ learning becomes part of the assessment and evaluation of the learning processes. Furthermore, this evidence can be used for accountability, reporting to parents, and can promote learning consistency in the transition from one year to the next.

Middle school teacher preparation programs need to incorporate into the curricula knowledge of assessment types, their construction, the gathering and analysis of information and the use of data and, the processes and practices in reporting within school contexts and to parents and carers.

2.6.5 Summary of the identified middle school strategies and practices.

Four key themes (Figure 2.1) have emerged from the literature as identified practices of middle school teachers that directly link to supporting the distinct stage of early adolescent development (Section 2.6). Each of these four broad themes interconnects. It is evident that synergies exist between the Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) and the desirable inclusions for middle years teacher preparation. These four themes derived from the literature will create a framework for this study that will assist in the reporting and analysis process.
Figure 2.1 creates a summary of the four themes emerging from the literature and the identified practices required for middle years teachers, hence, the attributes required for middle years graduate teachers. In summary, it has been established that an effective middle school teacher will create a positive classroom environment that fosters independence and caters for diversity. It is important to facilitate a safe learning environment with clear classroom plans that focus on behaviour management strategies, with a balance between rewards and consequences. The role of the middle years teacher is imperative, as the early adolescent student moves away from the influence of parents and becomes more reliant on those around them. Middle years teachers need to ensure they are positive role models by demonstrating enthusiasm for teaching and concerns for student well being.

Teaching has relationships at the centre of learning; consequently, developing positive relationships with students, staff, parents, and the community is pivotal to the teacher’s role. These relationships help to support the student’s learning from one year to the next during the vulnerable, early adolescent years, and as they make the transition between classes and between school settings. Such relationships can maintain consistency in learning and welfare programs that cater to the students’ needs.
Pedagogy is at the centre of engaging middle years learners. Middle years teachers need to have a firm philosophy that includes a thorough understanding of early adolescent development, enthusiasm for planning, implementing and assessing programs that are consistent and developmentally responsive. Variety in teaching strategies and the ability to engage students in learning that fosters interaction and is intellectually challenging will maximise student engagement and cater to learner needs. The changing nature of teaching
and the influences of societal change indicate that middle years teachers need to reflect and refine their practices to ensure continued professional development to facilitate continued renewal of their teaching practices.

The implementation of teaching in the middle years supports the development of curricula that incorporates Information Communication Technologies, interdisciplinary and real-world learning experiences that link to global issues and the lives of the students. Early adolescents’ cognitive development necessitates the incorporation of constructivist approaches that sequentially builds on the knowledge learnt and challenges students to think critically. Content knowledge across key learning areas is imperative for middle school teachers with a focus on the knowledge to teach literacy and numeracy, as supported by government documents and middle years ideologies. However, interwoven into the middle years teaching and learning process is the ability to undertake ongoing assessment. Middle years teachers require the skills and knowledge to construct authentic assessment tasks that are relevant to the students and provide data for accurate reporting to fellow teachers, parents and care givers.

2.7. Chapter summary

Chapter 2 has provided an overview of teacher education reviews in Australia, the development of the standards for teachers, and the need for teacher education institutions to produce quality teachers. Recognition of early adolescence as a distinct stage of human development provided an impetus for reforms into middle schooling. Literature and reports from the United States were discussed, and the developments of middle schooling in
Australia were provided. Producing specialised middle school teachers was supported by various Australian state reports and the National Middle School Association in the United States, and the role of practicum in middle years teacher preparation was also confirmed. Developing confidence for teaching in the middle school context was argued and the practices for teaching were identified with the four emerging themes discussed and summarised.

Chapter 3 will present the aims and design of the research, as well as the methods of data collection. The preparation of the research will be provided. It will be demonstrated how the identified practices for teaching in the middle school context noted above assisted in the development of the survey instrument, the questionnaire and the interview questions. Finally, the data analysis will be presented, and the reliability and validity of the study will be addressed.
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methods

3.1 Chapter preview

This chapter presents the research design with data collection methods and analysis. An overview of the research aims (Section 3.2) will be highlighted and the details of the research design presented (Section 3.3). Important to this study is the research preparation (Section 3.4) leading to details on implementing the data collection methods (Section 3.5). Data analysis will be explained (Section 3.6) and the validity and reliability of data collection will be highlighted (Section 3.7). The chapter will then be summarised and concluded (Section 3.8).

3.2 Overview of the research aims

It has been established in Chapter 2 that there is a need to investigate ways to support early adolescents as they negotiate their journey through the middle years of schooling. As a way forward, universities have responded to the literature and government policies by introducing teacher education courses specifically designed to graduate specialist middle years teachers (Pendergast et al., 2007). It is hoped that these specialist teachers will graduate with theoretical and pedagogical knowledge to support and engage middle years learners (Main & Bryer, 2004). However, research is required to determine the adequacy of preservice teacher preparation for middle school teaching. Although there is some research regarding preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle years teacher preparation (Pendergast et al., 2007, 2009), there is little research relating to the
perceptions of their confidence to teach. There is some evidence to suggest that the perception of confidence can impact on the ability to teach in the classroom (Section 2.5.3).

The purpose of this research was to explore and describe final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle years teacher preparation courses. In particular, this research aimed to:

1. Investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling.

2. Analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident.


Desired outcomes of this research are to provide information about the confidence of graduates to teach in the middle school, and the strategies and approaches that may equip them to be well positioned for classroom teaching. It is also hoped that this investigation will contribute to what is viewed as a gap in the research related to middle school teacher preparation (Hunter et al., 2005). The study strives to provide information about middle years dialogue around early adolescents and the importance of teacher education programs that suitably prepare graduates with the skills, knowledge, and practices to support and engage middle years learners.
3.3 Overview of the research design

The three research aims were investigated using a mixed-method design also known as integrating, synthesis, multimethod and mixed methodology (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). By using a mixed-method research design, the study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. One method of data collection may be inadequate to meet the complex needs of the research, which is often the case with social research (Creswell, 2009). A mixed-method approach is noted as a way to strengthen the quality of research (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Haertel & Means, 2000; Johnson, & Christenson, 2008). Using both qualitative and quantitative methods can provide broader insights, with a more meaningful view of the participants’ responses (Greene, 2001). The design suits the research as each aim, although linked, investigated a variation of the central theme, which would be represented by a mixed-method approach.

Although mixed-method research designs can be used within interpretivist qualitative and post-positivist quantitative traditions, the epistemological approach of this study was interpretive, as it investigated the “experiences, behaviours, feelings and knowledge of the participants” (i.e., preservice teachers) and focused on exploring and describing their perceptions (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 133). It approached the data analysis as inductive rather than “testing a theory”, as indicative of a post-positivist quantitative approach (Creswell, 2009, p. 207). As the study aimed to explore and describe preservice teachers’ perceptions as a result of their teacher preparation, this study was informed by the work of Blumer (1969). In particular, Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism, aligned to interpretivism, allowed for the participants to report upon their own experiences, using
their own language and, as a result of their interactions within their community. Symbolic Interactionism provided a theoretical framework and supports the approach for this study as the preservice teachers self report their confidence for teaching, the university experiences that influenced their development, and suggestions to enhance future middle years teacher preparation courses. Participant perceptions enriched the quantitative data collected in this mixed-method research design. Both sets of data had relatively equal weighting as each supported specific aspects of the research aims (Creswell, 2009).

The quantitative information was collected using a survey that allowed for data to be gathered from a sample population that provided inferences about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of that population (Neuman, 2003). Qualitative data were collected using a questionnaire and semi-structured, one-to-one interviews. The interviews provided more in-depth responses to complement the quantitative data and address the requirements of the different research aims. This mixed-method design sought to overcome the limitations and biases of any one design and present information from a variety of perspectives (McMurray, Pace, & Scott, 2004). However, mixed-method approaches can be time consuming in data analysis (Creswell, 2009) and require well organised, sequenced research preparation to ensure the processes and procedures support the validity of the research (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). The following section outlines the research preparation that supports this study.
3.4 Research preparation

3.4.1 Stage one.

The research preparation consisted of two stages that allowed for a sequential and informed approach towards data collection. Creswell (2009) notes that a sequential approach is necessary in mixed-method design as it allows for meaningful and orderly collection of data. Stage one incorporated the three phases depicted in Figure 3.1. All phases of stage one of the study are directly related to the research aims (Figure 3.1). The first phase consisted of undertaking a study of the literature related to the middle years of schooling. Investigating the literature was necessary as it set the context for the study and provided information relating to the state of middle years research in Australia and in the United States. Furthermore, of interest to this study, were reviews of teacher education, teacher standards, teacher preparation and the literature relating to confidence and the ability to teach. McMurray et al. (2004) note that reviewing the literature is essential as it discovers what is written, clarifies the issues and produces evidence on which to base “fundamental questions thereby refining the research topics” (p. 48).

The literature gathered in phase one (Chapter 2) provided information required to develop the survey instrument. A survey was viewed as appropriate for this study as it allowed for a large population to be studied and “rapid turnaround in data collection” (Creswell, 2009, p. 145). Specifically, literature about middle years teachers and the desired strategies and practices for teaching (see Figure 2.1) were used to construct the survey. As the majority of the participants were attending university in Queensland, The Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) that were developed in line with the National Framework for Professional Standards for Teachers (MCEETYA, 2003),
also informed the survey construction. Meeting requirements of employment and registration is essential for all teacher education graduates (HRSCEVT, 2007) so, it was necessary that the survey construction include the professional standards.

Figure 3.1. Linking the phases to stage one of the research preparation.

Figure 3.1. This figure presents the first stage of the research preparation involved in this study. It highlights and summarises the three phases and the activities involved. The figure then depicts how the phases of the research relate to the three research aims.
Similar to the studies by Woolfolk Hoy (2000) and Kessell et al. (2006) (Section 2.5.3) that investigated beginning teacher and preservice teacher confidence, the survey was specifically designed for this study. Addressing the first aim of the research, the survey gathered data about the final year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach on a range of middle years teaching strategies and practices, with consideration given to the desired practices noted in The Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006). A five-point Likert scale was selected to record the responses of the participants, as scales such as this are suited to measuring the “variables related to attitudes” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 108). Participants circled a response that reflected their attitude to the thirty eight survey statements. Although a fixed format, the five-point scale allowed for a full range of responses (Gray, Williamson, Karp, & Dalphin, 2007). A further purpose of the survey was to gather information about the demographics of the participants (gender, course being completed, relevant previous acquired qualifications) that was useful in setting the context for the study (Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2008).

Phase two of the research preparation (Figure 3.1) related directly to the second and third aim of the research. Using much of the phase one information about teacher preparation and confidence to teach, the questionnaire was constructed to gather more in-depth data on the nature of the participants’ teacher preparation program, its influence on their confidence to teach and the experiences and strategies that could be included in future middle years teacher preparation programs. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide further “written words” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 40) and to ensure specific information was gathered to address the second and third aims of the research. Considerate
questionnaire construction meant it met the predicted time constraints of administration, and was unambiguous in its wording, allowing for all participants to understand the questions (McMurray et al., 2004). These aspects of questionnaire construction can maximise the relevance and reliability of the data collected (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

The final phase of stage one of the research preparation consisted of devising the semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions were developed from information obtained about interview construction. As suggested by Gray et al. (2007), the interview questions were devised as a guide allowing for further probes or clarification of responses to ensure relatedness to the research aims. The first three questions gathered information about the participants’ demographics (university attended, course being undertaken, and previous in-school experiences), which provided contextual information and allowed for the participants to relax into the interview situation (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). Grbich (2007) suggests that personal questions are suitable to start the interviews, as it may settle the participant and elicit a more in-depth response. The interview questions were designed to obtain a detailed response from the participants, address the three aims of the research, build on the information gathered in the survey and questionnaire, and provide an opportunity for a more comprehensive response (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

3.4.2. Stage two.

As can be seen in figure 3.2, stage two of the research preparation sequentially linked to stage one and lead to the collection of data. Stage two had four phases.
Phase one began with a review of the survey, questionnaire and interview questions by two middle years teacher educators and one expert in instrument design. As the data collection methods were developed specifically for this study based on the literature, it was important that the documents be reviewed by experts to ensure construct validity, relevance to the topic and suitability in meeting the aims of the research (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

Changes were made to address the feedback towards securing validity and reliability of the proposed questions. The survey, questionnaire and interview questions were refined and again revisited by the experts to ensure no further modifications were required.
Once the data collection methods were confirmed, ethics approval was sought from the researcher’s university. McMurray et al. (2004) note it is important that ethical principles pertaining to data collection be addressed, which included in this study: protecting the interests of the participants, the researcher and the relevant institutions; ensuring the rights of those participating in the study; communicating the aims and purpose of the study to the participants; providing confidentiality and anonymity for the participants; and, avoiding exploitation of the participants, particularly as they were volunteers.

To ensure anonymity of the participants, the questionnaire, survey, and interviews were de-identified. The name of each university attended by the participant was not provided to ensure confidentiality for both the participants and institutions involved. As noted by Gray et al. (2007) confidentiality is vital as respondents are often reluctant to participate if their personal lives and identities are exposed. Aligned to ethical principles noted earlier, it was imperative that the study “avoid consequences that may be harmful to others” (McMurray et al., 2004, p. 19), for which the university ethics committee provided guidance.

To further maintain ethical standards, a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) was constructed to provide an overview of the study. Return of the survey and questionnaire was an agreement to engage in the study; however, participants could withdraw at any time without question. It was highlighted that contributing to the study and the subsequent findings would not impact on the participants’ university progress or their opportunities for employment. A Participant Consent Form (Appendix 2) was also constructed to be signed by participants prior to engaging in the one-to-one interviews. This form ensured and acknowledged the “participants’ rights would be protected during data collection” and
ensured they were well informed about the consequences of participation (Creswell, 2009, p. 89). By ensuring participants were well informed and the ethical issues considered, it would be more likely they would take part in the study (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

Following successful ethics approval from the researcher’s university (Southern Cross University, approval number: ECN-09-074), seven course coordinators responsible for the delivery of middle years teacher preparation programs were contacted. Five course coordinators across three universities in two states of Australia agreed to be involved. Following course coordinator agreement, phase three of the research design meant that the ethics department at each university was contacted. All advised that permission from the Dean of Education at each faculty needed to provide approval for participation in the study. Once the deans agreed, phase four of the research design was undertaken which entailed contacting and negotiating with course coordinators for a suitable time to administer the survey and questionnaire during lecture and tutorial times. The participants in this aspect of the study were viewed as an accessible population, which may be considered “convenient but representative of the larger populations” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 104).

Once the four phases of stage two of the research preparation were complete, the data collection was undertaken. Following the delivery of information about the research, the survey and questionnaire were administered to final-year preservice teachers at arranged times at the three participating universities. Participants were presented with the option of volunteering to be involved in the one-to-one interviews. Contact details of those interested were gathered by the researcher. To avoid a notion of exploitation expressed in
the ethical principles noted above, suitable interview times and venues, convenient to all parties, were later arranged by phone and email. Through the selection of the participants via volunteer sampling, the preservice teachers were likely to be enthusiastic to be involved (Cohen et al., 2007). Participants were again taken through the Information Sheet, and the Consent Form was signed prior to commencing the audio-taped interviews.

### 3.4.3 Timing of the research preparation.

As can be seen in Table 3.1, stage one and stage two of the research preparation took over three years to organise and implement. Using a mixed-method research design meant that time was required to ensure the validity and suitability of the data collection methods. The design of the survey, questionnaire and interview questions specifically for the study, also meant that time was required to ensure a thorough review by three academics with considerable and relevant expertise. Furthermore, due to the research being undertaken across different settings, it was a requirement that approvals be obtained from pertinent personnel at the various universities. By sequential and methodical development of the research preparation, it could be ensured that the study had maximum opportunity to be thoroughly investigated and implemented (Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2008).

Also for consideration with the timing of any research is accessibility and convenience to the participants (Creswell, 2009). For this study, as the data needed to be collected in the last semester of the final year of the preservice teachers’ course, an expanded time frame for data collection would not have been appropriate. Hence, the study was cross-sectional as it collected data “at one point in time” (Creswell, 2009, p. 146). Surveys and
questionnaires were collected simultaneously with expressions of interest to be involved in the interviews arranged at the same time. The concurrent collection of data was not only convenient but also aligned to meeting the aims of the study (Creswell, 2009). Interview data was collected soon after, at a time and venue suitable to the participants and the researcher.

Table 3.1

*Summary of Research Preparation Depicting the Timeframe of the Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Preparation</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage one: Research preparation</strong></td>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>Gathering of literature relating to:</td>
<td>August 2006 – January 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The middle years of learning;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reviews of teacher education;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher preparation and;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Confidence to teach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leading to the survey construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase Two</td>
<td>Gathering of literature regarding questionnaire construction leading to construction of the Questionnaire.</td>
<td>January 2007 – August 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase Three</td>
<td>Gathering of literature regarding conducting interviews leading to construction of the Semi-structured interview questions.</td>
<td>September 2007 – January 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage two: Research preparation</strong></td>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>Review of the survey, questionnaire and interview by middle years teacher educators and an expert in instrument design.</td>
<td>January 2008 – June 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase Two</td>
<td>Ethics approval sought from the researcher’s university. Course coordinators of universities offering middle years teacher preparation contacted.</td>
<td>July 2008 – December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase Three</td>
<td>Ethics approval gained and permission sought from the Deans of education at the various universities.</td>
<td>December 2008 – March 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase Four</td>
<td>Permission granted from the course coordinators at each university to administer instruments. A suitable time to administer the survey and questionnaire negotiated with the course coordinators.</td>
<td>March 2009 – July 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Implementing the data collection methods

In September and October, 2009 the survey (Appendix 3) and questionnaire (Appendix 4) were administered to 163 final-year preservice teachers across three universities in Australia. After providing the preservice teachers with the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) outlining the research, the survey and questionnaire were administered by the researcher during a suitable lecture or tutorial time that was viewed as convenient by the staff members at the participating universities. The survey and questionnaire took approximately 45 minutes to complete; incomplete responses were discarded (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). Hence, there were 142 participants who completed and returned the survey and questionnaire. As noted earlier, the survey and questionnaire, although administered concurrently, had different purposes as they addressed different aspects of the aims of the research. The survey addressed the first aim of the research, as it investigated the final-year preservice teachers’ confidence to teach in the middle years context. Preservice teachers had the opportunity to respond to specific statements. An example of the survey statements included: “In the Middle Years of schooling I am confident in my ability to effectively: Implement interdisciplinary (integrated) learning programs”. Respondents had the opportunity to reply using a five-point Likert scale (i.e., SD = Strongly disagree, D = Disagree, U = Uncertain, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree).

The 38 survey statements were randomly organised to encourage the respondents to consider each question carefully (Neuman, 2003). Although randomly organised, thought was given to the sequence and the construction of the statements to ensure they were not confusing or caused any discomfort to the participants. Each item was written to investigate the final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions on teaching in the middle years.
context. Items were selected to provide an overview of the participants’ confidence for teaching in the middle years of learning based on the four themes emerging from the literature, noted in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1). These included:

1. Creating a positive classroom environment
2. Developing positive relationships for teaching
3. Pedagogical knowledge
4. Implementation of teaching (including assessment and reporting)

As noted above, the questionnaire was administered at the same time as the survey. The universities were each visited over a two-month period, hence, the questionnaire and survey data were collected during that period. The questionnaire related directly to the second and third aim of the research. In mixed-method research designs, questionnaires can provide a deeper view of the concepts treated in the accompanying survey or provide a related or alternate view (Creswell, 2009). In this study the questionnaire, although still investigating the confidence of the participants, provided further information about the experiences that influenced the preservice teachers’ confidence to teach and suggestions for inclusions in the future. Examples of the questions included were as follows:

Question 1: What experiences have you undertaken as part of your university course that increased your confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling?

Question 3: What types of university experiences could be included in your course to better prepare you for teaching in the middle school?
As can be seen from these sample questions, the questionnaire provided a variation on the topic, providing related, different, and expanded information (Creswell, 2009). Relating directly to the second and third aims of the research, the participants provided responses on aspects of their teacher preparation that made them feel confident to teach and suggestions for future course inclusions. Consequently, the questionnaire extended the data collected by the survey through addressing different aims for the research (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

At the same time as administering the survey and questionnaire, expressions of interest from final-year preservice teachers wishing to participate in the one-to-one, semi-structured interviews was gained. One-to-one interviews (Appendix 5) were selected as the data collection method as it was viewed they would elicit the most effective interview data (Neuman, 2003). The interview questions were designed to address all three aims of the research and to complement, validate and expand the information gathered in the survey and questionnaire. Originally, 15 preservice teachers agreed to be interviewed, however, four preservice teachers became unavailable and another found it difficult to find a suitable time to meet. As a result, 10 final-year preservice teachers from two university campuses participated in the interviews. Five participants were undertaking a Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway), and the other five were undertaking a Graduate Diploma in Education (middle years).

Each participant was asked questions related to their education on learning to teach in the middle school, however, the timeframe for each interview varied between 30 – 45 minutes depending on the preservice teacher’s responses. Probes were asked when the preservice
teachers’ responses required clarification, diverted from the question, or more information was required (Neuman, 2003). The responses were audio-taped and notes taken. This allowed for ease of transcription and ensured none of the finer aspects of the responses were lost through equipment failure or misinterpretation (Creswell, 2009). Table 3.2 summarises the data collection methods and the timeframe of data collection.

Table 3.2

Summary of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research aims (Section 3.2)</th>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research aim 1</td>
<td>Survey (Appendix 3)</td>
<td>142 Final-year preservice teachers</td>
<td>September – October 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University A= 57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University B= 42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University C= 43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research aim 2&amp;3</td>
<td>Questionnaire (Appendix 4)</td>
<td>142 Final-year preservice teachers</td>
<td>September – October 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University A= 57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University B= 42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University C= 43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research aim 1, &amp; 3</td>
<td>Interviews (Appendix 5)</td>
<td>10 Final-year preservice teachers</td>
<td>October – November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(i.e., 5= Bachelor of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary (middle years pathway)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5= Graduate Diploma (middle years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Data analysis

The research was cross-sectional with equivalent weighting placed on the qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative and qualitative data were complementary and sought to investigate different aspects of the study. However, quantitative data (from the survey) and qualitative data (from the questionnaires and interviews) were analysed
separately and then compared to determine how the data supported, refuted or built on the results.

The survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Raw data from the five-point Likert scale were entered into SPSS16 (a statistical analysis software package). That is, strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, uncertain=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5. Using the analysis function of the SPSS package, percentages, mean scores and standard deviations were generated. These statistics allowed for analysis of completed responses from the 142 final-year preservice teachers. Agree and strongly agree percentages (i.e., from raw data responses 4 and 5) were added together. “Means and variances for items scored on a continuum (such as a five-point Likert-type scale) are calculated simply the way other means and variances are calculated” (Kline, 2005, p. 95, parenthesis included). In this way, it could be determined the percentage of preservice teachers who generally agreed with a survey item in relation to their confidence to teach in the middle school. Mean scores showed where these responses were averaged, and the standard deviation (SD) showed the variation of responses to the mean score (see Hittleman & Simon, 2006). Quantitative data were organised into one table to provide an overall view of the preservice teachers’ confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling followed by the four aforementioned categories that emerged from the literature (see Figure 2.1). Therefore, five tables were produced catering for all survey items, which provided a framework for analysis and reporting purposes. The analysis of the qualitative data (questionnaire and interviews) followed the six steps suggested by Creswell (2009, p. 185), a version of which is noted in Figure 3.3.
As depicted in Figure 3.3, the qualitative data analysis was conducted in a linear approach building from the bottom up. The questionnaires were analysed prior to the interviews as the questionnaire provided a generalised response while the interview data provided more in-depth viewpoints. Creswell (2009) notes that, in data analysis, it can be useful to go from the general to the specific. For example, the questionnaire asked for the participants to outline what university experiences had assisted in building the confidence of the middle years preservice teachers to teach. The questionnaire was in written form and delivered in a limited time frame, hence, a more general response was elicited. A similar interview question was devised allowing the researcher to elicit a more in-depth or specific response.

Questionnaire data were prepared for analysis by first numbering each participant (1 to 142) and transcribing the responses under each question. The responses were analysed several times to gain a general idea of the content and overall meaning. Notes were kept to record any points of interest or important details that may be forgotten. The responses were coded for commonalities, a process where raw data are organised into particular categories on the basis of “themes, concepts or similar features” (Neuman, 2003, p. 420). That is, similar responses were collated as an emerging theme. As themes emerged (see step 5 in Figure 3.3), descriptions indicative of each theme were highlighted as examples to provide a narrative for addressing the research aims (Creswell, 2009). This process was undertaken with each question noted on the questionnaire.
Figure 3.3. Process of analysis for the qualitative data.

Figure 3.3. This figure summarises how the qualitative data were analysed beginning with Step 1 and working in a linear approach through to Step 5. The steps were repeated several times to substantiate the accuracy of the emerging themes.
To check the reliability of the research, the processes in Steps 1 – 5 in Figure 3.3 were documented and repeated several times to substantiate the accuracy of emerging themes (Flick, 2007). The emerging themes were cross-checked by another researcher to ensure their authenticity and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). Step 6 in the data analysis involved “making an interpretation or meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). This process involved the researcher analysing overall themes that emerged, and making comparisons with the other data sets such as empirical evidence gathered from the literature. Creswell (2009) notes that through this process, findings can either confirm or refute past information or new questions can emerge to provoke further research. Following this final step, the expertise of a qualitative researcher was sought to provide an alternate opinion as to whether the interpretations were accurate and not influenced by the views of the researcher (Neuman, 2003).

The interview data was related to all three research aims and served the purpose of complementing the survey and questionnaire data. It also provided in-depth responses and an opportunity to clarify and expand the existing information. The steps noted by Creswell (2009) in Figure 3.3 were followed for the analysis of this qualitative data. The first step was to transcribe the 10 audio-taped interviews and align with the researcher’s notes. The transcriptions were then organised into responses under each question, similar to the process undertaken for the questionnaires. For example, interview question 6 asked: What university experiences in your course have increased your confidence to teach in the middle-years classroom? All the responses to this question were noted below and the participants’ transcribed responses were numbered 1 to 10, which allowed for a comparison of each participant’s response. Step three included reading through the
ordered responses to each question. It is important before coding that the researcher becomes familiar with the data so as to make well-informed decisions about the emerging patterns and trends (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). To ensure validity, a fellow researcher was asked to view the coded data and check for any anomalies or themes possibly overlooked (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). The researcher provided further suggestions and, once clarified, the themes were confirmed. Suitable examples of the transcribed audio-taped interviews were highlighted so they could be used to substantiate and emphasise a theme’s emergence. As the interview data addressed all three aims of the research, interview themes were compared to the four themes emerging from the literature (Section 2.6) and combined with the survey data to address the first aim of the research. The themes emerging from the interview questions relating to the second and third aims of the research (e.g. question 6 & 8 respectively) were then compared and combined with the questionnaire data.

3.7 Addressing validity and reliability

Although it may be noted in the previous sections how validity and reliability are addressed, this section briefly outlines possible issues relevant to this study. As this study attempts to explain possible causal relationships between preservice teachers’ confidence to teach in the middle school and their tertiary education, internal validity needed to be addressed (see Yin, 2009). The survey instrument in this study was devised for a specific purpose and population (Hittleman & Simon, 2002). For construct validity, the items were analysed by three experts, two in middle years teaching and one in survey construction. All survey items were derived from the literature as a “...sampling of a specific body of knowledge” (Hittleman & Simon, 2002, p. 119) and were analysed by these experts for content validity.
This was also the process for validating the design of the interview questions. The survey instrument had a Likert scale and used descriptive statistics to report on findings from an acceptable number of participants considered representative of the population. Selecting 142 participants from three universities and constructing survey items and questions derived from the literature assisted the study’s validity. Gaining internal validity for the survey, questionnaire and interview questions included triangulation of data and analysing responses, for example: “Is the inference correct? Have all the rival explanations and possibilities been considered? Is the evidence convergent?” (Yin, 2009, p. 43). Hence, determining emerging themes in the qualitative data and conferring with experts in data analysis, further aided the internal validity.

External validity was addressed through three universities being involved in this study. Participant numbers were considered acceptable for making generalisations relevant to an Australian education context. However, as education systems can be markedly different, generalising beyond the existing evidence would require careful deliberation. One way to address reliability was to ensure the data collection methods were procedurally accurate and explanatory. The research design in this chapter outlines step-by-step procedures that were followed in this study. As a result, other researchers who wish to investigate this line of research have a procedure for conducting the research to corroborate or refute the findings. Comparing data from the survey, questionnaire and interviews assisted in corroborating evidence, which strengthened the reliability of the findings (Creswell, 2009). Aligning the research aims with appropriate data collection methods and creating a chain of evidence through these sources aided in the reliability of findings (e.g., dependability). Increasing reliability occurred with experts reviewing the evidence thus reducing possible researcher
bias. Participants were surveyed and interviewed in the final semester of their final year of teacher preparation, which attempted to reduce reflexivity or time elapses that may reduce accuracy of memory. As this study was not an experimental design, it did not use a pre-test/post-test design. The participants were not subjected to a control-experiment situation, largely associated with the Hawthorne Effect (Hittleman & Simon, 2002), which may threaten internal validity. Instead it used a post-test only design with the survey and questionnaire treated anonymously and confidentially, administered immediately after their experiences to capitalise on participant memory. Interviews were also conducted confidentially, with participant knowledge that the interviews would be transcribed and given pseudonyms. Cross-checking and comparing data with “divergent data sources” (e.g., survey, questionnaire and interviews) presented a process for determining the credibility, trustworthiness, and reliability of information (Hittleman & Simon, 2002, p. 368).

3.8. Chapter summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research aims and the timeframes and stages of the research preparation. The quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were described with the research aims they attempted to address. The timeframes for data collection were provided, demonstrating that the survey and questionnaire data were gathered concurrently and the interview data collected soon after. Finally, the ways in which the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed were provided and, as with any research, the validity and reliability of the research was discussed. Chapter 4 will present and analyse the data collected from the surveys and questionnaires. The survey data will be presented to address the first research aim, followed by the questionnaire data that addressed the second and third research aims.
Chapter 4

Presenting and Analysing Survey and Questionnaire Data

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents and analyses the survey and questionnaire data, and is divided into four main sections. After the chapter is introduced (Section 4.1) the survey (quantitative) data (Section 4.2) will be analysed and presented providing the descriptive statistics that will highlight the perceived confidence of the preservice teachers to teach in the middle years of schooling. The following section will present and analyse the questionnaire (qualitative) data (Section 4.3) noting the emerging themes derived from the responses that address the second and third aims of the research. Finally, the chapter will be summarised and concluded (Section 4.4).

4.2 Survey (quantitative) data

The survey (quantitative) data addressed the first aim of the research which was to:

1. Investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling

The survey investigated preservice teachers’ demographics (n=142: gender, degree, practicum experiences, and previous qualifications). All of these participants (22.5% males, 77.5% females) were in their final year of learning how to teach. However, courses varied, with 19.7% completing a dual degree Bachelor of Education (middle years) / Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education (middle years) / Bachelor of Science, 16.9%
completing a Bachelor of Education (middle years) / Bachelor of Health Science, and 12% completing a Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway). In addition, 51.4% were completing Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years). Practicum experiences also varied, with 19.7% completing field experiences in grades 4-10, 26.1% in grades 8-10, 43% in grades 2-9, and 11.3% in grades 2-7.

These preservice teachers were in their final weeks of completing their teacher education program. Data indicated that 70% felt well prepared from their tertiary education to teach in the middle school. However, of the 30% who did not fall into this category, 18% felt uncertain about their confidence to teach. There were 73% who claimed they had theoretical knowledge, 78% with pedagogical knowledge, but only 67% who believed they had curriculum knowledge for teaching in the middle school (mean range: 3.70-3.85). These percentages were within a 12% range of each other, suggesting that more than 20% of these preservice teachers believed they were either uncertain or disagreed they were prepared for teaching in the middle school (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>%*</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35. Theoretical knowledge for middle school teaching</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Pedagogical knowledge for middle school teaching</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Curriculum knowledge for middle school teaching</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Successfully prepared for middle school teaching</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* %=Percentage of students who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each item.
Data from more specific survey items provided insight, with an analysis locating explicit areas of confidence for teaching in the middle years. To assist in the analysis and reporting of the data the responses were organised into the four themes emerging from the literature, as noted in Chapter 2. These preservice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they could create a positive classroom environment (mean range: 3.88-4.46, Table 4.2). Indeed, 97% believed they could create a safe learning environment with 96% believing they would have enthusiasm for teaching. Theriot (2005) claims that teacher enthusiasm assists students in their learning as students develop motivation for completing school tasks assigned to them. Enthusiasm is positive teacher behaviour and is considered an influence on students’ intrinsic motivation (Beutel, 2003). These preservice teachers claimed they were prepared to exhibit this particular teacher behaviour.

Eighty-five percent or more of the preservice teachers indicated they could create a learning environment that fosters independence (86%), caters for diversity (87%), and that they could develop programs to cater for students’ interests (89%) and needs (85%, Table 4.2). However, there were less preservice teachers confident in implementing effective behaviour management (70%), and in providing clear and reasonable consequences for behaviour (76%). Behaviour management is recognised as one of the most challenging aspects of teaching (Weinstein & Mignano, 2003; Wolfgang, 2001). Experienced middle years teachers have also recorded difficulties in managing certain classes (Arbuckle & Little, 2004). These middle years preservice teachers have had a minimum of 55 days practicum experience, some had more than 100 days practicum, depending on their course requirements and personal involvement. Although behaviour management would have
been observed and practised, developing these skills requires preparation in a range of contexts so strategies can be trialled and refined to cater for each cohort being taught.

Table 4.2

Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions for Creating a Positive Classroom Environment (n=142)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>%*</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Create a safe learning environment</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Create a learning environment that fosters independence</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Create a learning environment that caters for diversity</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Respond to the individual learning needs of the students</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Negotiate a classroom management plan with students</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Implement effective behaviour management strategies</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Provide clear and reasonable consequences for behaviour</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Develop learning programs that cater to students’ interests</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* %=Percentage of students who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each item.

Developing and fostering positive relationships is essential in teaching early adolescent students, particularly as teaching has people as its focus. These participants’ perceptions of being able to develop positive teacher-student relationships was nearly unanimous (98%). and working in teams also presented minimal hesitation (90%, Table 4.3). However, fostering community and parent relationships presented lower percentage scores (80%, 79% respectively), as did supporting students to transition between grades (71%). Although these preservice teachers have had experiences in schools, much of this work
would have included teaching students and interacting with their mentors (classroom teachers). These practicum experiences did not occur at the end of the year when teachers assist students to make the transition to the next year level. In addition, community and parent interactions would be minimal within a four or six week block period. Indeed, the classroom teacher would more than likely take responsibility for such interactions recognising the sensitive nature of these relationships, hence there are mentoring practices or lack of mentoring provided by classroom teachers (as the mentor) that can hinder the preservice teachers’ development (e.g., Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragins, 2010; Long, 1997).

Mismanaging these relationships can have dire consequences for the teacher and school, so from a mentor’s perspective, it may be easier not to have preservice teacher involvement at the relationship level with parents and community. Nonetheless, if middle school preservice teachers are to feel confident in the breadth of teaching practices expected of them from the very first day of full-time employment, then mentors need to scaffold their interpersonal relationships with parents and the community. The tight duration of practicum experiences focuses heavily on teaching and learning, with little time to cover issues in broader contexts. Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to listen and observe mentor interactions can present initial understandings of the types of conversations that occur between teacher and parents, including the diplomatic integrity required.
Table 4.3

*Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of Developing Positive Relationships for Teaching*

\( (n=142) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>%*</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Develop positive teacher-student relationships</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Support students in their transition between year levels and from primary to secondary</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Work in teaching teams</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Foster positive relationships with the community</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Foster positive relationships with parents</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* %=Percentage of students who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each item.

The majority of these preservice teachers believed they have the pedagogical knowledge to work within middle schools. About 90% indicated they could plan appropriate learning experiences and engage students in intellectually challenging work, with 95% believing they could engage students in group work (Table 4.4). This result coincides with their confidence to develop programs that cater for students’ interests (Table 4.2). Importantly for their continued development, 93% agreed or strongly agreed that they could reflect and refine teaching practices with 92% claiming they would engage in further professional development (Table 4.4).
Table 4.4

Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of their Pedagogical Knowledge (n=142)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>%*</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Share my personal philosophy of teaching</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Plan appropriate learning experiences for student</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Engage students in group work</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Use a variety of teaching strategies</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Reflect and refine my teaching practices</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Engage in further professional development</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Engage students in intellectually challenging experiences</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* %=Percentage of students who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each item.

Schön (1983, 1987) claims that teachers cannot develop professionally without becoming reflective practitioners. In addition, educators (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008) advocate professional development as a way to continue teachers’ professional growth, as this can also facilitate reflection on practice. These preservice teachers were confident they could reflect and engage in professional development, which indicates a potential for growth and development as they enter their first years of teaching. Nevertheless, only 72% suggested they would be able to align curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. This result may have been influenced by the construction of this survey item, particularly determining how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment align and whether this specific terminology was used within their coursework. Regardless, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment
appear as a fundamental system for teaching and learning in any subject area, particularly as part of middle years practice (Carrington, et al., 2001).

Having pedagogical knowledge shows the potential to plan and engage in teaching practices. However, asking these preservice teachers to indicate their confidence to implement teaching practices in the middle school setting presented a potential practical application. Other than implementing learning programs with real-world connections (91%), about a quarter of these preservice teachers could not agree or strongly agree to six of the nine items (Table 4.5). Implementing literacy and numeracy is pivotal within middle schools, yet only 74% believed they could implement these core subjects. Literacy and numeracy were subjects taught to these preservice teachers in their university coursework; however, some middle school preservice teachers with prior degrees and specialisations may have felt they had expertise in those subject areas rather than literacy and numeracy.

Considering Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been conducted throughout their coursework and embedded within various subjects also showing interdisciplinary practices, 23% were either uncertain or disagreed that they could implement ICT in the middle school (Table 4.5). Yet, successful completion of university coursework in ICT has shown they have the knowledge and skills for implementing it in schools. Nearly all curriculum areas use ICT in schools to advance pedagogical practice and to capitalise on the visual and auditory displays that can assist students in conceptual development.
Table 4.5

Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions for Implementation of Teaching (n=142)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>%*</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Implement student-centred learning experiences</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Implement interdisciplinary learning programs</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Implement learning programs with real-world links</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Implement learning programs with global connections</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Implement learning programs that incorporate ICTs</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Incorporate literacy strategies in planning and teaching</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Incorporate numeracy strategies in planning and teaching</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Implement a constructivist approach</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Demonstrate content knowledge of subject matter</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Create a variety of assessment tasks</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Report upon student learning</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Provide regular feedback to parents</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* %=Percentage of students who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each item.

Current theoretical underpinnings for teaching middle years students include constructivism where the learner engages in first-hand experiences to construct knowledge (Carrington, 2002, 2006; Vygotsky, 1986). Although 76% claimed they could implement constructivist approaches in the middle school, nearly a quarter of the preservice teachers were either not sure or disagreed they could teach in this way (Table 4.5). Furthermore, content knowledge is essential for teaching and fundamentally, “The focus on content knowledge fits with the commonsense notion that teachers must know the content they are
teaching” (Borko & Whitcomb, 2008, p. 567). Despite 80% claiming they have the content knowledge, others may be unsure or disagree until they know the lesson they will be teaching. Some preservice teachers may have read this survey item as specific content knowledge, while others as the ability to acquire content knowledge before teaching.

Assessment and reporting are fundamental to the teaching and learning cycle (e.g., Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training, 2008). Yet more than a quarter of the participants claimed they were uncertain or disagreed that they could create a variety of assessment tasks, with 76% indicating they could provide regular feedback to parents (Table 4.5). Many coursework subjects embed the construction of student assessment tasks. For example, one university has five semester-long subjects that involve designing assessment tasks for students. These assessments tasks included a variety of activities such as constructing lesson plans, units of work, backward mapping, assessment task sheets, designing assessment criteria and rubrics. So, it was surprising that more than a quarter of these preservice teachers recorded they were not confident they could create such tasks. Assessment may require more practical experience within schools, as the relatively short durations of practicum may not provide sufficient time for preservice teachers to undertake substantial assessment designs. The classroom teacher may feel solely responsible for the assessment because of these short practicum durations.

4.2.1 Summary of the quantitative data.

The above discussion has addressed the first aim of the research and investigated the confidence of the final year preservice teachers to teach in the middle years of schooling.
The results were presented by providing an overview of confidence for teaching (Table 4.1). Overall preparation results indicated that 73% or more of the final-year preservice teachers agreed or strongly agreed they were confident in the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for teaching in the middle years of schooling. However, 30% or more disagreed or strongly disagreed they were confident in curriculum knowledge for teaching and, being successfully prepared for teaching in the middle years of schooling.

Subsequent quantitative results were framed by the four themes noted from the literature (Section 2.6). Varied items within each of the four themes demonstrated confidence for teaching. Survey items where 90% or more of preservice teachers agreed or strongly agreed they were confident included: creating a safe and supportive learning environment (97% Table 4.2); demonstrating enthusiasm for teaching (96% Table 4.2); developing positive teacher-student relationships (98% Table 4.3); working in teams (90% Table 4.3); engaging students in group work (95% Table 4.4); reflecting and refining teaching practices (93% Table 4.4); engaging in further professional development (92% Table 4.4); and, implementing programs with real-world links (91% Table 4.5).

Areas where 30% or more of the final-year preservice teachers indicated they were not confident for teaching in the middle years of schooling included: implementing behaviour management strategies (70% Table 4.2); and reporting upon student learning (70% Table 4.5). This survey (quantitative) data has addressed the first aim of the research providing an examination of the data related to the preservice teachers’ perceived confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling. The following analysis of the questionnaire
(qualitative) data will provide further explanation to address the second and third aims of the research.

4.3 Questionnaire (qualitative) data

The questionnaire was administered at the same time as the survey and was designed to address the following aims of the research:

2. Analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident; and


The questionnaire provided broader information from the 142 middle years preservice teachers about the university experiences that supported confidence development as well as suggestions for enhancements for future middle years teacher education programs. Three questions were administered to the final-year preservice teachers from three universities in two states of Australia. The first two questions addressed the first aim of the research and asked the 142 preservice teachers to note and describe the university experiences that increased their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. There were four themes that emerged from the collation of the data.

Theme 1: Practicum / Field Studies that included: (1) real-world experiences; (2) varied middle years experiences in a range of schools (3) opportunities to link theory with
practice; (4) quality mentor teachers (5) opportunities to develop behaviour management strategies (6) and a supportive school staff.

Theme 2: Middle Years Subjects that included: (1) content knowledge for teaching; (2) pedagogical knowledge; (3) theoretical knowledge; (4) and application to the middle years classroom.

Theme 3: Pedagogical Approaches of University Staff that included: (1) modelling of teaching strategies; (2) design of assessment strategies; (3) incorporation of ICTs into lectures and tutorials; (4) the personal attributes of the university staff; (5) and incorporation of guest lecturers and tutors into teaching.

Theme 4: Other Experiences that included: (1) professional development opportunities; (2) and volunteer work in schools.

**4.3.1 Theme 1: Practicum / Field Studies.**

From the pool of final-year preservice teachers, 85 noted practicum experiences increased their confidence to teach. Comments such as the one noted below were indicative of the group:

The best experience I had for increasing my confidence was the prac I undertook in a year 5/6 class. I also worked with a team of teachers and we developed the transition strategies for the for year seven students.

It seems the “hands on” nature of the practicum and the opportunities to “practice and reflect on lessons” combined with “observing and participating in middle years classrooms”, were viewed by the majority of the preservice teachers to develop confidence. As summed up by one preservice teacher’s written response, “practical work,
there is nothing like teaching in the classroom for increasing your confidence to teach”. Varied practicum experiences in a number of different middle years classrooms, were also viewed as valuable for increasing preservice teacher confidence. A statement that summarised the views of the group noted “the wide range of practicum has developed different styles of teaching for me and increased my confidence”.

Middle school teaching includes a range of subject areas and graduates can be expected to teach an assortment of grade levels. Gaining experience to teach on different grade levels and observing the associated teaching practices would broaden a preservice teacher’s understanding of how to approach teaching in varied classroom contexts. Analysing written responses signalled that being in different grade levels, allowed the preservice teachers to “really understand the diverse developmental issues that we as teachers will face” and “understand that all classes and children are different and require different approaches”. It seemed that opportunities to be a part of how different “teachers work together in different schools” increased their confidence that they could “easily be a part of this in the future”. Experiences in different contexts also allowed some preservice teachers to understand how schools “implement their middle years policies” and consequently they can “contribute to the middle years philosophy of the school”. Furthermore, preservice teachers claimed that teaching in varied contexts allowed them to “interact with a variety of teaching staff to gain a broader range of experiences” and interacting with “a vast array of students allowed the development of a greater range of teaching strategies”.

The majority of preservice teachers’ written responses indicated that being able to apply knowledge and skill in a “real-world setting” assisted them to become confident for
teaching. They considered practicum as an opportunity to get “real experience in a real classroom” and appreciated the “real world nature of the experience”. They also commented that practicum allowed them to apply what they had been “learning in the university setting”, and “make sense of the middle years concepts and practices they had been exposed to as part of their degree”. Indeed, practicum was seen to provide them with the experience that helped them to make the “links between the theory and the real world of the classroom”. Preservice teachers recognised the value of learning in the university setting but also considered this learning as largely theoretical; hence, connecting theoretical and pedagogical practices with practical classroom applications presented opportunities to link theory with practice.

Preservice teachers’ written responses highlighted the interactions with teachers in their roles as mentors. Preservice teachers appreciated the personal attributes of their mentor teachers, noting that they made them feel “welcome in the school and classroom by their warmth and generosity” and “their enthusiasm for having a preservice teacher”. Positive mentoring provided by the teacher during practicum was raised by the majority of the participants as developing confidence for teaching. It seemed that many of the preservice teachers had experienced “great supervising teachers” who “guided, provided advice and useful feedback” in classrooms that were “supportive to preservice teacher development”. The majority of the preservice teachers noted that positive mentoring experiences increased their confidence by allowing them to “develop at their own rate” and “work and learn with experienced teachers who were prepared to “model practices and share their resources”. Preservice teachers are at different stages of readiness and self reported that they required differentiation of mentoring that targets their level of proximal development.
Mentors who model practices allow preservice teachers to observe how teaching works (or in some cases, does not work). Modelling of teaching presented ways for preservice teachers to analyse practices and select appropriate courses of action for their own implementation of teaching. The responses indicated that the preservice teachers appreciated that their mentors shared pedagogical practices such as “the best approaches for engaging middle years learners”, “teaching strategies that really worked”, and “ways for developing teacher-student relationships”.

Behaviour management can be an area of concern for preservice teachers as each classroom and context is different (Main & Hammond, 2008; Peters, 2009). Classroom climates are ever changing and preservice teachers need to be prepared with a range of management strategies they can use for middle years classrooms. Practicum, combined with advice from mentor teachers, was viewed by the preservice teachers to develop confidence for managing student behaviour. One participant whose comment was similar to others wrote, “I learnt heaps on prac about behaviour management that increased my confidence greatly” and “my mentor teacher modelled strategies that I used and were successful”. It seems confidence in behaviour management was increased by having experience in a class where they were able to “experiment and try out all the things we have learned at university and, observed during our course”.

As well as positive mentoring from supervising teachers, the “support provided by other staff members at the school” was viewed by a number of participants as being conducive to confidence development. Being “welcomed at the school by the principal and deputy” and “introduced to other staff members” as well as “invited by staff to team meetings”
made the preservice teachers feel “confident we were valued members of the school community”. Administration staff members were seen as influential to how confident the preservice teachers felt being included within the school setting, for instance, “the admin team helped me use the photocopier” and “locate the rooms that were noted on my timetable”, which meant the preservice teachers felt “accepted they could be part of the teaching staff”.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Middle Years Subjects.

Over a quarter of the preservice teachers (n=52) agreed that their confidence increased as a result of the subjects that specifically addressed middle years topics. Preservice teachers commented that these subjects provided “content knowledge for teaching” and directed them to “using syllabus documents to understand the goals for teaching middle years learners”, as well as “providing them with resources they could obtain to increase their own content knowledge”. They further commented that, as a middle years teacher in the future, they will need to “stay abreast of the content knowledge for teaching and these subjects provided a starting point to build upon”. Indeed, it seems having content knowledge for teaching or knowing how to access this knowledge impacted on these preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching.

Specific middle years subjects, as well as providing the content knowledge, were also appreciated as providing pedagogical knowledge. Preservice teachers commented that the subjects “assisted them to understand middle years philosophy” and “learn about effective teaching strategies for intellectually challenging middle years learners”. It seems that the
preservice teachers appreciated these subjects as they had opportunities to learn about “how to develop lessons that provide hands-on experiences” and develop assessment tasks that linked with the “curriculum and pedagogy”. Learning about “backward mapping as a planning tool” and “designing integrated learning experiences” were also reasons why the middle years subjects were viewed as increasing confidence for teaching.

The development of theoretical knowledge that was embedded in the middle years subjects was also valued by those completing the questionnaire. Particular subjects were named such as, “Science and Tech, SOSE and Arts increased my confidence as they provided me with a lot of theories such as constructivist approaches to teaching”. Preservice teachers also noted subjects where they gained information about early adolescent development such as “Behavioural Studies as it gave me the psychological and social aspects of students in the middle years of schooling”. Another preservice teacher noted that “Beane’s model of middle school opened our eyes to integrated studies in middle years.” Approaches such as “Bloom’s taxonomy and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences were presented in the middle years subject” and were seen to be “invaluable in the development of understanding middle years education”, hence developing confidence for teaching.

Finally, the middle years subjects were perceived by preservice teachers to increase confidence as they could “apply the knowledge learned directly to the classroom”. These subjects seemed to give preservice teachers the “framework required for teaching early adolescents in the classroom” and provided ideas that “they knew they would be using in their future classrooms”. The preservice teachers expressed that “knowing about early adolescents made me feel well prepared for teaching” and “having this depth of knowledge
will assist me to share this knowledge with parents and teachers in the future”. There was also a view among the preservice teachers that in future, they may be able to “deliver professional development to teachers who may not be as informed about middle years issues”. Indeed, this data suggests that, specific middle years subjects were influential in preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling and there appears to be a correlation between the knowledge they have gained and their perception of confidence.

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Pedagogical approaches of university staff.

The pedagogical approaches of the university staff was the third theme that emerged as developing preservice teacher confidence. The compilation and coding of the data revealed that the modelling of teaching suitable to middle years students increased preservice teachers’ confidence as they could see the “practices and strategies in action”. According to the preservice teachers, “university staff that modelled strategies for teaching in the middle years of schooling” increased confidence as they “provided them with practices required for their own teaching”. Modelling by university staff as a vehicle for developing preservice teacher confidence was supported by over one-third of the cohort who completed the questionnaires. As well as the modelling of teaching strategies, preservice teachers noted that modelling “integrated curriculum”, “constructivist approaches to teaching”, “questioning techniques using Bloom’s taxonomy”, and “planning units of work using backward mapping” provided them with “hands-on experiences that they could use in the classroom and as part of their own teaching”.
The way the university staff designed the assessment for particular subjects was also valued as developing preservice teacher confidence. Preservice teachers noted that the selection of “real-world assessment used by some of the staff” helped them to understand “how this could be applied to middle years learners and why it was appropriate and engaging”. It seems a number of the preservice teachers also appreciated opportunities to undertake the design of assessment in class. A typical response was, “we experienced hands-on activities in tutorials that included devising assessment, the construction of task sheets and assessment criteria”. Hence, the modelling of assessment by lecturers and opportunities to experience assessment design assisted preservice teacher confidence development.

As well as modelling teaching strategies and assessment, the ways in which university staff incorporated Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into lectures and tutorials increased their confidence for teaching in the middle school. Specifically, the preservice teachers noted that undertaking ICT activities “as part of tutorials and assessment tasks gave them opportunities to see how ICTs could be applied in class”. Preservice teachers noted that the use of “smart boards as part of teaching” provided an interactive environment that they knew would be engaging for middle years learners. Furthermore, tasks such as “blogs, WIKIs and online forums” were thought to be “transferable tools that could be used in middle years classrooms”. The preservice teachers also commented that some lecturers used “mobile phones creatively in the classroom to provide feedback and interact with students”. The use of “lap tops in the tutorials meant that they had information at their finger tips” which was seen as useful for “teaching middle years students about undertaking on-line research”. Preservice teachers claimed
that the use of ICTs in the classroom by university staff “gave first-hand experience of how this could be used effectively in the middle years classroom context”.

These preservice teachers noted the importance of the personal attributes of the university teaching staff, claiming that university staff who were “approachable and friendly”, “willing to answer questions” and “make time to discuss any queries about middle schooling” contributed to preservice teacher confidence. It was purported by over one-third of the preservice teachers that having approachable university staff developed confidence that any “misconceptions or preconceptions about middle school teaching could be overcome, discussed and possibly rectified”, which gave them a sense that they “were on the right track to becoming a middle years teacher”. As well as being approachable, they appreciated university staff that “made them feel comfortable in tutorials” and promoted “discussion about middle years issues where everyone’s perspective was valued”. From the preservice teachers’ perspective, this aided confidence development by allowing them to “articulate their points of view in a non-threatening environment and confirm their own views about middle schooling philosophy”.

Finally, preservice teachers regarded their university lecturers’ pedagogical practice of incorporating “guest lecturers as part of lectures and tutorials promoted confidence development”. Preservice teachers claimed that “hearing from visiting lecturers such as teachers from middle schools” and “experts from various fields of teaching” provided them with further information and “confirmed what they were learning at university was preparing them for the real world of the classroom”. They valued that the visitors had “recent teaching experience” and that they were “succeeding in teaching early
adolescents”. It was also suggested that these sessions provided the preservice teachers with a “greater range of strategies and ideas”, and in some cases “a whole school approach for engaging middle years learners” and working towards “seamless transitions between classrooms including primary and secondary school contexts”. Hence, these sessions were perceived by preservice teachers as “providing a broader perspective about middle schooling practice” and “how it might work in the school and classroom”, as well as assisting preservice teachers to “link what they had learned from university classes with what these teachers (guest lecturers) were doing in schools”. It seems for many of these preservice teachers gaining “knowledge from a variety of expertise assists to develop confidence”.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Other experiences.

The final theme that emerged from the preservice teachers’ responses was they had “other experiences” that had impacted on their confidence for teaching. For many of the preservice teachers, as part of their teacher preparation, they had opportunities to be involved in “professional development and volunteer activities” that were seen by the participants involved to “increase participation and real world opportunities”. The professional development made available by lecturers to some preservice teachers was seen as “valuable for confidence development as it provided opportunities to interact with teachers from diverse schools”. It meant the “sharing of ideas not only from university lecturers but a greater range of professionals”.

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Further experience was gained by preservice teachers who as part of their studies, volunteered in a school outside of their practicum. This experience was also valued as “providing further hands-on experiences”, “creating networks with experienced teachers” and opportunities “to interact with middle years students and gain greater understanding of their developmental needs”. These volunteer experiences included “working with middle years students with reading difficulties”, “assisting in classrooms of exemplary middle years teachers”, “working as a part of team developing a transition to high school strategy”, “assisting at the middle school athletics” and “being a mentor to disengaged middle years students”. It seemed that as a result of these “other experiences” preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence increased because they were gaining additional “opportunities to engage with middle years learners and teachers and refine their practice”.

The majority of the preservice teachers could highlight areas of their university studies that increased their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. Of the total cohort, only five preservice teachers could not indicate a university experience that increased their confidence. One preservice teacher noted, “I do not have any university experiences that increased my confidence” while another noted, “Nothing increased my confidence. My university studies have left me under prepared to teach anything”. The inability to identify worthwhile experiences may be due to a lack of engagement with the university course content or poor practicum experiences. As suggested by one unconfident final year who stated “I’ve had poor practicum experiences that haven’t increased my confidence so I’m looking forward to the next one that I hope will increase my confidence to teach”. Indeed, experiences can affect preservice teacher confidence to teach; however, when such a small minority highlight a lack of preparation in the questionnaire responses, then the self
motivation, application, aptitude, and enthusiasm of those participants needs to be considered.

4.3.5 Enhancing middle years teacher preparation.

The final question addressed the third aim of the research and asked preservice teachers to describe strategies that could be included to enhance future middle years teacher preparation. Four themes with related sub themes emerged from the data:

Theme 1: More practicum / field experience that included: (1) Increased time in schools; (2) More varied middle years experiences; (3) Supportive mentor teachers; (4) Supportive school community; and (5) Debrief sessions following practicum.

Theme 2: More practical approaches in lectures and tutorials that included: (1) Lecturers and tutors who have taught in middle years classrooms; (2) Lecturers and tutors who model middle years approaches; and (3) Guest lecturers from the profession.

Theme 3: More specific middle years subjects that included: (1) Further ideas for teaching; (2) School visits; and (3) Opportunities to speak to successful middle years teachers

Theme 4: More opportunities for real world experiences that included: (1) Volunteer activities; (2) More professional development opportunities; and (3) Networking with middle years teachers.
4.3.5.1 Theme one: Practicum / Field experience.

The most frequent preservice teacher response (n=86) relating to suggested course enhancements, was the inclusion of more practicum or field experience. There was a general sense that practicum was where “we gain confidence for teaching so there should be more of it”, with some preservice teachers questioning “why isn’t there more prac?”. Greater amounts of practicum was also seen as “expected” for those completing a four year degree, with comments such as “in a four year degree there should be more practicum”. Some participants added that there should be “more practicum and less university”. It was felt by the majority of the preservice teachers that more practicum would allow preservice teachers to “gain greater knowledge for teaching” and more “strategies and practices for engaging middle years learners”. Others made more specific comments that more practicum would allow them to have more experience “developing teacher-pupil relationships”, “trialling an integrated curriculum”, “developing relationships with community members,” and “implementing teaching strategies to challenge and engage middle years learners”. Understanding early adolescence was also viewed as something they would gain from more practicum, with statements noting “more practicum means we can fully understand middle years students and their development” and how “experienced teachers respond to this development”.

As well as more practicum, the participants also viewed varied experiences in a range of middle schools as being an enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation. It appeared that preservice teachers would have appreciated “more time in a wider range of middle years classrooms” so that they could “observe the range of approaches that different middle years teachers employ”. There was some indication that behaviour
management was at the forefront of these preservice teachers minds, as over half indicated that practicum in more varied classrooms would provide further knowledge about “managing the behaviour of the middle years students by seeing it modelled by experienced middle years teachers”. It was also noted that, the way “different schools implement middle years philosophy and strategies varies”, so it was important to see “as many contexts as possible to see how it is done”. Some preservice teachers indicated that by completing more practicum in varied school contexts, it was possible to understand “whole school approaches to middle schooling including transitions”, “how teachers work in teams for planning and teaching”, “a greater understanding of developing suitable assessment”, and “how schools approach developing relationships with the parents and carers of middle years students”.

The importance of the mentor teacher during practicum was raised by over one-third of this cohort. The selection of “mentor teachers who are passionate about middle years students” was a comment that was consistently noted throughout the proposed enhancements for future middle years teacher preparation. It seemed that some preservice teachers believed their mentor teachers should be “positive role models for preservice teachers” by “modelling affirmative strategies and encouraging middle year learners”. It was also noted that some mentor teachers did not value the middle years teacher education program being undertaken by this cohort, with statements such as “please give us teachers who understand and appreciate middle years courses” and “before allocating us a supervising (mentor) teacher please ensure they are supportive of middle years programs”. Some members of this cohort were undertaking a one-year graduate diploma. For them, mentor teachers who have an understanding of middle years programs combined with
support for one-year of teacher preparation was also seen as an enhancement. Participants’ comments such as “please give preservice teachers mentors who like one-year graduate diploma middle years courses” and “send us to mentors who don’t mind that we are doing a one-year middle years course” summed up the views of the group.

Further comments about mentor teachers seemed to revolve around knowledge for teaching middle years students. In some instances the preservice teachers felt they had “more knowledge about teaching middle years students than my mentor teacher”, requesting in future that selected mentor teachers “have in-depth knowledge about teaching middle years students so that I can learn from them” and are “able to share their knowledge about middle years teaching”. More general statements about mentor teachers were noted, with some comments relating to their personal attributes and skills such as “mentors need to be supportive and provide well-delivered feedback”, “they need to be able to share their resources and teaching strategies”, “mentor teachers should instil confidence” and “they should understand we are learning”. Finally, a sentiment that was shared by a number of this cohort is summarised by the statement, “one enhancement for the future is don’t give preservice teachers negative mentor teachers as it is detrimental to our development”. Indeed, it is evident from the data that selecting positive middle years mentor teachers is a perception of these preservice teachers that needs to be considered in future middle years teacher preparation programs.

“Send us to school communities that support middle years preservice teachers and middle years initiatives” was noted as another enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation. Preservice teachers commented that the school community was significant for
“influencing the attitudes of preservice teachers towards middle years learners” and “showing us how middle years philosophy can be implemented at a whole school level”. Just as the mentor teacher was viewed as pivotal in supporting the development of middle years preservice teachers, so too was a supportive school community. The preservice teachers suggested that practicum placements needed to be carefully considered in the future because “the school community should model middle years strategies”. Other preservice teacher suggestions included “don’t place us in schools where the staff don’t like preservice teachers” and “don’t assign us to schools where they don’t embrace middle years philosophy as it is hard for us to learn”. Another well supported enhancement noted was “encouragement on behalf of the university for the school to have an induction program for preservice teachers”. Some preservice teachers felt being “welcomed to the school” would assist them to “settle quickly into the school community”, “assist them to understand the school culture”, and make them feel that they were “a valued member of the school”.

Debrief sessions that followed practicum was the final subtheme noted by preservice teachers as an enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation. It seems that the preservice teachers who completed the questionnaire felt there should be more opportunity to “talk about prac at the conclusion so we can share our experiences”, “learn more about teaching by sharing, listening and discussing our practice with our peers and the lecturers and tutors”, and “talk more about prac in class so the lecturers can provide us with advice as to how to handle certain situations”. There was also a sense that these sessions would guide the preservice teachers to “become reflective practitioners by talking about prac”, “problem solve difficulties”, and “self evaluate our learning to ensure we are making good
progress in our teaching”. Hence, it was evident that these preservice teachers recognised the importance of reflection and the inclusion of debrief sessions following practicum would assist them to refine and develop their reflective practices.

**4.3.5.2 Theme two: More practical approaches in lectures and tutorials.**

The second theme that emerged as an enhancement for the future was that there needed to be more practical approaches in lectures and tutorials. Preservice teachers felt these approaches could be more readily achieved if the lecturers and tutors had “taught in middle years classrooms so they could tell us about the ideas they used” and “share with us the strategies that worked for them”. Typically, preservice teachers noted that some lecturers and tutors would “benefit from having taught in a middle years classroom” as it would really help them to make “their lectures and tutorials much more authentic”. Some preservice teachers suggested that lecturers needed to be able to draw on their own experiences. Statements exemplifying this argument included “I asked a lecturer how he implemented Beane’s integrated curriculum and he said he’d never taught in an integrated way” and “how can they tell us about teaching middle years students and engaging middle years learners if they have never done it themselves”. This cohort of preservice teachers felt that it was “essential for middle years lecturers and tutors to have experience in teaching middle years students so they could effectively teach preservice teachers”. Lecturers and tutors who have experienced teaching in middle years classrooms was an enhancement that over one-fifth of the preservice teachers suggested for the future. In summary, the preservice teachers called for middle years lecturers and tutors who could draw from their experiences to show they could “practice what they were preaching”.
Modelling of middle years practices by lecturers and tutors was another suggested enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation. Preservice teachers requested the modelling of useful ideas for the classrooms such as “lots of practical advice and suggestions that are shown to us in tutorials”, “specific strategies to teach reading not just multi-literacies”, “more tools for teaching key learning areas”, and “more realistic suggestions and the modelling of behaviour management strategies – not just theories”.

Some preservice teachers called for the modelling in tutorials of particular pedagogical approaches such as “incorporating Bloom’s taxonomy and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences into lessons” and “using examples, samples of games and experiments we could really use”, “incorporating backward mapping tasks into tutorials”, “designing authentic assessment relevant to the classroom”, and “including how you would include ICTs into classroom activities to keep students engaged”. Preservice teachers noted that, by having the activities “modelled”, it would assist them to “understand the practical application more effectively” and, “enhance their own teaching”. Some preservice teachers called for lecturers and tutors who could “model the personal attributes required for teaching middle years learners”. Specifically, preservice teachers noted that university staff should model “developing better relationships with students”, “being more approachable”, “understanding towards the diverse needs of preservice teachers”, “support of individual development”, “clear expectations” and “humour as part of the interaction with students”. Therefore, this cohort of preservice teachers perceived that middle years lecturers and tutors modelling middle schooling approaches would enhance future middle schooling teacher preparation.
The final subtheme that emerged from the data was that preservice teachers would like to see more “lectures delivered by middle schooling teachers or professionals”, as this would provide “other ideas from practitioners who are actually in the field doing great things in middle schooling”. It was thought these lectures “would give further ideas for implementing middle schooling philosophy in our schools when we graduate” and “practical suggestions from practitioners”. It seems that some of the preservice teachers had experienced guest lectures and found these sessions “provided a positive experience and great ideas for preservice teachers”. Preservice teachers that attended these lectures valued them and felt that the inclusion of “more lectures such as these would be an enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation”.

4.3.5.3 Theme three: More specific middle years subject.

The inclusion of more subjects that were specifically designed for middle years preservice teachers was the third theme that emerged as a suggested enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation. It seems that, although these participants were completing a middle years course not all of the subjects were directly related to specific middle years practices. In some instances preservice teachers noted that “we need for all our subject to be directly related to early adolescence and middle years pedagogies”. In a similar vein, “some of the subjects need to be re-designed so they relate directly to middle years practices as some were not as useful as others”. Also recommended for these subjects were suggestions for additional content and ideas for teaching such as “how to apply some of the theories to classroom practice”, “added strategies for meeting the needs of early adolescents” and “how to deal with diversity in middle years classrooms”.

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Final-year preservice teachers also felt the middle years subject would be enhanced by related school visits. This suggestion was supported by over one-fifth of the cohort, who felt these visits would “allow preservice teachers to make the links between middle years theories and practice” and enable them to “discuss with lecturers the practices they were seeing” and “to make sense of what they were studying at university”. Suggestions ranged from “being in classrooms with great middle years teachers on a regular basis, perhaps once per week” to “being allocated to middle years classrooms for the whole year and having the opportunity to see how the teacher establishes relationships with the students and develops the pedagogy to support them”. These visits were suggested by the final years improvements as it was perceived they would “enhance the teaching and learning experience of the preservice teachers” and “better prepare us (preservice teachers) for teaching in middle years classrooms”. The suggestion of school visits related to the middle years subject was well supported by the preservice teachers, as they also believed that such school visits would provide “opportunities to converse with middle years teachers” and “ask questions and discuss their ideas for engaging and motivating learners”. Further opportunities to speak to successful middle years teachers was an enhancement that was supported by 28 preservice teachers, who felt that by talking to “experienced middle years teachers they would gain ideas for classroom management”, “discuss how they implemented their planning”, and “establish some networks for the future that may assist in possible employment”.

4.3.5.4 Theme four: More opportunities for real world experiences.

The final theme that emerged from the data was that preservice teachers requested more opportunities for “real world” experiences. Preservice teachers noted that “the university
should find ways for preservice teachers to spend more time in real world situations outside of practicum and university studies’. They suggested that these experiences would assist them to “learn more about the roles as teachers” and “more hands-on experiences”. It was noted that further opportunities to “volunteer in school related activities” would enhance their ability to “assimilate into varied school cultures” and, at the same time, “provide an extra pair of hands in the classroom”. It was also felt that middle years teachers “would enjoy having opportunities to have an extra pair of hands in the classroom to assist” and, as they were volunteers in the schools, it would not be a “cost to the university”.

Another suggestion that related to more real world opportunities was the addition of further professional development opportunities for preservice teachers. It was perceived that “professional development with experienced colleagues” and “opportunities to converse with teachers in professional development forums” would provide preservice teachers with situations where they could “network, gain further ideas for teaching and share experiences with more practiced teachers”. Professional development specifically in the area of middle years was viewed as a suggested inclusion for the future. Some final years noted they would have liked “opportunities to attend middle years professional development alongside knowledgeable teachers”, and, a further suggestion, “have the university host professional development conferences with expert guest speakers so preservice teachers and teachers benefit”. Attending professional development alongside their colleagues was a well supported strategy that would enhance future middle years programs. The final suggestion was the inclusion of “more opportunities to network with expert middle years teachers”. Preservice teachers noted “I would like to see a system in
place where we can make more connections with middle years teachers”, “more networking with real middle years teachers is required”, and “we need opportunities to join professional associations with practicing middle years teachers so we can interact and learn from their expertise”. In summary, preservice teachers suggested that future middle years teacher preparation needed to include greater opportunities to interact and network with middle years teachers. They indicated that professional development sessions, and participation in professional associations and conferences, might be ways to achieve this aim.

4.3.5.5 Summary of the questionnaire data.

As previously noted, the questionnaire data related to the second and third aims of the research. In addressing the second aim of the research, preservice teachers indicated the experiences that made them feel more confident to teach in the middle years of schooling were those provided by both school-based and university-based components of their teacher preparation. It seems preservice teacher confidence was influenced when they had the opportunity to undertake practice in the field that allowed them to “link theory with practice” and provided “real world learning”. Quality mentor teachers who modelled appropriate practices, particularly in the area of behaviour management were also valued as increasing confidence. Additionally, the data indicated that, when the school community welcomed and supported the preservice teachers throughout their practicum, they felt more confident to teach. These experiences, combined with university studies that included specific middle years subject that incorporated relevant content, pedagogical and theoretical knowledge for teaching were seen to influence confidence development. The practices of university staff who modelled teaching strategies, the design of
assessment tasks and incorporated ICTs into lectures and tutorials also impacted positively on preservice teacher confidence. Finally, the questionnaire data indicated that confidence was also improved by “other experiences” such as professional development and volunteering in schools.

The preservice teachers suggested enhancements for future middle years teacher preparation demonstrated synergies with the participants’ perceptions about what developed their confidence for teaching. Just as practicum was well supported by the final-years as a source of confidence development, a suggested enhancement was the inclusion of more time in schools, with varied middle years experiences that included different grade levels, different schools, and a mentor teacher and school community supportive of middle years practices. The inclusion of debrief sessions after practicum were supported by the participants who perceived such sessions would enhance the development of reflective practice and provide opportunities to gain further advice, and suggestions from academic staff.

Further synergies were evident between the suggested enhancements and those experiences perceived to develop confidence. For example, there was a call for more practical approaches demonstrated by university staff who had experience in teaching middle years classrooms and could model the desired practices of middle years teachers in lectures, tutorials, and in the delivery of specific middle years subjects. It was also suggested that middle years subjects include related school visits and more ideas for teaching early adolescent learners. The inclusion of guest lecturers from the profession, additional interaction and networking with successful middle years teachers, and further
real world learning opportunities were supported as course improvements by the preservice teachers. Indeed, a compilation and comparison of the questionnaire responses relating to the second and third aim of the research confirm that the recommended enhancements by final years include more of those activities that they perceived developed their confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling.

4.4. Chapter summary

Chapter 4 has presented the survey (quantitative) data providing the descriptive statistics that highlighted the areas of perceived confidence of the 142 preservice teachers for teaching in the middle years of schooling. The presentation of the questionnaire (qualitative) data demonstrated the preservice teachers’ perceptions of the experiences that made them feel confident for teaching and suggestions for enhancements for future middle years teacher preparation courses. The next chapter will analyse the interview (qualitative) data that addresses all three aims of the research and will provide a deeper understanding of the participants’ responses that have already been presented in the survey and questionnaire data.
Chapter 5

Presenting and Analysing Interview Data

5.1 Chapter Preview

Chapter 5 presents and analyses the interview (qualitative) data. Following the introduction to the Chapter (Section 5.1), the context for the interviews (Section 5.2) will be presented, followed by the responses of the ten final-year preservice teachers undertaking specialist middle years teacher preparation. The responses from the preservice teachers completing the undergraduate course (Section 5.3) will be presented first, followed by the responses from preservice teachers completing the graduate course (Section 5.4). The most frequent responses will be collated and presented in relation to the aims of the research (Section 5.5) and finally, the Chapter will then be summarised and concluded (Section 5.6).

5.2 Interview context

Ten preservice teachers volunteered to be a part of the in-depth face-to-face interviews used in this study. Five participants were completing an undergraduate education course (e.g., Bachelor of Education Primary [middle years pathway]), while the other five were completing graduate studies (e.g., Graduate Diploma in Education [middle years]). All participants were undertaking a teacher education program that incorporated subjects that focused on the middle years of schooling. Table 5.1 below summarises the age, gender, and courses of the preservice teachers who participated in the interviews.
Table 5.1

*Age, Gender and Courses of Interviewed Preservice Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preservice teachers completing the Bachelor of Education Primary (Middle Years Pathway)</th>
<th>Preservice teachers completing the Graduate Diploma in Education (Middle Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Beryl</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews took between 30-45 minutes to address the three main aims of the research, namely:

1. Investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling;

2. Analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident; and


The interviews were designed to provide more in-depth data about the confidence of the preservice teachers to teach in the middle years, describe in detail the university experiences that influenced the development of their confidence, and the enhancements required for the future design of middle years teacher education courses.
Initially, it was not the intention of this study to compare the confidence of preservice teachers undertaking different education programs, however, the responses from these cohorts will be discussed separately, as a little more than half the participants (\(n=73\) of the total 142 surveyed) were involved in a one-year graduate diploma program; hence, there needed to be a purposeful representation of this cohort. Separating the interview data between the undergraduates and graduate cohort will allow representation of each group to determine if there are specific experiences that impact on their confidence to teach in the middle years. First, the responses from preservice teachers who completed the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) will be presented followed by the preservice teachers who completed the Graduate Diploma in Education (middle years).

### 5.3 Interview Participants: Bachelor of Education Primary (Middle Years Pathway)

These five interviews (see Table 5.2 Participants 1 – 5) were undertaken at a small regional campus of a large university in Queensland, Australia. Preservice teachers at this campus were in the final year of a Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) degree. As part of their studies, core subjects were shaped to address middle years issues and as well, four middle years elective subjects were undertaken. At the time, the design of the course was to improve the quality of middle years teachers and provide employment flexibility so that graduate teachers could teach across primary and secondary contexts. The elective subjects completed included: Middle years students and schools; Middle years curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; Teaching strategies for engaging middle years learners; and Teaching middle years students with learning difficulties.
In keeping with the strategic plan for this campus, subject coordinators “incorporated community engagement activities into the academic programs” (Queensland University of Technology, 2008, p. 3). Hence, in many of the core and elective subjects, preservice teachers completed the coursework and undertook related school visits in middle years classrooms so the links between middle schooling concepts and practices could occur concurrently. School visits were offered in both primary and secondary contexts, and preservice teachers had choices as to which grades they undertook practicum, with secondary classrooms to grade 10 offered as an option. The preservice teachers undertaking this course completed over 100 days of practicum, including extra days provided by the community engagement activities.

The Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) was offered at the campus commencing in 2005. At the time this study was undertaken, there were 160 preservice teachers enrolled across four years of the course. The location and convenience of this campus in a small community, attracted many mature age students with 60% of the cohort aged over 30. Four of the five preservice teachers involved in these interviews came to the course with a range of workplace backgrounds including experience as a teacher aide, plumber, and administration. One of these preservice teachers entered the Bachelor of Education the year after their high school graduation. The following is a de-identified description of each of the participants with pseudonyms used to protect their identities.
Participant 1: Maree

Maree is a single parent with two children. She has worked as a teacher’s aide for 10 years in two schools including a secondary setting. As the first person in her family to attend university, Maree selected this course because she was encouraged by her teaching colleagues to undertake a teaching degree. As the course was offered close to her home, she noted she could “juggle her studies and parenting duties”. Close proximity to the university also allowed her to maintain part-time work in a local school that helped her to make further links with her studies and assisted her financially.

Participant 2: Beryl

Beryl is a married mother of five children. Marrying young and becoming a parent at an early age, she did not have the opportunity to attend university as a school leaver but wanted to be a teacher for many years. With her youngest child commencing school, she felt she was able to enrol in a Bachelor of Education degree at the university closest to her home. Completing a primary degree was a priority but not necessarily the with a middle years pathway. She saw herself as a teacher, not necessarily as a teacher of a particular developmental period or grade.

Participant 3: Vona

Vona enrolled in university from high school. With family members as teachers, she had always wanted to be a teacher and recognised the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) as a great opportunity for “flexibility for future employment”. Having a university so close to home was viewed as a bonus but was not her reason for selecting this
degree. However, being close to home meant she could remain in her part-time job assisting in a kindergarten. Vona saw this as a way to gain vital skills required for teaching.

Participant 4: Wendy

Working as a legal secretary, Wendy wanted a career change. The introduction of teaching a degree at a local campus provided an opportunity to complete her studies and care for her two children, who were enrolled in a nearby school. Wendy’s husband was supportive of her undertaking further studies, as she had been unhappy in her previous employment stating her job lacked “the satisfaction that she was making a difference in someone else’s life”.

Participant 5: Brian

Brian completed a plumbing apprenticeship, worked for nine years as a plumber and decided to make the transition to university. Brian heard about the new campus at the local supermarket where a “Careers Expo” was on display. He decided he wanted to be “a positive role model to his two-year old son” and enrolled in a Bachelor of Education Primary degree. Like others in his cohort, he was attracted to the university because of the location.

As can be noted from the above participant descriptions, only one of the five interviewees specifically selected this degree because of the middle years pathway, instead, each desired
to undertake further studies in teaching to: change careers, fulfil a desire to become a teacher, and become a positive role model. From their responses it was evident that all but one of these participants (Vona) was attracted to this course because of the close proximity of the campus to their home address.

5.3.1 Interview data: Self-reported confidence

To address the first aim of the research the preservice teachers were asked to comment on aspects of teaching in the middle school context where they felt most confident and where they felt least confident. They were also asked to note how they would overcome any lack of confidence in their future teaching. The responses varied between participants (Table 5.2). All five participants claimed they were confident in particular aspects of teaching middle years students. After comparing the data, it emerged that some preservice teachers shared similar responses. Three preservice teachers (Maree, Brian, and Beryl) noted they were confident they had an understanding of middle years teaching philosophy.
### Table 5.2

**Preservice Teachers’ (Bachelor of Education Primary [middle years pathway]) Self-Reported Confidence to Teach in the Middle Schooling Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preservice Teacher</th>
<th>Area most confident for teaching</th>
<th>Experiences that developed confidence</th>
<th>Area least confident for teaching</th>
<th>Overcoming lack of confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maree</td>
<td>Middle years teaching philosophy Curriculum knowledge to teach literacy Planning engaging and intellectually challenging learning experiences Using a variety of teaching strategies for MY students Reflecting and improving upon teaching Planning and implementing assessment</td>
<td>The University subject “Teaching Strategies” assisted to implement a range of teaching strategies and also assisted with planning. Previous experience assisted confidence in literacy. Experienced success in teaching after reflecting on practice during practicum.</td>
<td>Just getting started on my own classroom</td>
<td>I feel I can overcome any lack of confidence through preparation and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Beryl</td>
<td>Knowing more about middle years philosophy than experienced teachers Preparing intellectually challenging learning experiences suitable for middle years students Curriculum knowledge to teach mathematics Curriculum knowledge to teach the arts Assessment</td>
<td>University subjects included assessment The university unit “Teaching Strategies” assisted the development of planning skills. Previous experience in arts and science assisted confidence.</td>
<td>Teachers who have been teaching for a long time not accepting new approaches to teaching middle years</td>
<td>Presenting myself as a professional and working successfully in teams with experienced teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Vona</td>
<td>Organising, monitoring and catering to diversity through group work Using teaching strategies that engage middle years learners</td>
<td>Had success in teaching and using a variety of teaching strategies</td>
<td>The level at which to pitch lessons so it is relevant to the students</td>
<td>Talking with experienced teachers and getting to know parents and community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Wendy</td>
<td>Developing teacher-pupil relationships Designing suitable assessment tasks that align with what has been taught and how it has been taught</td>
<td>Experienced success in developing rapport with early adolescents while on practicum. University subjects included assessment</td>
<td>Teaching literacy and numeracy Behaviour management</td>
<td>Undertaking further reading and professional development in the areas where I lack confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brian</td>
<td>Understanding middle years learners’ philosophy Developing relationships with middle years students Reflecting on practice to ensure improvement</td>
<td>Experienced success in developing rapport with early adolescents while on practicum. Experienced success in teaching after reflecting on practice during practicum.</td>
<td>All of it - but I am ready to be out there</td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After further probing questions, it seemed that the confidence of these three participants was influenced by both their university and in-school experiences. To illustrate, Maree commented she had confidence in middle years philosophy because she had “taught in a number of schools and worked with early adolescent students that confirmed middle years philosophy”. Brian stated, “I have learned a lot about the philosophy of middle years learners at university and have drawn from this information for teaching”, while Beryl claimed confidence in this area sharing, she had “a greater understanding of middle years philosophy than some experienced teachers”. Middle years philosophy was embedded in their middle years preservice teacher preparation so it appeared reasonable that these three participants felt confident in this area. Having an opportunity to experience middle years philosophy at work in schools as part of their preparation could have enhanced and confirmed their confidence for teaching.

Table 5.2 demonstrates there were other similarities in participant responses. Again, it appeared that the confidence of the preservice teachers was influenced by opportunities provided by university subjects and their school experiences. Two preservice teachers (Vona & Maree) claimed they were confident in using a variety of teaching strategies because “I have employed a vast array of teaching strategies that engaged middle years learners over the last four years” (Vona) and “the subject Teaching Strategies armed me with great ideas that I know I am confident to use” (Maree). Another two (Brian & Wendy) highlighted their confidence in developing a positive rapport with students. Brian said he was confident to “develop positive teacher-student relationships because I really enjoy middle years students”, which was similar to Wendy’s response when she stated, “Developing relationships with middle years students is an area of confidence as I have
done it successfully in two practicum experiences”. Two preservice teachers (Maree & Brian) agreed they felt confident about reflecting on their practices. Maree said, “I am confident to reflect upon practice and make improvements for teaching because I have improved so much over the last four years as a result of reflection”, while Brian stated, “Reflection on my practice is definitely an area of confidence as I have experienced how you can improve”. Indeed the reflective process can enhance teaching practice (Schön, 1983, 1987) and when improvement in teaching occurs, teaching confidence can increase (e.g., see Shulman, 1986a, 1986b).

Assessment for learning that is on-going, aligned to the curriculum and pedagogy, and authentic with real-world connections is a feature of middle years teaching (Pate, 2005; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010). In this undergraduate degree, assessment was embedded in all middle years curriculum subjects, however, two subjects focused directly on assessment. It seemed these subjects may have influenced the confidence about designing and conducting assessments. For instance Wendy said, “I am confident in assessment as in our course we did a lot on assessment” and Beryl claimed, “Assessment is one of my areas of confidence as we did so much planning for assessment and I had opportunities to implement these in the classroom”. These comments indicated a theory to practice connection where the preservice teachers were scaffolded in devising relevant assessments at university that link with curriculum and pedagogy. Similarly to constructivist principles emphasising first-hand experiences for students’ learning in the classroom (e.g., Vygotsky, 1986), Beryl indicated her first-hand experiences of applying her learning about assessment in the classroom assisted her confidence to teach. It appeared that the subjects included in this
degree provided information and strategies suitable for ensuring these two preservice teachers were confident in this area.

The perception of confidence in planning intellectually challenging learning experiences was shared by two preservice teachers (Maree and Beryl). They referred specifically to the middle years subject, *Teaching Strategies*, as a subject that enhanced their confidence for planning. Maree noted that *Teaching Strategies* provided “ideas for challenging students and employed Bloom’s Taxonomy as a theoretical framework” while Beryl stated, “This subject provided so many ideas for the classroom that I feel confident to challenge students of all intellectual abilities”. The *Teaching Strategies* subject provided first hand opportunities for the preservice teachers to engage with effective pedagogical practices that can be used to facilitate student learning. Conscious decision making on selecting appropriate teaching strategies, instead of teaching without an understanding of how these strategies may affect students, appeared to develop Beryl and Maree’s confidence in their abilities to apply theory to practice. Certainly these preservice teacher responses indicate subject design needs to be considered in all teacher preparation courses (National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006), as such subjects can provide preservice teachers with skills and knowledge to increase confidence for classroom practice.

When discussing areas of confidence, participants claimed they were confident in curriculum knowledge for teaching particular key learning areas such as literacy (Maree), the arts, and mathematics (Beryl). It seemed past experience rather than their teacher preparation played a significant role in confidence development to teach particular key learning areas. Maree’s employment as a teacher’s aide seemed to be influential when she
commented, “I feel confident to teach all aspects of literacy because of my experience helping students as a teacher aide”. Beryl stated, “I was always good at school in art and mathematics, and this has increased my confidence to teach those two areas”. Hence, prior knowledge on specific subjects can help to develop the confidence to teach subject areas. Similarly, Beryl’s ability in art and mathematics, and Maree’s experiences in assisting with literacy as a teacher’s aide, instils confidence that they possess the content knowledge to teach these subject areas.

Overall, the data indicated that these five preservice teachers were most confident in the areas of middle years philosophy, planning intellectually challenging experiences, using a range of teaching strategies, designing assessment, and reflecting on practices. It seemed their confidence was influenced by their experiences during practicum, their teacher preparation course and prior experiences before commencing university. The areas of least confidence noted by the preservice teachers were individual and varied. Brian claimed he was least confident in all aspects of teaching but was ready to be in the classroom. He attributed his lack of confidence to the “unknown future of being a final year”, as he stated, “I lack confidence in everything because I don’t know where I’ll be teaching or even if I will obtain a teaching position. How do you plan for the unknown?” Vona also related her lack of confidence to the “unknown”. Specifically, she stated “not knowing at what level to pitch the lessons” related to her “not knowing what her class would be like or their developmental level”. Both Brian and Vona demonstrated recognition of unique teaching contexts requiring specialised knowledge and skills that need to be acquired within these contexts.
Wendy claimed she felt least confident in the curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy with a further lack of confidence in behaviour management. She attributed her lack of confidence to “few opportunities to practice the implementation of these during practicum experiences”. The extent of opportunities to practice particular subjects, skills, and knowledge impacted on Wendy’s confidence to teach in the middle years. Practical opportunities needed to be available to preservice teachers at different times during the school year. Maree said she lacked confidence in “getting started” and “setting up your classroom from day one to meet the needs of middle years learners”. Her lack of confidence was attributed to “being in experienced teachers’ classrooms during practicum that were already organised and prepared”. Maree was unaware of how to organise and arrange a classroom, which appeared to affect her confidence in establishing herself at the commencement of a school year.

Further evidence of the impact of experiences on confidence was highlighted by Beryl, who claimed that her lack of confidence was in the area of “working with teachers who have little knowledge about contemporary approaches to teaching middle years students”. Her lack of confidence was influenced by practicum where the teachers at the school “were resistant to different approaches and negated that middle years was a significant period of development”. This may be related to the mentor selection process and limited by the pool of available mentors who are current with middle years practices. The data suggested that practicum experiences can influence confidence development and, in Beryl’s case, her lack of confidence was affected by experienced teachers’ attitudes at one particular school.
Despite the participants articulating areas where they may lack confidence, all participants were optimistic about overcoming any lack of confidence for their future teaching. Interviewees emphasised the need to gain more teaching experiences and stressed that interactions with colleagues would assist confidence development. They also wanted to ask more questions of experienced teachers and seek professional development for areas where they lacked the skills, knowledge and confidence. The interview data demonstrated that the participants expected that beginning teachers would lack confidence to some degree as a first-year teacher. Beryl summarised the views of the group: “I would imagine there wouldn’t be a beginning teacher that was confident in all areas of teaching. To lack confidence is normal but with experience, I believe I’ll be as confident as the next person”. This seems to indicate that the preservice teachers are self-reflective in their capabilities but also have the initiative to plan to overcome any shortfalls in their pedagogical practices within the school context.

5.3.2 Interview data: University experiences and confidence development

In alignment with the second aim of the research, these five preservice teachers were asked to comment on the university experiences that had increased their confidence to teach in the middle years’ context. These experiences were categorised into three themes with associated sub themes, namely:

Theme 1: Practicum / field studies and included: (1) Experiences in middle years classrooms; (2) Teaching in diverse contexts; (3) The content of the field studies (practicum) subjects delivered at university; (4) The quality of the supervising or mentor teacher; and (5) Community engagement school visits and opportunities to reflect on practice.
Theme 2: Subjects specifically related to the middle years of schooling that incorporated:
(1) Middle years subject content; (2) Subject related visits to middle years classrooms; (3) The links between theory and practice by observing middle years teachers; and (4) Modelling of teaching practices by exemplary middle years teachers.

Theme 3: The pedagogical approaches of the lecturers and tutors that involved: (1) The modelling of teaching strategies; (2) Practical activities; (3) Hands-on experiences; (4) visual aids and technologies into lectures and tutorials; and (5) The design and implementation of assessment tasks.

5.3.2.1 Theme 1: Practicum / Field studies

Practicum was heralded by the preservice teachers as pivotal to their development of confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling. Specifically, understanding the students’ developmental levels for learning and associated behaviour was a key aspect of the practicum experience. Wendy noted, “Spending the time in the school and actually teaching middle years students increased my confidence. I wondered whether I would engage the children but they did respond to my teaching and I felt good about that”. Vona also stated:

I found that prac experiences have increased my confidence to teach middle years. My second prac was year four/five and at first I didn’t know what to expect. They (the students) actually surprised me as to where they were developmentally with their learning and behaviour. That really gave me confidence because I knew I could teach the students and apply a lot of what I had learnt at uni.

Preservice teachers in this cohort had opportunities to complete practicum experiences in varying schools and were encouraged to nominate different grade levels for these
experiences. Interview data suggested that these diverse teaching contexts provided opportunities to understand the developmental needs of early adolescents, increase teaching approaches suitable for middle schooling and create opportunities to develop a rapport with students across different grade levels. These experiences in various classrooms appeared to enhance preservice confidence that they could teach in a range of contexts. To illustrate:

I feel more confident in knowing that I have the knowledge and I can develop the rapport to teach students in the middle years of learning. The varying classrooms required different approaches so there is great value in completing practicum experiences in different schools and with different grades.

Similarly, Brian stated:

Completing field studies experiences in a variety of grades and schools assisted my confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling as I could see the developmental needs of the students over the different grade and age levels. It helped me to understand early adolescent development.

As part of the Bachelor of Education offered at this campus, each practicum experienced by the preservice teachers had associated course content that was delivered at university prior to the preservice teachers beginning their school visits. These subjects, known as Field Studies, focused on providing relevant knowledge and skills required for teaching. Content topics for Field Studies included: classroom and behaviour management; lesson and program design; assessment, curriculum and pedagogy development; teaching strategies; designing questioning; and catering for diversity in the classroom. It seemed that learning about these topics at the university empowered the preservice teachers to commence their school experiences with positive attitudes. Once in the classroom,
opportunities arose to apply university coursework content to their classroom practices, which included planning, preparation, and teaching strategies. For example:

I thought the content of the field studies subjects was vital in developing my confidence to teach. When I started prac I knew how to plan a lesson, I could select from a range of teaching strategies, I knew how to structure my questions and make sure I had all my materials prepared. All I had to do was focus on my teaching. This, combined with my knowledge of middle years students, made me feel confident before I began teaching.

The five preservice teachers who acknowledged the importance of practicum experiences in developing confidence also highlighted practicum as a way to connect theory and practice. Maree commented that the practicum experiences assisted her to “make sense of all the things that we’ve read and learnt about middle years students. In fact, it allowed me to really understand what my lecturers had been on about during our lectures and tutorials”. In addition, the Field Studies subjects covered content about the role of the teacher in the classroom, the development of their professional identity, and the changing nature of teaching in the twenty-first century. Some of the subject content provided preservice teachers with knowledge and skills on guiding and supporting students’ education and assisting them to become independent learners. Furthermore, the practicum subjects also assisted the final-years to define their role as a teacher and assisted in the development of a professional identity. Wendy stated:

I am a fairly confident person; however before I went into the schools I was really worried as to whether I could teach. The field studies subjects made me realise that I don’t have to know everything about teaching. In fact, what I have learned is that I am not just a teacher, I am an educator. The difference being, that as an educator I provide the students with the skills, knowledge and resources to help them be self-directed learners. I think knowing this increased my confidence, because it was then clear to me what I had to be and what I am in the classroom.
The preservice teachers indicated that the quality of the supervising or mentor teacher made a difference to their teaching practices. It appeared that preservice teacher confidence could be influenced by how much teaching the preservice teacher was allowed to undertake, the support provided by the mentor teacher, and the quality of the feedback provided. Maree’s response was indicative of other participants’ views:

I have been so lucky in all my practicum experiences that I have had the most supportive mentor teachers. Their support has really aided my confidence to teach. Without them giving me freedom to teach a range of lessons in their class I think it would be impossible to develop confidence. They also provided me with constructive feedback that was delivered in such a way that it supported me to become the best teacher possible.

A further comment from Vona outlined the significance of the mentor teacher in sharing knowledge about teaching in the middle years and how the mentor can develop confidence by demonstrating and modelling specific middle years practices. During a practicum, preservice teachers may have more than one mentor teacher, which can include permanent and casual teaching staff. It appeared that Vona’s confidence development was not only influenced by what she did but what she observed her mentor teachers model in their classrooms. To illustrate:

The supervising teachers I have had during prac have played a huge role in the development of my confidence. You learn a lot from each. I had one that demonstrated how to engage middle years students, who successfully integrated the key learning areas and created authentic assessment tasks that allowed the students to be totally immersed in the learning and assessment process. I had another who had wonderful management strategies with clear boundaries and high expectations for the students and a third that modelled outstanding student – teacher relationships. By observing each teacher I learned something that I could implement, this definitely increased my confidence.
The degree to which mentor teachers can influence confidence development was articulated by Brian, who claimed that an unsupportive mentor can be detrimental by decreasing confidence to teach. It seemed that Brian’s mentor teacher was overly critical and provided little modelling or dialogue that assisted him to develop effective teaching practices. Thus there was considerable evidence emerged from the interview that the mentor teacher was pivotal to preservice teacher confidence development, particularly as negative mentoring can discourage preservice teachers to continue learning in the profession (Long, 1997). For instance:

I nearly gave up teaching after my first field studies experience. The mentor teacher provided me with no advice, I couldn’t identify any middle years practices in her teaching and she didn’t model any lessons but criticised everything that I did. After a while I had no confidence and was ready to throw in the towel.

Final-year preservice teachers have had multiple opportunities to be in classrooms with varied mentors. These first-hand experiences provided participants with ideas about what may be considered as effective mentoring. Beryl noted that, without a previous positive practicum experience, she would not have realised that she was experiencing inadequate mentoring. This participant clearly pointed out that mentoring must be purposeful and supportive by modelling practices and providing constructive feedback in order to develop confidence. It was recognised that different mentors during practicum experiences can assist to balance out possible negative mentoring that may have adverse effects on a preservice teacher’s development. As Beryl stated:

I have had two really great mentor teachers and one who was very negative. The one negative teacher really destroyed my confidence in teaching. The negative mentor didn’t make me feel welcome, didn’t model lessons and didn’t provide any feedback. I was pleased I had other positive experiences because I think this experience made me feel totally insecure.
Despite reports of some negative mentoring experiences, these undergraduate preservice teachers appreciated the school-based learning experiences linked to core subjects that were part of the university-community engagement focus of this campus. This support of these experiences may have been due to the hands-on nature of the visits and the reflective discussions that followed. It seemed that opportunities to practice what they had been learning at university added to the development of confidence for these preservice teachers. A typical response was:

> Just being in schools and in classrooms builds confidence to teach. The experiences we had in science, undertaking the experiments with the middle years kids, were really valuable. I liked the PE (physical education) sessions too. Working with the kids gave me so much more confidence to teach rather than just working with and teaching my peers.

The school-based opportunities provided within these professional experience activities also increased confidence as preservice teachers were able to plan, teach, reflect, and improve pedagogical practices. Reflective practice is a positive attribute of an effective teacher (Schön, 1987; Stronge, 2007) as the process allows for improvement in teaching. Beryl highlighted improvement of pedagogical practices as a result of reflection, speaking with a peer and repeated opportunities to practice her teaching. She noted that:

> The subjects that included school visits really helped me to understand how to teach that subject and the importance of reflection. For example, the first science experiment I did with the students at school didn’t go well. After I reflected on this and discussed it with my teaching partner, we changed it so the second session was more engaging and fun. This increased my confidence to know that through reflection I could improve.
**5.3.2.2 Theme 2: Subjects that specifically related to the middle years of schooling.**

The second theme that emerged from the interview data was that the specific middle years subjects studied at this campus also assisted to build confidence to teach in the middle years context. The content of the middle years subjects focused on middle years student development and provided specific strategies to engage them within the classroom. Vona noted, “The middle years subjects for sure increased my confidence as what I was learning was directly related to my teaching context”. This view was shared by three other participants, in particular Maree, who commented, “I would say the middle years subjects increased my confidence because we covered so many of the issues we will be facing in our classrooms and the strategies we learned will certainly help us”.

Similar to some of the core subjects, two of the middle years pathway subjects included visits to classrooms with exemplary middle years teachers identified by school executives (e.g. school principal). All five preservice teachers commented the school visits influenced their confidence to teach. Preservice teachers recognised the links between what was being studied at university and what they observed in middle years classrooms. The preservice teachers commented that the subject content provided them with an understanding of classroom management and teaching integrated subjects to prepare them for teaching.

I enjoyed the visits to the middle years classrooms. In lectures I thought “Do teachers really do this”? When I visited the schools I saw teachers developing positive relationships with the students, whole school approaches to behaviour management, integrated curriculum that was connected to real-life learning experiences and authentic assessment. Teachers were really doing what we were being taught and this gave me confidence our course was preparing me well. (Wendy)
Comparable to Wendy’s response, other preservice teachers articulated that they could make the connection between the middle years subject content and the practices they observed in the classroom. Observing middle years teachers provided them with ideas and strategies for their own classroom practices, which they acknowledged as beneficial to their confidence development. Indeed, these responses confirmed that the modelling of teaching by exemplary classroom practitioners can benefit preservice teacher development.

The school visits allowed for me to make the links between the content of middle years subjects and what the teacher does in the classroom. I felt I learned so much from watching the teacher. As I watched her I thought: I can do this.

In general, the middle years subjects were viewed as developing their confidence to teach. The subjects were directly related to the pedagogies and practices for teaching in the middle years of schooling so, it was likely, the preservice teachers could see the relevance of these subjects to their teaching preparation. As confirmed by Beryl and Wendy:

I think all the middle years’ subjects were particularly useful in developing my confidence. I think that looking at the theory behind middle years students is important to understand in order to be a successful classroom teacher.

Subjects that focused on middle years issues such as adolescent development, dropout rates, and disengagement of students, brain development and the cognitive, social and emotional development of students in the middle years helped me to understand that early adolescence is a distinct time of development. I also realised that the work of middle years’ teachers is important if we are to keep these students engaged and motivated in the classroom.

Conversely, Brian felt the middle years subjects did not develop his confidence to teach. He alleged the subjects needed to be more practical, with greater emphasis on useful
activities for teaching in the middle school classroom. Although he recognised the value of the school visits, Brian claimed that the subjects should have included more specific strategies.

I didn’t enjoy the middle years subjects. The school visits were very good in developing confidence but I thought the subjects themselves needed to model cooperative learning, and provide more examples of authentic assessment. We learn by doing, we needed more doing than listening.

5.3.2.3 Theme 3: Lecturers’ pedagogical approaches.

The third theme that emerged was that the preservice teachers felt the pedagogical approaches of university lecturers delivering the subjects were important for developing the preservice teachers’ confidence. The final-years claimed the lecturer’s modelling of “constructivist approaches to learning” (Maree), “teaching strategies” (Beryl), and “group work and cooperative learning activities” (Vona) assisted the preservice teachers to gain a better understanding of effective approaches for learners in the middle years of schooling.

My confidence was increased by lecturers who modelled the strategies and approaches that we should be doing in our classrooms. By observing and participating in such activities, I felt confident I could use those strategies too.

Four of the five participants claimed that practical activities provided by particular lecturers and tutors assisted to build their confidence for the classroom. Indeed, the points noted were again practical middle years activities that could be applied to early adolescent learners. A typical response came from Vona who stated:

The practical activities that the science lecturer took us through that included higher-order thinking, integrated planning, engaging students in the classroom, and real-world experiences. He modelled for us the sorts of things we should be doing in our classrooms and this really helped to develop my confidence.
Three of the participants cited “hands-on experiences” as being particularly useful in developing confidence to teach in the middle years classroom. Learning by doing was a familiar response throughout the interviews with the participants claiming that once they had experienced the concept they could apply it to the classroom. Beryl stated:

I found subjects where the lecturers and tutors used hands-on activities such as in art and literacy helped to increase my confidence. We actually did the activities like creating the artworks and deconstructing texts and it made me think about how I could do this activity in the classroom.

Similarly, Maree said:

I thought the activities that employed hands-on type activities were the best. Some lecturers made the activities so much fun and they showed us how we could make learning in the middle years classroom interesting and fun. That’s the sort of teacher I want to be.

As well as the lecturers’ approaches to teaching being a vehicle to build confidence, the preservice teachers commented on the incorporation of visual aids and technologies in the lectures and tutorials. They claimed that, by observing the lecturers using such techniques to engage the learners, they gained confidence for implementing these ideas into their own teaching. It appeared that approaches to teaching that are modelled effectively by university lecturers can facilitate preservice teacher development. As summarised by Vona:

Those lecturers that used related pictures and resources, Youtube clips and multi-model type presentations with interactive whiteboards and activities such as robotics kept us engaged and these would keep middle years learners engaged too. Seeing how they used them gave me confidence that I could use them too.
The final sub theme that emerged was the way the lecturers designed and implemented the assessment for their subject. The preservice teachers commented on the value of completing well-designed coursework assessments as a way for understanding how assessments can be devised for the middle school years. Just as there was value in the lecturers modelling suitable teaching strategies, the modelling of different types of assessments with task sheets and assessment rubrics gave the preservice teachers knowledge about how to undertake assessment strategies in their own classroom. They found additional value in assessment tasks that could be used specifically for teaching in the middle years, such as devising teaching resources and unit plans, as illustrated by the following interviewees:

I gained confidence in assessment from looking at how my lecturer constructed the middle years assessment tasks. The task sheet and rubric was easy to understand and the real-world nature of the task made me feel motivated to complete it.

The task sheets for the unit of work were so explicit; I thought I could use something similar in my classroom. I think completing assessment you know you can use in the classroom such as that unit of work for science, gives you more confidence than a meaningless essay.

The second aim of the research sought to analyse the university experiences included in their teacher preparation that made the middle years preservice teachers feel confident for teaching. From analysing the responses of the preservice teachers, it is evident that confidence increased as a result of different school contexts in their practicum experiences, some core university subjects, and the middle years subjects. Furthermore, the modelling of middle years practices was not only valued when demonstrated by their mentor teachers but also by their university lecturers and tutors. Subject content, combined with
opportunities to observe, implement and experience middle years practices in a range of contexts were perceived to increase confidence for teaching in the middle years classroom.

**5.3.3 Enhancing middle years teacher preparation.**

In alignment with the third aim of the research (Section 3.2), the preservice teachers were asked to comment on the areas of their teacher preparation course that could be enhanced to better prepare them for teaching in the middle school. Two themes emerged from this question with related sub themes:

Theme 1: More time should be spent in schools that included: (1) Further field studies/practicum experiences; (2) More school experiences linked to university subjects; and (3) Greater access to a variety of middle years classrooms; and

Theme 2: A more practical teacher education course that included: (1) More hands-on experiences.

**5.3.3.1 Theme 1: More time spent in schools.**

The preservice teachers indicated that more time was needed in schools outside of their usual practicum. According to the interviewees more field experiences would allow for “greater opportunities to learn the art of teaching” (Brian), “build connections with teachers to promote professional conversations” (Beryl), and “give more chances for preservice teachers to make sense of what they are learning at university and why they are learning it” (Beryl). Vona’s comment below indicated she felt given the length of the
In a four year degree, we should spend at least half of that time in schools completing field studies. Between second and third year, there was such a huge gap and quite frankly, I had forgotten what I had learned. I was lacking so much confidence before I went on prac in third year.

Some of the university coursework incorporated school-based experiences. For example, a science subject embedded additional school-based experiences within the coursework, which was indicated by the participants as a way to increase their confidence. As well as requesting more school-based experiences in other subjects, preservice teachers claimed that time spent in schools linked to core or curriculum subjects would further enhance their course, increase their confidence, and better prepare them for teaching in the middle school context. Wendy stated:

We need more on the ground contact with students in particular curriculum subjects, like we did in science. Prac is good but by linking the visits to the university subjects; it helps develop confidence and helps us to understand what we are being taught, why it is important and how to teach it in the classroom.

Importantly, for developing skills to teach in the middle school, these preservice teachers wanted more school visits linked to the middle years subjects. Even though visits were made, from the preservice teachers’ perspective, they required further immersion of school-based experiences. Beryl commented:

It would be good if when we are doing all the middle years subjects, we could undertake more weekly visits to really witness early adolescent development and how middle years teachers engage and interest the students.
More time in schools related to middle years subjects was a view shared by all of the preservice teachers, however, greater access to a range of classrooms was also seen as necessary for building confidence. Wendy in particular recognised the value of observing a variety of exemplary teachers in both the primary and secondary school settings to understand age appropriate teaching strategies, to illustrate:

I think the biggest improvement in this course would be to get student teachers out there into the high schools and upper primary classrooms. Yes, get them out there with great teachers. Not all classrooms are the same and not all teachers use the same approaches. We need to get into as many classrooms as possible and build a repertoire of strategies and approaches for the various classrooms that exist.

5.3.3.2 Theme 2: A more practical teacher education course.

The second theme that emerged when asked about course enhancements was that overall the middle years teacher preparation needed to be much more practical. The opportunity to make the links between theory and practice assists preservice teachers’ learning (Dowden, 2007; Kessels & Korthagan, 2001). All five participants agreed with the notion that “the course needed to be more hands-on with an emphasis on practical suggestions and application” (Maree). Some preservice teachers nominated particular subjects as requiring enhancement. For example, Beryl noted:

The course needed to be more practical. Visual art, in particular, was not practical enough. We needed to undertake more making and appreciating activities that were suitable to middle years classroom practice. I couldn’t see the relationship between what we did and its application in the classroom.

These five preservice teachers claimed there needed to be a balance between the amount of theory and practice in preparing middle years teachers. They explained there was an
excess of theory and not enough emphasis on practice. A typical response was from Vona who stated:

I think the last four years could have been spent learning more about what to teach. I think the theory is important but there is an overabundance of theory and not enough emphasis placed on the strategies and content we need for teaching.

Vona’s viewpoint was shared by her peers but Brian extended this perspective by providing more information, indicating that opportunities to connect theory with practice would be enhanced by further school visits and subjects that explicitly guided the preservice teachers to make the theory to practice connections.

We have four years to learn how to teach, so we need a menu of strategies to help us. Sure, we need theory and we need practice but to make the links we need more school visits and subjects that help us to clearly make those links.

Four of the five preservice teachers noted that the course design needed to ensure lecturers incorporated greater emphasis on hands-on experiences. Just as there is a need to engage early adolescent learners in hands-on activities, it appeared university students feel the same about their learning. Comments such as “lecturers need to practice the strategies they preach” (Brian), “we need to learn by doing” (Vona), and “hours spent listening to lectures is not conducive to learning nor does it build our confidence for teaching” (Maree) summarised the preservice teachers’ views about course improvements.

Despite this cohort valuing the school experiences provided as part of the practicum, core subjects, and middle years subjects, it was recognised there were areas requiring improvements. Although greater access to schools in a variety of school contexts was
available to these preservice teachers, increased opportunities to undertake more school-based experiences in a wider range of middle years classrooms was unanimous. In general, this cohort perceived a more practical approach to middle years teacher education with lecturers and teaching staff who modelled advocated practices was a perceived enhancement for the future middle years teacher preparation.

5.3.4 Summary of the Bachelor of Education Primary (Middle Years Pathway) interview results.

The first aim of the research was to investigate preservice teachers’ perception of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. In summarising the interview data collected from the five final-year preservice teachers completing the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) and relating their responses to the emerging themes noted from the literature (Section 2.6), there was evidence to suggest that these preservice teachers felt most confident in aspects that related to the theme of “Pedagogical knowledge” (i.e., share middle years philosophy, plan appropriate learning experiences, use a variety of teaching strategies, reflect and refine teaching, engage students in intellectually challenging experiences, and align curriculum pedagogy and assessment). There was no identifiable theme emerging from this group when asked about the areas where they lacked confidence. Instead, the responses were varied and individual, which may indicate that although they have completed the same teacher education program, confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling may be influenced by the way they engaged with the course content, the nature of practicum experiences, and the previous experiences they brought to university.
The university experiences that made the Bachelor of Education interviewees feel most confident included the practicum, the specific middle years subjects, and the pedagogical approaches of the university lecturers and tutors. It seems these preservice teachers perceived confidence was increased when they had opportunities to practice, reflect, observe and refine the strategies and approaches suitable for learners in the middle years. Also emerging from the research was the importance of the approach of the mentor teacher in influencing the confidence of the preservice teachers. In particular, the way the mentor teacher provided support and feedback, and modelled classroom practice was influential in developing confidence.

As well as that provided by mentor teachers, the modelling from university lecturers and tutors was also significant in developing preservice teacher confidence. It seems the demonstration of activities provided greater understanding of an activity influencing the preservice teacher’s confidence for the future. This raises the suggestion that university teaching staff need to consider their own pedagogical approaches when designing and delivering subjects to preservice middle years teachers.

In responding to the final aim of the research that asked for strategies that could be included to enhance preparation for teaching in the middle years, similarities were noted between the experiences that increased their confidence and their suggested inclusions. Preservice teachers felt their teacher preparation would be enhanced by more practicum, school visits connected to core, curriculum and middle years subjects, greater access to middle years classrooms, more hands-on experiences provided by university lecturers and tutors and, a more practical course structure.
5.4 Interview Participants: Graduate Diploma (Middle Years)

As noted earlier, it was not the intention of this study to compare particular coursework degrees, however, the findings were unexpected and indicated some distinctive differences between those completing the four-year degrees and those completing a one-year graduate diploma. Unlike the participants completing the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) the five preservice teachers involved in these interviews were completing a one-year Graduate Diploma in Education (middle years) at a large metropolitan university in Queensland. Each participant entered the course with a first degree and then, after successfully completing the one-year course, will be qualified to teach in a middle years classroom. The development of this course was in response to the need to better prepare preservice teachers to support middle years learners as discussed in Chapter 2. The two semester, eight subject course completed by these preservice teachers was structured to reflect middle years interdisciplinary approaches in arts, society and environment, science, and technology, and included subjects with a focus on engaging diverse learners. Preservice teachers undertaking this course completed a total of 55 days of practicum experience in middle years classrooms spread across first and second semester. A description of each of the interviewees follows. Again, pseudonyms are used for de-identification purposes, as the preservice teachers were assured the interviews were anonymous.

Participant 6: James

James has always wanted to be a teacher. Completing a science degree, he then wanted to teach where he felt he could “do the most good”. The middle years of schooling appealed to him because he remembered how “challenging young people at this age were in his own
education”. James has the desire to make a difference and be the “best teacher he can become”.

Participant 7: Jenna

Jenna completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and has been working as an assistant in a local library for 10 years. A mother of two, now her own children are at school, she wants to become a teacher because she “loves working with young people and feels the hours will allow her to balance family and a career”. Jenna selected the middle years course because she has enjoyed “working with early adolescents in her library work”.

Participant 8: Elyssa

Elyssa has “never wanted to be anything else but a teacher”. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and is keen to be a middle years teacher in a secondary school. She particularly loves teaching English and drama, and was drawn to the middle years graduate diploma because she had a teacher in her own schooling with a middle years qualification “I found her inspiring and she influenced my decision as to the type of teacher I want to be”.

Participant 9: Zoe

Zoe was previously a social worker employed in the area of child protection and children’s services. Feeling like a career change, she was attracted to teaching because of her “enjoyment of working with young adolescents”. Zoe chose the middle years diploma as
she was undecided as to whether she wanted to work in primary or secondary. She selected this course because it would provide her with “broader career options and an opportunity to assist early adolescents to stay engaged in school”.

Participant 10: Jordan

Jordan was an accountant who said he “wanted to do something more creative”. He decided to enrol in teaching because he felt it would assist him with his own children. Jordan was attracted to the middle years course because his own children “are at this stage of development” and he was aware of the ways in which teachers need to “engage early adolescents in order to keep them motivated”. Furthermore, if teaching in the secondary setting, he thought he could make further use of his accountancy skills and “provide early adolescents with strategies for life in managing budgets and their finances”.

The preservice teachers completing the Graduate Diploma (middle years) participated in individual 30 - 45 minute one-to-one interviews and were asked the same questions as those preservice teachers completing the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway). The responses of the Graduate Diploma (middle years) preservice teachers were not as extensive as those articulated by the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) interviewees. This may be because the graduate diploma cohort could only comment on two semesters of their teacher preparation course as opposed to eight semesters completed by the undergraduate cohort, for example, “Even though we are at the end of our course, we have only completed a small number of subjects that we can comment upon”.

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5.4.1 Interview data: Self-reported confidence.

This group, in alignment with the first aim of this study, were asked about the areas where they felt most confident, least confident and how they would overcome any lack of confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling. Table 5.3 summarises their responses. The areas where these preservice teachers felt most and least confident to teach in the middle years of schooling varied between each participant. The areas of most confidence ranged from curriculum knowledge to teaching particular subject areas (James, Elyssa, and Jordan), using particular middle years teaching strategies (Jenna) to developing relationships with middle years students (Zoe), planning in teaching teams (Jordan), creating a safe and caring learning environment (Jenna and Zoe), to reflecting on practice (Elyssa).

The curriculum areas selected as being areas of confidence seemed to relate to these graduates first degree. For example, James noted “I feel most confident to teach Science because I have a Science degree and three years of experience at a university level in Science. I also enjoy aspects of Science which I think has affected my confidence”. Similarly, Elyssa noted “I feel most confident to teach English and drama because I have content knowledge in that area. Also I went into teaching because I wanted to share my passion of these subjects”. Indeed, these responses suggest that the confidence of these preservice teachers was influenced by their previous studies, enjoyment of these subjects and a belief they have sound content knowledge.
### Table 5.3

**Preservice Teachers’ (Graduate Diploma [middle years]) Self Reported Confidence to Teach in the Middle Schooling Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preservice teacher</th>
<th>Area most confident and prepared for teaching</th>
<th>Experiences that developed confidence</th>
<th>Areas least confident and prepared for teaching</th>
<th>Overcoming lack of confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6: James</td>
<td>Curriculum knowledge to teach science and maths, Create a safe, caring learning environment</td>
<td>Having a Science degree assisted confidence in Science. Enjoys Science Experienced success creating a safe caring environment during practicum.</td>
<td>Literacy to students who are struggling</td>
<td>Working in teaching teams and learning from my colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Jenna</td>
<td>Incorporating middle years teaching strategies into my pedagogy</td>
<td>Confidence developed in teaching strategies after observing the mentor Teacher modelling practices.</td>
<td>Teaching students in my class who have learning difficulties and at the same time catering to the other students</td>
<td>Learning from experienced teachers Undertake professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Elyssa</td>
<td>Curriculum knowledge to teach English and drama Reflect upon my teaching so I improve</td>
<td>A previous degree and being passionate about English and drama assisted confidence. Experiences success when reflecting on practice during practicum</td>
<td>Managing the behaviour of the students and ensuring everyone is learning in my classroom</td>
<td>Practice and trial and error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Zoe</td>
<td>Developing relationships with my students and creating a caring classroom environment</td>
<td>Experienced success building relationships with middle years students during practicum. Experienced success creating a safe caring environment during practicum.</td>
<td>Working with teachers who don’t share a passion for middle years practices</td>
<td>Talking to colleagues and sharing thoughts about middle years learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Jordan</td>
<td>Planning and teaching in teams Curriculum knowledge to teach mathematics and English</td>
<td>Working with teachers during practicum that Included him in team planning and teaching.</td>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>Working with the students, developing a rapport with the students and seeking advice from experienced colleagues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modelling was expressed by the graduate diploma students to influence confidence. Jenna commented her confidence in implementing middle years strategies came from “observing mentor teachers and lecturers at uni”. Similar to the undergraduate cohort, Jenna found benefits in “learning from accomplished teachers through observing their practices”. She continued that, “once you have a strategy or lesson modelled, you have the confidence to try it yourself”. This data confirms the suggestions made by the undergraduate cohort that the modelling provided by mentor teachers and university educators can be a powerful tool for developing confidence in preservice teachers.
Practicum and experience as a source of confidence development were consistently noted by this cohort. Zoe’s confidence to develop relationships with middle years learners related to her practicum experiences where she “experienced success developing a relationship with all the middle years students” making her realise “it is about listening and being approachable”. While Jordan’s confidence to plan and teach in teams came from opportunities to “work with teachers who were collaborative and included me in their team planning and teaching during practicum”. James and Zoe expressed one of the areas they felt most confidence was creating a caring classroom environment again pinpointing experiences during practicum as the impetus. James stated “I created a caring environment that was safe and nurturing” and “I am confident I can do this because I have done it during both my practicum experiences”. Finally, Elyssa expressed confidence to reflect on practice as she had found “during practicum I successfully improved my teaching so I am confident my reflective practices were successful”. Indeed, many studies (e.g., Brandt, 2008; Bean & Stevens, 2002) have demonstrated how reflection on practice can transfer to pedagogical improvement. Developing confidence in critical self reflection may be an indicator about one’s ability to be professionally developed.

As can be seen from Table 5.3, areas of least confidence varied among this cohort. Least confidence ranged from working with students with learning or literacy difficulties (James and Jenna), managing the behaviour of students (Elyssa and Jordan), and working with colleagues who are not passionate about middle years practices (Zoe). Two preservice teachers indicated they were least confident to deal with students who were experiencing difficulties because they lacked experience. James noted his lack of confidence was as a result of “completing two practicum and having limited experience working with students
who had differentiated learning needs”. Jenna commented “I didn’t get experience working with the students who had difficulties with literacy as they were on specialised programs managed by their teacher”.

Behaviour management is often a concern for beginning teachers (Main & Hammond, 2008) and was noted by two of this cohort. Elyssa noted her lack of confidence in this area arose from her practicum experience “where I struggled for the first week to get everyone on task and keep them that way. I had to ensure I thought about behaviour management in every aspect of my teaching”. Jordan noted that his lack of confidence in this area was due to “not knowing what your class will be like, what behaviour management strategies will work and the best ways to keep them motivated”. Indeed behaviour management is taught at university and experienced during practicum; however, the nature of every class is different and strategies will need to vary depending on the class.

A lack of confidence was expressed by Zoe, who shared concerns about the acceptance of middle years philosophy and teaching approaches by future colleagues. She commented that, during one of her practicum experiences, she was told “all this enthusiasm about middle years philosophy and engaging middle years students is something you’ll experience at university but not in the real world of teaching”. Zoe’s response indicates that the attitude and beliefs of the mentor teacher can impact on preservice teacher confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling.
The preservice teachers were optimistic about overcoming areas where they lacked confidence. They noted by undertaking professional development (Jenna), learning from colleagues (James, Jenna, and Zoe), and through experience in the classroom (Elyssa) any lack of confidence could be overcome. This strategies noted for overcoming a lack of confidence, demonstrated the preservice teachers understanding that although their formal teacher preparation is complete, learning can continue when they commence teaching.

This view was shared by the entire cohort but summed up by James when he stated:

We may be completing our teacher preparation but really the journey has just begun for us. When we get into our classrooms our learning journey will begin again and we’ll overcome any lack of confidence by experience and learning from those experienced teachers around us.

5.4.2 Interview data: University experiences and confidence development.

Despite the length and design of their courses, there were similarities in the responses between this cohort and those completing the four-year degree course. In alignment with the second aim of the research this cohort was asked about the university experiences that influenced the development of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling.

Two themes with related sub themes emerged.

Theme 1: Practicum / field experiences that included: (1) A supportive mentor teacher; (2) an introduction to the school; and (3) Supportive school staff.

Theme 2: Specific subjects studied at university that incorporated: (1) Interdisciplinary subjects; (2) Lecturers and tutors who incorporated hands-on learning, ideas for the classroom and teaching strategies suitable for the middle years classroom.
5.4.2.1 Theme 1: Practicum / Field studies.

It was established in the first five interviews that these preservice teachers perceived practicum assisted to develop confidence for teaching in the middle years of schooling. The preservice teachers completing the Graduate Diploma in Education (middle years) course agreed with their undergraduate counterparts. It appeared these interviewees found the “opportunity to plan and teach lessons” (James), “reflect on teaching practice”, (Jenna) and “implement behaviour management strategies” (Elyssa) all assisted in confidence development. Zoe and Jordan (respectively) concurred, noting the importance of practicum when they stated:

Prac is definitely the best way to increase confidence for teaching in the middle years. The opportunity to implement lessons that really work is a boost to my confidence. You can talk about teaching but you have no idea what or how you’re going to do it until you’re standing in front of the students.

My confidence was increased greatly by prac. I had a great class which was wonderful. I could really roll up my sleeves and try out all the things we had been talking about at uni. When I experienced success my confidence increased. When the lesson didn’t go so well, I felt confident I could reflect and work out strategies that would ensure improvement for next time.

Jordan’s comment about when he “experienced success my confidence increased” can be indicative of long-held adages such as “success breeds success”. This success and related increased confidence can also support the preservice teacher when lessons do not go according to plan. Consequently, the very initial stages of learning to teach in practical settings may be crucial to the preservice teacher’s confidence. Therefore, not experiencing success may diminish confidence and the ability to “reflect and work out strategies”. These ideas require further investigative studies.
The value of the mentor teachers was also recognised by this cohort. A supportive mentor teacher was viewed as essential by all five preservice teachers, who were complimentary of their teachers. Such comments as “the way I was supported by my mentor teacher really made the difference to my confidence” (Elyssa), and “the way I was treated like a real teacher made me feel I could do it” (Zoe). Jenna commented on the importance of having a supportive mentor who provided feedback when she stated:

My mentor teacher was amazing. She took so much time to provide me with support, gave good feedback and guided me through my experience. She was fabulous. Her attitude and support impacted on my teaching and gave me the confidence I needed to be successful.

James’s supported Jenna’s remarks but included the importance of receiving purposeful, constructive feedback that is delivered in such a way that it enhances the learning of the preservice teacher. Indeed, the comments made by James confirm the significance of decisive and well-delivered mentor feedback.

My confidence increased by the way my mentor teacher gave me feedback. Firstly, it was meaningful feedback that allowed me to improve. Secondly, the feedback was critical and constructive but definitely not destructive. She gave me plenty of positives sprinkled with ways I could improve.

Four of the five participants commented that, as well as their mentor teachers, the support of school staff influenced their development of confidence. Being welcomed to the school and made to feel part of the school community, is a deciding factor that influenced how confidence developed for this group of preservice teachers. It seemed that knowing the location of rooms and buildings, as well as having background information about the school, assisted the preservice teachers’ confidence. This may be because it provided them
with a greater understanding of the context in which they were teaching and. As Zoe notes below, it also provided a sense of belonging at the school.

I was welcomed to my school on the very first day. I was taken on a school tour and provided with the school prospectus. I felt like I was part of the team and was treated like I was a real teacher. This gave me confidence from day one.

An induction process where the preservice teacher is introduced to the school and the roles of staff in the school was an aspect of practicum that contributed to the confidence of the preservice teachers. Furthermore, the value of clear expectations from the beginning meant that James knew what was expected of him which again influenced his confidence. His thoughts are summarised as follows:

On the first day we had a meeting with the principal. I was impressed he made the time to meet with us all. He talked to us about the school routines, the location of important points in the school, school policies, the roles of staff and his expectations for us. I felt confident I could do the right thing as it was explained clearly.

A preservice teacher who did not receive this introduction or induction noted this made him lack confidence. Hence, thought needs to be given to how preservice teachers are made to feel welcome during their practicum experiences to ensure their confidence is developed. Jordan’s views below demonstrate how preservice teachers may feel a sense of disorientation when not adequately inducted into the school environment. As Jordon notes:

I felt uncomfortable for the first week of practicum as I didn’t know where to find anything; I didn’t know the school rules and what was expected. I think it would have increased my confidence if I had someone to walk me through all aspects of the school context.
As well as being welcomed to the school and experiencing an induction, preservice teacher confidence was influenced by other teachers who were supportive and made the preservice teacher feel part of the school community. It appears the mentoring process and the nature of support during practicum are not limited to just the mentor teacher. These comments by Elyssa, demonstrates that other supportive teachers in the school or grade can also influence the confidence of preservice teachers.

My mentor teacher was wonderful, but so were the other year 7 teachers who took me under their wing, gave advice and offered support. This made me feel confident as I was part of their teaching team.

This cohort appreciated the practicum as a means to develop confidence. Unlike the undergraduate cohort, they noted some different aspects of practicum such as the induction process about the school infrastructure and culture, and the support of the school staff. This response may be because there were fewer university subjects to comment upon in the graduate diploma course structure and the practicum stood out as pivotal in confidence development. Or perhaps, these preservice teachers experienced more induction and school personnel were more supportive. Indeed, all practicum experiences will be different and each preservice teacher will have a variety of experiences however, this data accentuates the magnitude of practicum experiences on the development of middle years preservice teachers’ confidence. It highlights the careful consideration that needs to be given to the mentoring process provided by experienced teachers and the significance of the induction into the school community.
5.4.2.2 Theme 2: Specific subjects studied at university.

Some university subjects were highlighted as developing confidence. The preservice teachers noted specific coursework subjects increased their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. It was unanimous among this cohort that the interdisciplinary subjects, which included approaches in arts, society and environment, and science and technology, were most helpful in increasing confidence. It seems these subjects developed confidence as they related to teaching middle years students. Comments such as “these subjects helped us to understand how middle years topics should be taught” (Zoe) and “middle years philosophy was embedded in these subjects, hence, we’re learning exactly what we should be doing” (Jordan), were appreciated for their application to the classroom. Jenna summarised how these subjects influenced her confidence when she noted, “learning the content for teaching middle years students gave me confidence to teach”.

Similar to the undergraduate cohort, the approaches used by lecturers and tutors in the delivery of these subjects also played a role in building preservice teacher confidence. It appeared the practical delivery of these subjects was seen as positive and provided the preservice teachers with ideas for the classroom. Elyssa stated:

Without doubt the interdisciplinary subjects were the ones that made me feel most confident because they included hands-on ideas for the classroom. The hands-on learning provided by my tutor increased my confidence as I knew what to do and how to do it in class.

A response by James concurred that the subject, Science and Technology, and the approach of the tutor offered ideas for teaching this content in the school which increased his
confidence to implement such activities in the classroom. Indeed, it seemed that preservice teacher confidence was not only influenced by knowing the subject content, but also knowing ideas for how to teach the content in the classroom. James stated:

I really enjoyed the Science and Technology subject. It increased my confidence because everything we did I could use in class. I am pleased the tutor gave us ideas for teaching. As soon I go to school, I know I can use these.

As well as classroom ideas, the graduate preservice teachers noted the value of subjects that provided them with teaching strategies for the middle years. The opportunity to understand how strategies were organised and implemented in the classroom was deemed to instil confidence for teaching. Teaching strategies as “cooperative learning” (James), “integrated learning” (Jenna), “implementing student-centred activities” (Elyssa), and approaches such as “plus, minus and interesting (PMI) and Gardner’s multiple intelligences” (Zoe), “Bybee’s 5Es and Bloom’s Taxonomy” (Jordan) were all viewed as subject experiences that contributed to the preservice teachers’ confidence. Having a repertoire of teaching strategies can influence preservice teacher confidence as they can enter the classroom knowledgeable about established approaches that have practical applications.

It was evident that the five preservice teachers completing the Graduate Diploma in Education (middle years) viewed practicum and particular subjects studied at university as increasing their confidence to teach in the middle years context. Although, as noted above, it is not the purpose of this study to compare the responses of the undergraduate and graduate cohorts, it was clear both cohorts had similar viewpoints. In summary, these preservice teachers perceived practicum, a supportive mentor teacher, well-designed
middle years subjects, hands-on experiences and practical approaches employed by
lecturers and tutors as conducive to developing their confidence for teaching in the middle
years of schooling.

5.4.3 Enhancing middle years teacher preparation.

To address the third aim of the research, the graduate diploma cohort was asked to
describe strategies for enhancing their teacher preparation and developing confidence for
teaching in the middle-school context.

Two themes emerged: (1) More time in schools; and (2) A rethinking of the one-year
course that included variation in the course structure.

5.4.3.1 More time in schools

All five graduate diploma interviewees believed that more time in schools would assist
their confidence to teach, which was a view shared by the undergraduate preservice
teachers. Jenna noted, “the university component is fine but longer practicum would be
better as this is where we really learn to teach”. Zoe agreed when she stated, “Prac is
where we develop the confidence to teach but at the moment we spend more time at uni
than we do in schools, this just doesn’t seem right”. Jordan and James concurred. They
wanted longer practicum experiences but in different school contexts. Their comments are
highlighted below:

I think we need longer pracs as this will make us more confident to teach but at the
moment we stay in the same school for the whole year. I am worried I will only
know how to teach in this school. I’d like more pracs in different schools. (Jordan)
Extended pracs in different schools, on different grades with different teachers so we can learn as much as possible in a short time would be good. Being at university is not as useful as being in school as far as confidence goes. (James)

From the perspective of these preservice teachers, the role of the mentor teacher was important to the development of the preservice teacher’s confidence. As graduate diploma students, they recognised that positive mentoring experiences were essential in a one-year course to aid “the development of the theoretical, pedagogical and content knowledge for teaching” (Jordan). These preservice teachers had encountered some resistance to a one-year, middle years teacher education program from some supervising teachers. Selecting mentor teachers that are supportive towards a one-year graduate diploma course was noted by four of the interviewees to enhance their practicum experiences. Elyssa commented:

Mentor teachers need to be experienced and have positive mentoring skills but in our case they also need to be supportive of our one-year program. I had a mentor who kept saying I would never get there in one year. This didn’t give me much confidence. I don’t think we should be placed with mentor teachers who have this attitude.

Jenna confirmed this view about a one-year teacher education program but questioned whether the teachers’ attitudes were related to all one-year diploma courses or the fact that they were middle years. Jenna’s comments were indicative of two others from her cohort when she stated “Please give grad dip middle years students to mentor teachers who see their potential. I couldn’t tell whether the teachers were against the one-year program or a middle years course”. She concluded with the statement, “confidence can only be built when the mentor teacher has confidence in your teacher education program”. Mentors’ preconceptions of the one-year program may present negatively to the preservice teachers, which in turn can undermine the confidence in the quality of the program from both the preservice teacher and the mentor’s perspective.
In addition to noting enhancements such as longer practicum and selecting positive mentor teachers, these graduate diploma students were keen to have more opportunities to talk about their school experiences. Reflection on practice is an important skill for preservice teachers to develop, however, these five preservice teachers claimed there were little or no opportunities to discuss their experiences with university staff. James summarised the group’s sentiments when he explained:

We go out to prac but we don’t ever talk about our experiences back at uni. A future course inclusion would be the introduction of de-brief sessions about our school experiences. I think opportunities to talk about our school visits and link these to what we learned at university would assist to develop confidence. I also think the university staff could offer us suggestions for improvements, providing yet another perspective and ideas about our practice.

Other participant responses were similar, but Elyssa added that she would like the opportunity to “discuss our school experiences with our lecturers when we were completing their subjects”. Further discussion about practicum was supported by Jordan, who noted, “we need to discuss our school experiences as it seems they sit outside of what we do at university”. These comments indicated that, from the preservice teachers’ perspective, confidence would increase if there were greater discussions that provided links between the practicum and university subjects in the course, which would further advance the connection between theory and practice.

5.4.3.2 A rethinking of the one-year course.

The second theme that emerged from these interviewees was that, although grateful for the opportunity to undertake a one-year program, in order to develop maximum preservice
teacher confidence, the course required rethinking and possible review of the course structure. Typical comments from Zoe and Jordan were:

Having a one-year course is wonderful for me as I am going to begin a new career only after one-year but, I do think the year could be more beneficial with more time spent undertaking the course. I don’t think we need such big breaks, I think I would be more confident if I were spending more of the year learning how to be a teacher.

As our course is only one year it is a steep learning curve. Why not have the course structured like a school year where we begin in January and end in December. This would be much better and at the same time we could spend more time in schools as our course would be structured in the same way.

The suggestion that the course could be reorganised to include more practicum days and a greater time at university learning about middle years teaching, expressed by Zoe and Jordan above, was a view shared by all five of this cohort. A further enhancement for future middle years teacher preparation was the inclusion of more practical approaches by lecturers and tutors. The preservice teachers appreciated lecturers who incorporated practical approaches to teaching but strongly suggested that these practices should be consistent throughout the course, for instance, “Why don’t all lecturers model the approaches we should be using?” (Elyssa) and “We learn so much more when they demonstrate classroom strategies” (Zoe) were common among the participant responses. James agreed, but added that the modelling of practical approaches for the classroom should be “an integral part of lecturers’ teaching”.

A more practical approach and the modelling of teaching by lecturers were views supported by Jenna, Jordan and James who claimed their course would have been
enhanced by university lecturers who presented and incorporated pedagogical approaches into their teaching of content knowledge. Jenna stated:

In a lot of the subjects we just learnt the content knowledge for teaching. I think it would have increased my confidence if I learned the associated pedagogical knowledge too. Like in Science and Technology we learnt the science facts but at the same time learnt ways to teach those facts. Why couldn’t everyone do that?

Similarly, Jordan noted, “We learn so much about what to teach, this needs to be combined with how to teach and be shown strategies to help us”, while James agreed that “Some of the lecturers focused on the content we need to know for teaching but, to be successful and confident, we also need to know the pedagogy for teaching that content”.

The graduate preservice teachers argued that their confidence to teach would be enhanced if they completed longer practicum experiences and lecturers used more practical approaches. These views very much aligned with those completing the Bachelor of Education Primary (middle years pathway) (Section 4.3.5). However, some strategies that were thought to enhance their teacher preparation were unique to the nature of the graduate diploma one-year course structure. This cohort appeared appreciative of their one-year program but thought the program could be reconfigured. For example, they valued the practicum already part of their program but, wanted more. The preservice teachers also suggested the selection of mentor teachers should be on the basis of those supporting the one-year graduate diploma course. Hence, the nature of this one-year program meant that some of the enhancements suggested, were unique to the Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years) course design.
5.4.4 Summary of the Graduate Diploma of Education (Middle Years) interview results

The first aim of the research was to investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. It was evident from the views of the preservice teachers completing the Graduate Diploma (middle years) there was not particular area where they all felt confident for teaching (Table 5.3). However, there did seem to be some correlation between their confidence to teach in particular key learning areas and the previous degree they had undertaken. Areas of least confidence produced diverse responses amongst the group except for two participants who agreed behaviour management was an area where they lacked confidence. The lack of confidence in behaviour management expressed by these two preservice teachers is not unique even to experienced teachers (Main & Hammond, 2008).

Optimism towards overcoming any lack of confidence was a view shared by this cohort. There was a common understanding that teacher education does not end with the completion of a course but involves life-long learning, engagement with professional development, and interacting and sharing ideas with colleagues. Areas where there was a lack of confidence were viewed as normal for a beginning teacher. Seeking professional development and collegial advice from experienced teachers were agreed strategies that the preservice teachers perceived could assist to overcome any lack of confidence. The views of the participants were summarised by one graduate diploma preservice teacher who stated, “I know I am not going to be confident in all aspects of middle years teaching but I know if I get experience, talk to other teachers and read as much as I can, I will become more confident”.
The second aim of the research was to analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident. The graduate preservice teachers noted that experiences that made them feel confident were those that provided relevance and practical application for teaching middle years students. There was support that experiences provided by practicum, where preservice teachers had opportunities to perfect their teaching approaches increased confidence for teaching. They also highlighted the importance of a school induction at the beginning of their practicum and the role of supportive middle years mentor teachers in increasing confidence. The importance of university lecturers and tutors who model teaching strategies and provide hands-on approaches suitable for middle schooling were also viewed as advantageous to the development of confidence. Finally, subjects that were specifically designed for teaching middle years students, and combining content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge were noted as increasing confidence because of their relevance and practical application to teaching early adolescents.

Addressing the third aim of the research was to describe strategies for enhancing preservice teachers’ middle schooling teacher education preparation. The graduate preservice teachers suggested that preparation which included longer practicum experiences and a more practical approach by lecturers and tutors were enhancements for future middle years teacher preparation. The one-year program experienced by these graduates was the impetus for a suggested reorganisation of the course structure and the selection of mentor teachers who were supportive of one-year middle years teacher preparation programs. Indeed, this cohort emphasised that the nature of middle years teacher preparation and, the length of the graduate program means careful consideration of
how Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years) preservice teachers can be well supported in future teacher preparation programs.

5.5 Combining the interview data

Combining the interview data gathered from the two cohorts demonstrated that although the participants were studying different courses (i.e. undergraduate and post graduate) there were similarities in the participants’ responses. In addressing the first and second aims of the research Table 5.4 highlights the themes that emerged, exemplar quotes that typified the views of the preservice teachers and, the number of similar responses.

As can be seen from the Table 5.4 all of the preservice teachers agreed that practicum provided opportunities for the preservice teachers to develop confidence for teaching. In addition, half of the preservice teachers noted that lecturers that provided hands-on learning experiences during tutorials increased confidence. Indeed, this confirms Bandura’s (1977, 1994) notion that in order to develop confidence, opportunities for mastery experiences or, experiences to apply and refine teaching, need to be provided. Table 5.4 also highlights that the majority of the preservice teachers noted that the quality of their supervising or mentor teacher, the content of the middle years subjects and the modelling of middle years practices by university lecturers assisted to develop confidence for teaching. The latter response again confirms the value of Bandura’s claims that vicarious experiences or, those that are successfully modelled, can increase confidence. Aligning to the importance of practicum, half of the preservice teachers agreed that the
field studies units assisted to increase confidence and the same number perceived that just being in middle school contexts could increase confidence for teaching.

Table 5.4

*Collating the interview data: Confidence for teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes that emerged</th>
<th>Exemplar quotes from participants</th>
<th>Number of participants with similar responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practicum / field studies</td>
<td>I found that prac experiences have increased my confidence to teach middle years.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completing field studies experiences in a variety of grades and schools assisted my confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The field studies subjects made me realise that I don’t have to know everything about teaching.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The supervising teachers I have had during prac have played a huge role in the development of my confidence.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just being in schools and in classrooms builds confidence to teach</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was welcomed to my school on the very first day</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects specifically related to the middle years of schooling studied at university</td>
<td>I would say the middle years subjects increased my confidence because we covered so many of the issues we will be facing in our classrooms and the strategies we learned will certainly help us.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The school visits allowed for me to make the links between the content of middle years subjects and what the teacher does in the classroom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pedagogical approaches of the lecturers and tutors</td>
<td>My confidence was increased by lecturers who modelled the strategies and approaches that we should be doing in our classrooms.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I found subjects where the lecturers and tutors used hands-on activities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Those lecturers that used related pictures and resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I gained confidence in assessment from looking at how my lecturer constructed the middle years assessment tasks.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addressing the third aim of the research many of the preservice teachers had similar responses. Table 5.5 collates the responses of the ten interviewees and highlights the themes that emerged, the exemplar quotes and, the number of participants that had similar suggestions for enhancing future middle years courses. As can be seen from the table, all of the participants agreed that more time in middle schools would improve their teacher preparation. Furthermore, nearly all of the participants noted they should spend a larger percentage of their course in a classroom. Half of the interviewees advocated that the links between theory and practice would be enhanced with visits incorporated into middle years subjects and the same number called for further opportunities to discuss their teaching as part of their university coursework. Bandura (1977, 1994) notes the importance of social persuasions in developing confidence and it is evident a large proportion of the preservice teachers involved in the interviews advocated for such opportunities.

Bandura (1977, 1994) advocates the psychological state of an individual is linked to the development of confidence. Half of the preservice teachers substantiated this claim professing the need to have supportive mentors. Indeed, it is up to the mentor teacher to create a positive mentor-mentee relationship and ensure the preservice teacher is well supported and comfortable in the classroom. In addition, a more practical approach to their teacher education was supported by the majority of the preservice teachers. The suggestions of hands-on experiences and opportunities to observe lecturers adopting and demonstrating middle years practices again aligns with Bandura’s theory (1977, 1994) and the importance of mastery and vicarious experiences.
Table 5.5

Collating the interview data: Enhancing future middle years teacher preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes that emerged</th>
<th>Exemplar quotes from participants</th>
<th>Number of participants with similar responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time should be spent in schools</td>
<td>...we should spend at least half of that time in schools completing field studies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It would be good if when we are doing all the middle years subjects, we could undertake more weekly visits to really witness early adolescent development</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think the biggest improvement in this course would be to get student teachers out there into the high schools and upper primary classrooms (i.e. middle years contexts).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor teachers need to be experienced and have positive mentoring skills</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...opportunity to discuss our school experiences with our lecturers when we were completing their subjects</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A more practical teacher education course</td>
<td>The course needed to be more hands-on with an emphasis on practical suggestions and application</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think the theory is important but there is an overabundance of theory and not enough emphasis placed on the strategies and content we need for teaching</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...lecturers need to practice the strategies they preach</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking of the one year course</td>
<td>As our course is only one year it is a steep learning curve. Why not have the course structured like a school year where we begin in January and end in December</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, half of the preservice teachers, called for a restructure of the one-year course. As five of the preservice teachers were undertaking the one-year Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years) this response rate relates directly to them. Recently, at a national level, there have been discussions about the adequacy of one-year teacher education programs. Consequently, AITSL has recently announced “Graduate entry primary programs must comprise at least two years of full-time-equivalent professional studies in
education” supporting the views of the preservice teachers in this study (AITSL, 2011, p.24).

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the results and discussion of the interview (qualitative) data. The responses of the ten preservice teachers were presented according to the course they had undertaken, with the undergraduate cohort presented first, followed by the graduate cohort. The results were presented, collated and combined aligning them to the research aims the interviews addressed. The responses of each cohort demonstrated the areas of most and least confidence for teaching, the university experiences that they perceived developed confidence and finally, the suggested enhancements for future middle years teacher preparation. Chapter 6 will present the findings and further discussion of the study.
Chapter 6

Discussion and findings

6.1 Chapter Preview

Chapter 4 analysed the survey data to address the first aim of the research. It also analysed the questionnaire data that related to the second and third aims of the research. Chapter 5 analysed the interviews to address the three research aims. Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the study. After the chapter preview (Section 6.1), the confidence of the middle years preservice teachers will be highlighted focusing on areas of final-year preservice teachers’ perceived confidence or lack of confidence (Section 6.2). In addition, the experiences promoting confidence and those noted for enhancing middle years teacher preparation will be discussed (Section 6.3). Suggestions for advancing middle years teacher preparation will be drawn from the research (Section 6.4) and finally, the chapter will be concluded (Section 6.5).

6.2 Confidence for teaching in the middle years

The interview responses of the ten preservice teachers discussed in Chapter 5 are combined in Figure 6.1. It can be seen from the combined responses that the preservice teachers were most confident in middle years philosophy, planning engaging and intellectually challenging learning experiences, involvement in suitable middle years teaching strategies, and reflecting on practice and aligning curriculum with assessment.
Figure 6.1 highlights that the preservice teachers noted more confidence in pedagogical knowledge practices than the other three areas.

This result was supported by the quantitative data where 78% of the preservice teachers felt prepared in the area of pedagogical knowledge for teaching in the middle school (Table 4.1) and 85% or more preservice teachers noting confidence for teaching in seven out of the eight pedagogical knowledge items (Table 4.4).
Assessment was an area of pedagogical knowledge that received mixed results in the interview and survey data. For instance, in the interview data, one preservice teacher stressed the alignment of assessment to the curriculum as an area of confidence and, another two reported confidence in implementing assessment (see Figure 6.1). Conversely, the survey data highlighted assessment as an area where preservice teachers were not as confident as other pedagogical practices. Table 4.4 showed that over one quarter of the total cohort that participated in the surveys, reported they were not confident in aligning curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Additionally, in Table 4.5, over one quarter of the cohort could not verify they were confident to create a variety of assessment tasks. Assessment is a starting point for teaching. Once teachers have an understanding of students’ knowledge they can create experiences to build upon their prior learning. Assessment provides vital feedback to teachers so they can alter or modify their teaching approaches and practices (AITSL, 2011), and meet the needs of middle years students (Pate, 2005; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010). The findings suggested that pedagogical knowledge of assessment and the implementation processes required for assessment such as creating a variety of assessment tasks needs to be reviewed in the delivery of middle years teacher preparation.

The survey data revealed that nearly one third of the 142 participants lacked confidence to implement effective behaviour management strategies, and to provide clear and reasonable consequences for behaviour (Table 4.2). This finding was confirmed by three interviewees who suggested behaviour management was an area where they lacked confidence (Tables 5.2 & 5.3). Behaviour management can be difficult for experienced
middle years teachers (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Consequently, preservice teachers require considerable scaffolding in this practice (Ramsey, 2000; Caldwell & Sutton, 2010).

The changing nature of early adolescence and the complex social interactions of middle years students can impact on classroom teaching (Barratt, 1998; Carrington et al., 2001; Cumming, 1998; Groundswater-Smith et al., 2007). Different contexts and cohorts of early adolescents require diverse approaches (De Jong, 2005), which necessitates behaviour management strategies such as the development of positive teacher-student relationships, creating a positive classroom environment (Anafara, 2001; Neumann and Associates, 1996; National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007), and demonstrating teacher enthusiasm to motivate and engage students in learning (Beutel, 2003; National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2005). Survey and interview data indicated that most of the preservice teachers self-reported they were confident in these three specific behaviour management strategies (Table 4.3, Table 4.2, & Figure 6.1). However, the findings showed many had limited recognition of how developing positive teacher-student relationships, creating a safe classroom environment, and demonstrating enthusiasm for teaching support behaviour management in the middle years classroom. Considering the developmental needs of early adolescents, some of these middle years preservice teachers may require further preparation that incorporates the interrelated strategies for promoting positive behaviour management. Hence, university coursework needs to be more overt in connecting how strategies and practices link together in the implementation of behaviour management.
In their overall preparation for teaching, about a third of preservice teachers indicated they lacked confidence in curriculum knowledge for middle school teaching (Table 4.1). Masters (2009) notes that highly effective teachers have “high levels of confidence in the subjects they teach” (p. 4); yet over a quarter of preservice teachers in the survey indicated they lacked confidence to incorporate literacy and numeracy strategies in planning and teaching (Table 4.5). Considering they were at the conclusion of their teacher preparation, high levels of confidence to include literacy and numeracy strategies in their teaching needs to be a priority. Although some interviewees noted particular curriculum areas as areas of confidence (see Tables 5.2 & 5.3), two interviewees’ noted a lack of confidence for teaching literacy. Indeed, in the Implementation of Teaching (Table 4.5), more preservice teachers were confident to implement interdisciplinary learning programs, incorporate ICTs into learning, execute programs with real-world connections, and use a constructivist approach to teaching and learning than they were to incorporate literacy and numeracy into planning and teaching. The latter is a necessary practice for teacher graduates (AITSL, 2011; Louden, Heldsinger, House, Humphry, & Fitzgerald, 2010; Masters, 2009; Queensland College of Teachers, 2006), and teachers cannot assume that all school students are literate and numerate by the time they reach early adolescence. Middle school teachers need knowledge of multi-literacies to support adolescent students in speaking, listening, reading and writing in an intellectually challenging and motivating environment (Honan, 2010; Louden et al., 2010; Luke et al., 2003; Milton, Rohl, & House, 2007; Pendergast et al., 2007). Additionally, middle years teachers need to be well versed in the teaching of numeracy by linking school mathematics to real-world applications (Borko & Whitcomb, 2008; Dole, 2010; Rowe, 2004). Findings indicated that greater emphasis on the incorporation of literacy and numeracy strategies into the preparation for
planning and teaching of early adolescents needs to be more explicit in middle schooling teacher education programs.

Programs that successfully guide and support middle years students as they make the transition between grade levels and from primary to secondary schools are recognised to overcome some of the disengagement and behaviour difficulties often experienced by early adolescents (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Supporting the students and working with parents and carers so there is a shared understanding of the different contexts, approaches of teachers, and the school expectations is a desired practice of middle years teachers (Akos, 2005; Henten, 2005; Smith, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007). The survey data in this study (Table 4.3) highlighted that over one quarter of the preservice teachers were not confident to support middle years students as they made the transition between year levels and from primary to secondary schools. Supporting students during transitions was not noted as an area of confidence by the ten interviewees (Figure 6.1). As seamless transitions are indicative of middle schooling practices (Carrington, 2002), it is important that universities reflect on their course delivery to ensure graduate middle years teachers are confident to support students, parents and carers in this area.

Survey data showed the willingness of these preservice teachers to improve their practice with over 90% agreeing they were confident to reflect and refine teaching practices and engage in further professional development (Table 4.4). Similarly, the interview data confirmed participants’ perceptions of overcoming aspects of their practice where they lacked confidence. Seven of the ten interviewees highlighted professional-growth
strategies they would undertake such as involvement in professional development and seeking advice from experienced colleagues. Pivotal to the on-going renewal and improvement of a teacher’s practice is the reflective process (Crosswell, Bahr, Pendergast, & Newhouse-Maiden, 2010; De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; Luke et al., 2003; Pendergast et al., 2005). A commitment to reflective practice provides an impetus for improving teaching performance, allowing them to adjust their teaching to the needs of middle school students (AITSL, 2011; Queensland College of Teachers, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007). Indeed, the majority of these final-year preservice teachers were confident and committed to on-going professional renewal for teaching in the middle years of schooling.

6.3 Experiences promoting confidence and enhancing teaching preparation

Opportunities for preservice teachers to practice activities or gain hands-on experiences were noted to increase confidence, while limited or unsuccessful experiences tended to indicate a lack of confidence. Experiences that the preservice teachers perceived assisted the development of their confidence were similar to their suggestions for enhancing their teacher preparation program, namely: practicum and associated experiences; and course structure and delivery.

6.3.1 Practicum and associated experiences

Interview and questionnaire data confirmed the value of practicum in middle years teacher education and established its influence on preservice teachers’ confidence to teach in the middle years classroom. Although the practicum was undertaken at varying periods throughout the year and consisted of different lengths of time depending on the middle
years teacher preparation course, the opportunity to engage in real-world learning experiences promoted confidence. Mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977, 1994), where preservice teachers had opportunities to practice and refine their skills, increased their confidence. For example, three preservice teachers who noted they were confident in assessment claimed that one of the influences on their confidence was the opportunity to implement and achieve positive results in assessment practices during practicum. The value of such experiences was also highlighted by preservice teachers who supported the inclusion of more practicum to enhance middle years teacher preparation. Findings of this study suggested that, from the preservice teachers’ perspective, practicum and other associated experiences increased their confidence across a range of teaching areas; hence more school-based opportunities need to be included in their preparation.

Experiences that involved teaching in a range of middle years contexts and classrooms were deemed to assist preservice teachers’ confidence as they learnt about teaching practices for a range of settings. Although this implied that many preservice teachers experienced a range of school and classroom settings during practicum, some preservice teachers indicated the need for greater diversity in middle years classrooms and school contexts. As discussed previously, variations in the number of practicum days and experiences may have been because of the university course structure. As noted in the Top of the Class report (HRSCEVT, 2007) “there is little consensus on how much practicum there should be” (p. 69). Consequently, there is variation among courses and universities. For example, it is likely that a one-year graduate diploma (middle years) would have far less school-based experiences (e.g., practicum) than a four-year program, and providing a range of teaching contexts in one year could prove challenging. Nevertheless, the findings
of this study substantiates the views of the National Middle School Association (2001, 2006) and Pendergast et al. (2007) that quality practicum experiences are a key element of middle years teacher preparation. This study extends this view by highlighting that a range of different middle years contexts is desirable. Hence, graduating confident teachers requires universities to examine how they can incorporate practicum and associated experiences into their middle years teacher preparation courses.

Field studies subjects associated with practicum experiences increased preservice teacher confidence for teaching as it provided an avenue to link theory taught at university with the practice in the field. The interviewed preservice teachers wanted more university debriefing sessions following practicum. It was suggested that debrief sessions allowed for critical reflection on practice that could be guided and supported by peers and experienced university staff through providing advice and alternative ways for addressing difficulties. The discussions promoted by the debrief sessions would also assist in making the links between their university coursework and the practices observed and experienced in the field. Indeed, literature into teacher education (Caldwell & Sutton, 2010; Eyers, 2005; HRSCEVT, 2007; Kessels & Korthagen, 2001; Masters, 2009; Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 2003) highlights the importance of designing meaningful preservice teacher education courses that assist the links between theory and practice to be confirmed. This study suggests that this also pertains to middle years teacher preparation.

The role of the mentor teacher is crucial for preservice teacher development (Eyers, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, Parker & Zeichner, 1990; HRSCEVT, 2007; Hudson, 2004; Hudson & Millwater, 2008). This current study confirmed its relevance for middle schooling teacher
preparation. Bandura (1977, 1994) has noted the importance of social persuasions where confidence levels are developed from the social messages received from others. For these middle years preservice teachers, the importance of social persuasions of a supportive mentor teacher, who provides clear expectations and constructive feedback, built confidence. The qualitative data in this study supported Bandura’s (1977, 1994) notion of vicarious experiences. For example, preservice teacher confidence was increased when placed with an exemplary middle years mentor teacher who modelled practices suitable for teaching early adolescents. In particular, preservice teachers noted mentor teachers’ modelling of behaviour management strategies assisted them to develop their own practices. Furthermore, data indicated that when the mentor teacher supported and guided the preservice teacher in the successful implementation of behaviour management in the classroom, confidence was increased from this experience. It is argued that the support provided by the mentor teacher can decrease a preservice teacher’s stress levels and anxiety, hence promoting a positive physiological state (Bandura, 1977, 1994). Bandura has noted that the physiological state can influence self efficacy, which impacts on a person’s confidence to execute a task.

These participants placed importance on a mentor teacher who was understanding of the development of early adolescents and attuned to the needs of preservice teachers. However, emerging from this study was that a number of mentor teachers were not supportive of middle years teacher preparation, with some mentors having little understanding of the nature of middle schooling. As Keogh et al. (2006) claim, such circumstances can create tensions and are not ideal for the development of mentor-mentee relationships and the mentoring process. A lack of overall support towards the preservice
teacher and their selected teacher education program can impact negatively on their physiological state (Bandura, 1977, 1994). In designing middle years courses, there needs to be careful selection of quality mentor teachers who are positive role models and supportive of middle schooling practices, particularly as many Australian schools are not classified as middle schools. Indeed, middle schooling in Australia focuses on Years 4-10, (depending on the state or territory) which generally includes primary and secondary contexts; consequently, mentors may need further support from universities in understanding how to mentor preservice teachers in the middle school context.

Just as a supportive mentor teacher was reported as influencing the development of confidence, support provided by other school staff was also significant. Preservice teachers commented that being welcomed to the school and made to feel part of the community assisted them to assimilate as a member of the school environment, which they claimed influenced their confidence for teaching. In particular, preservice teachers appreciated executive staff members who took the time to introduce them into the school, point out places of significance, and present school policies and procedures. Being provided with school information gave the preservice teachers clear expectations and guidelines that promoted their transition to the school and classroom contexts.

6.3.1.1 Summary of practicum and associated experiences.

Reports and research emphasise the significance of first hand experiences in preservice teacher development (Victoria Parliament and Education and Training Committee, 2005; Eyers, 2005; HRSCEVT, 2007; Invargson et al., 2006; Queensland Board of Teacher
Registration, 2003; Ramsey, 2000). Literature pertaining to middle years teacher education highlights practicum and associated experiences as key to quality teacher preparation (Keogh et al., 2006; National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007). University teaching staff facilitating middle years teacher preparation need to carefully select practicum placements and quality mentors for their preservice teachers. The challenge will be to overcome the reported deficiency of practicum placements in Australia (HRSCEVT, 2007; Ramsey, 2000), and the variability of quality mentors (Hudson, 2010), particularly for the middle school context. Field studies (practicum) subjects that support preservice teacher development needs to embed debriefing sessions to allow preservice teachers opportunities to reflect and examine their development with university staff and peers. A further consideration is the selection of the school in which preservice teachers are placed for their practicum. As can be noted in the results, a school culture that supports middle years preservice teachers and welcomes them to the school context can instil confidence for teaching. This study also highlighted the significance of a mentor teacher who is supportive of middle years teacher education programs, possesses the personal attributes to be a positive mentor, and has the ability to model positive middle years practices.

### 6.3.2 Course structure and delivery.

Data collected from the interviews and the questionnaire revealed the influence of university middle years subjects on final-year preservice teachers’ confidence. Similar to the field studies subjects noted above, middle years subjects assisted the preservice teachers to understand and apply practices appropriate to the middle years classroom context. In particular, preservice teachers outlined the strategies and approaches taught in
these subjects that included practical ideas for engaging and enhancing early adolescent learning. The literature (e.g., De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007; Rumble & Aspland, 2010) shows middle years teachers require specific skills and knowledge to be effective teachers of early adolescents. Specially designed subjects are required that teach preservice teachers about early adolescent development, suitable pedagogical practices, engaging teaching strategies, content knowledge for teaching, and whole-school approaches to support their learning (De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007). The interdisciplinary subjects were emphasised in the interviews and questionnaire as being of significant value. It was stressed by the final years that these subjects demonstrated interdisciplinary planning and teaching, with substantiated models and approaches that could be used in middle years teaching. The middle years subjects, including the interdisciplinary subjects, were deemed by the preservice teachers to equip them with knowledge and practices required to teach in the middle years context, which impacted on their confidence to teach.

To enhance their teacher preparation, these preservice teachers called for more specific middle years subjects that extended their knowledge for teaching in middle years contexts and a greater variety of effective teaching practices. Although the majority of these preservice teachers were exposed to middle years subjects that presented effective pedagogies and practices to understand and engage middle years learners, they requested more pragmatic experiences. Indeed, as already noted, supporters and researchers of middle schooling maintain that there are essential components of middle years teacher preparation (National Middle School Association, 2001, 2006; Pendergast et al., 2007) that
need to be incorporated in teacher preparation. More generally, these preservice teachers suggested that the middle years subjects would be more effective if they were linked to school-based experiences to clearly correlate university learning to current school practices. Such school-based experiences would also promote opportunities for preservice teachers to speak to committed middle years teachers to discuss and enhance their pedagogical knowledge.

Further opportunities for conversing with middle years teachers in the university setting were also suggested (e.g., inviting them as guest lecturers and speakers as part of the middle years university subjects). Middle years practitioners, as university guest speakers, can provide practical strategies and scenarios for implementing middle years practices within their schools. For example, practitioners can outline how they execute school and year level transition programs and what processes they undertake in designing and delivering curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. They could also make suggestions related to the most effective behaviour management strategies to use when teaching early adolescents. Indeed, the sharing of knowledge by middle years teachers may contribute to overcoming the preservice teachers reported lack of confidence in these areas. Although there is little research that notes how such guest lectures and tutorials will enhance middle years preservice teacher development, Pendergast et al. (2007) claim that having practising middle years teachers as tutors and lecturers is a desirable component of middle years teacher preparation.

In this study, a lecturer who models middle schooling strategies and practices in university subjects was shown to increase preservice teacher confidence. The importance of the
mentor teacher modelling practices to assist the development of the preservice teacher is well documented (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hudson, 2007; Keogh et al., 2006). However the notion of the university teacher (i.e., lecturer, tutor, academic) as a role model is not as well substantiated in the literature (Lunenberg, Karthagen & Swennen, 2007). Preservice teachers claimed that their confidence increased when they were able to observe a proficient and experienced university staff member modelling strategies, providing them with hands-on experiences and engaging them in student-centred learning. Specifically, preservice teachers reported that lecturers, who demonstrated authentic assessment linked to real-world learning experiences and the incorporation of information communication technology (ICT) into teaching, provided them with knowledge on how they could apply these practices to the middle years context. In addition, university lecturers who modelled how to build relationships with preservice teachers to create a safe environment conducive to learning was also considered valuable. Just as effective middle schooling teachers promote early adolescent learning through positive relationships and classroom environment (Anafara, 2001; Neumann and Associates, 1996; National Middle School Association, 2001; Pendergast et al., 2007), university academics adopting similar strategies appeared to impact positively on preservice teacher confidence. Hence, the research findings suggests that just as a mentor teacher can influence preservice teacher confidence development by modelling appropriate strategies or, providing vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977, 1994), so too can university teaching staff.

Preservice teachers claimed that, although some university staff modelled middle years pedagogical approaches, this needed to be demonstrated by more of the lecturers and tutors delivering coursework. More hands-on activities were required to extend their knowledge.
and provide them with the experiences for implementing practices. As the preservice teachers indicated they lacked knowledge in curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy (Table 4.5), they suggested university staff model literacy and numeracy within their university subjects to increase their confidence. They called for university staff to have middle years teaching experience, with an ability to share their real-world experiences. Indeed, as noted in the *Top of the Class* report (HRSCEVT, 2007) university academics should be “more in touch with developments in schools and the classroom” (p. 107), and the authors of the *Step Up, Step In. Step Out* report (Victoria Parliament Education and Training Committee, 2005) suggest that teacher educators should upgrade their skills so they can model relevant strategies to preservice teachers. Pendergast et al. (2007) support this claim stating that middle years teacher educators need to “practice what we preach in preparing” middle years graduates (p. 77).

Overall, some preservice teachers wanted more practical approaches and real-world experiences as part of their teacher education preparation that included professional development alongside practitioners, volunteering in schools, and community engagement activities. Further inclusion of such experiences in the course delivery and design was a well-supported suggestion. As Sorin (2004) states, “Student teachers often report a lack of connection between what is learned in university studies and in the classroom, and often report feeling unprepared for the ‘real life’ situations that face them in their first days of classroom teaching” (p. 102). Preservice teachers considered their suggestions as proactive ways for overcoming the lack of connection between theory and practice. As Pendergast et al. (2009) claim middle years preservice teachers will form their teacher identities based on their understandings of the theories and the related practice.
Developing partnerships with key stakeholders is documented in the *Top of the Class Report* (HRSCEVT, 2007) as a recommendation towards providing more real-world experiences and enhancing teacher education programs. It is purported that such partnership arrangements would not only increase the quality of graduates but also enhance the nature and number of school related activities available for preservice teachers (Masters, 2009; Ramsey, 2000). Claims that lack of government financial support hinders the development of such partnerships (HRSCEVT, 2007) suggest that funding for these experiences needs to be considered for future middle years teacher preparation programs. Through quality university-school partnerships, experiences such as joint professional development, school volunteer, and community activities can be arranged and supported (Brady, 2002; Kruger, Davies, Eckersley, Newell, & Cherednichenko, 2009; Ramsay, 2000).

Some of the preservice teachers involved in the interviews noted that prior experiences or a previous degree increased their confidence for teaching in specific subject areas (Sections 5.3 & 5.4). Indeed, there is little opportunity for differentiated education at university that considers the prior learning and experience of preservice teachers. Modes of delivery such as lectures, tutorials and a practicum component are representative of Australian teacher education programs over the past thirty years (HRSCEVT, 2007) and could be argued as “one size fits all”. For instance, Pendergast et al. (2007) note that, in the formation of the middle years course offered at the University of Queensland, academics considered the need for “negotiated learning pathways” to cater to the prior learning and interests of middle years preservice teachers (p. 80). Certainly, for consideration is the need to investigate how middle years teacher education can better
deliver programs that cater to the prior knowledge and experiences of preservice teachers. The design of the one-year Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years) recognises the prior learning of a previous degree towards teacher preparation and some preservice teachers reported confidence in key learning areas previously studied. However, some graduate diploma preservice teachers reported negativity from the profession in regards to the length and adequacy of their one-year course structure. Universities providing middle years programs need to be advocates of their preservice teachers and communicate the value of the experiences and knowledge this cohort brings to the profession.

6.3.2.1 Summary of course structure and delivery.

This study strongly suggested that there is a necessity for middle years preservice teachers to have specific programs suitable for developing their skills required for teaching in the middle years. As confirmed by the National Middle School Association (2001, 2006) and others (e.g., Education Queensland, 2004; Pendergast et al., 2007), early adolescents require teachers who can be developmentally responsive for supporting and engaging early adolescents. Preservice teachers require pedagogical practices that will assist students in the middle years of schooling to become motivated and interested in their learning; hence middle years coursework must include understandings about current early adolescent development. This study demonstrated that the preservice teachers appreciated middle years subjects and found them useful to their development as middle years teachers. As a result, they called for more of these subjects and a more practical approach to their teacher education that included: school-based experiences related to the middle years subjects; guest lecturers from the profession; the modelling of middle years teaching strategies and approaches by their lecturers and mentor teachers; the opportunity to be involved in
professional development with practitioners; volunteering in schools and, community engagement to learn more about middle schooling. Indeed, previous reviews have highlighted weaknesses in connecting the theoretical components of teacher education programs to the practices in the field (e.g. Caldwell & Sutton, 2010; HRSCEVT, 2007). This finding is clearly relevant to middle years teacher preparation.

6.4 Advancing middle years teacher preparation

Figure 6.1 draws on the findings of this research and provides a model for advancing middle years teacher preparation. The preservice teachers involved in this study outlined specific areas where they lacked confidence for teaching within the four broad categories, at the centre of the model (i.e., create a safe environment, developing positive relationships, pedagogical knowledge and implementation of teaching). This model shows that universities and schools share roles that may advance middle years preservice teacher confidence and the practices required for enhancing their preparation. For example, current theories studied at university about pedagogical knowledge for teaching early adolescents (e.g., alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) need to be supported through practical applications within the school setting.

Participants emphasised other university and school actions that could be initiated to advance their preparation for teaching. The model highlights how universities and schools can take responsibility for areas that require improvement in middle years teacher preparation. For instance, universities must be more active in ensuring quality middle years practicum placements and the inclusion of meaningful practicum debriefing sessions.
to make explicit links between theoretical viewpoints and the teaching experience. These preservice teachers stressed the need to present middle years subjects that provide a deep understanding of middle school concepts and approaches. Such subjects may be supported by lecturers modelling practices and by including guest speakers from the profession making connections between theory and practice. Preservice teachers wanted a greater range of quality practicum experiences to equip them with the skills and knowledge for becoming effective middle years teachers. From the school’s perspective, supportive school staff with knowledge of the context, classrooms and mentor teachers can assist towards facilitating these quality middle years experiences. Indeed, careful selection of skilled and enthusiastic mentor teachers can more effectively guide the development of middle years preservice teachers. Finally, the preservice teachers suggested that volunteering at school sites and engaging in middle school communities could provide additional experiences for enhancing their middle school teacher preparation.
Figure 6.2. A model for advancing middle years preservice teacher preparation

Figure 6.2. This model summarises suggestions for advancing middle years teacher preparation. The need for universities and schools to work together is represented by a VENN diagram. At the centre, are the areas where the preservice teachers self-reported a lack of confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. The model demonstrates how universities need to work with schools to provide middle years preservice with knowledge about middle years practices and opportunities to apply them in the classroom. The outer circles highlight the need for schools to ensure that preservice teachers: experience quality middle years practicum experiences; can participate in other school-based experiences; are provided with effective mentoring; and are supported by school staff. Universities need to ensure that preservice teachers: have quality middle years practicum experiences; have opportunities for practicum debrief sessions; are presented with middle years units that provide the theoretical knowledge with practical applications; are taught by lecturers who can model middle years practices; and have opportunities to attend lectures delivered by middle years teachers.

6.5. Chapter summary

Chapter 6 discussed the research findings. Drawing on the survey and interview data, it highlighted areas where the preservice teachers were confident for teaching (Section 6.2). This chapter outlined the experiences that assisted to build preservice teacher confidence.
for teaching in the middle years context (Section 6.3). Practicum, including a range of practicum contexts, the mentor teacher, and field studies subjects were noted to be experiences that increased confidence. Course design and delivery such as the middle years subjects and the pedagogy of the university teaching staff emerged in this study as increasing confidence. However, just as these areas were noted to increase confidence, this chapter has shown that these were areas where preservice teachers suggested strategies for enhancing their middle years preparation. As a result of the findings of this study, ways to advance the future of middle years teacher preparation in Australia were highlighted (Section 6.4) and a model presented to summarise how this might be initiated through university and school partnerships.
Chapter 7

Summary, Implications and Further Research

7.1 Chapter preview

Chapter 7 presents a summary of this thesis (Section 7.2) highlighting the methods of data collection, the need for such a study, and a synopsis of the research findings. Following the chapter summary, the limitations (Section 7.3) that include the participant numbers, the selection process, and the timing of data collection will be outlined. The implications (Section 7.4) of the study will be presented and the directions for further research (Section 7.5) will discussed. The significance of the study will then be highlighted (Section 7.6) and finally, the thesis will be concluded (Section 7.7).

7.2 Thesis summary

This mixed-method study involved 142 final-year preservice teachers undertaking middle years teacher preparation at three different universities across two Australian states. Data collection methods included a survey and questionnaire, with interviews being conducted with 10 of the participants; 5 completing the final semester of the Bachelor of Education (middle years pathway) and 5 in their final semester of a Graduate Diploma of Education (middle years). Although the need to support early adolescents is documented in the literature (Section 2.3), this study has addressed a gap in the research by investigating preservice teachers’ confidence for teaching in the middle years, the experiences that influenced their confidence, and their suggested enhancements in middle years teacher
preparation. Using the literature (Chapter 2) a survey, questionnaire and interviews were developed. The survey instrument was developed to determine preservice teacher confidence on practices applicable to middle years teaching. The questionnaire and interview questions were devised to provide further insights into the preservice teachers’ experiences that contributed to confidence development and strategies that could be included to improve future middle years preservice teacher education. These methods were used to collect and analyse data for addressing the following three research aims (Section 3.2).

1. Investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling.

2. Analyse the experiences included in their teacher preparation course that made them feel confident.


The authors of reviews into teacher education in Australia note the importance of graduating teachers who are competent and confident to teach (Section 2.2). Similarly, Pendergast (2010) highlights the importance of middle years teachers possessing levels of confidence to engage and motivate early adolescents for learning (Section 2.5.3). Competency for teaching is addressed through university coursework aligned to the required teaching standards and successful completion of assessments and practicum by preservice teachers. However, there is little evidence about the confidence of final-year preservice teachers to teach in the middle school. Preservice teachers’ self-reported
confidence can provide feedback to inform teacher preparation program delivery (Section 2.5.3). Even though more than 20% of the preservice teachers did not indicate an overall confidence for teaching (Section 4.2), the study suggested that the majority of the preservice teachers claimed confidence in areas of pedagogical knowledge and professional renewal. However, they required more confidence development in areas of assessment, behaviour management, implementing school transition programs, and literacy and numeracy for teaching early adolescents (Chapters 4 & 5). Furthermore, this investigation identified areas for enhancing middle years teacher preparation including more: practicum; middle years subjects; practical approaches by university teachers; and more real-world learning opportunities.

The significance of experience (i.e., past, university and in school) for enhancing confidence for teaching was analysed. Previous experiences or a previous degree were beneficial to the development of confidence in specific curriculum areas, for instance, content knowledge in a discipline gained from a previous degree instilled confidence for teaching that subject in the middle school. Positive practicum experiences confirmed the findings of reports and reviews (Section 2.5.2) that preservice teachers considered practicum was pivotal to effective teacher preparation. A mentor teacher who supports middle schooling practices was found to be essential to a positive practicum experience.

This study established that Bandura’s (1977, 1994) theory and the importance of experience were significant to the development of confidence of preservice teachers undertaking middle years courses. Mastery experiences where the preservice teachers had opportunities to practice and perfect activities in classrooms were perceived as developing
confidence. Similarly, when university teaching staff had preservice teachers involved in hands-on learning approaches they felt they could master the activity through practice impacting on confidence. Mentor teachers and university teaching staff effectively modelling teaching strategies suitable for early adolescents confirmed that such vicarious experiences could increase preservice teachers’ perceived ability to undertake the task hence, impacting on their self belief. Also substantiated in this study was the importance of the mentor teacher during practicum. How the mentor teacher interacted with the preservice teacher, the nature of the relationship and, the amount of support offered, influenced confidence development demonstrating the implication of Bandura’s social persuasions, and an affirming physiological state.

From the perspectives of the preservice teachers, the significance of designing and presenting a middle years course that specifically address the elements of middle schooling teacher preparation was highlighted (see 2.5.1). Preservice teachers suggested that middle years subjects presenting information about theories and practices of middle schooling were essential for developing confidence to teach. In addition, as already established above, it was emphasised that preservice teacher confidence was built when teacher educators delivering middle years courses went beyond lecturing to modelling middle years pedagogy (Chapters 4 & 5).

In this study, preservice teachers called for a more practical teacher preparation program with real-world learning experiences. Middle years teachers as guest lecturers, attending professional development with middle years teachers, volunteering in middle years classrooms, and additional school-based experiences presented preservice teachers with
more opportunities for networking and linking theory with practice. Such opportunities through university-school partnerships were advocated in the literature to be advantageous to preservice teacher preparation (Section 2.5). This study confirms that the same applies for middle years teacher preparation.

7.3 Limitations of the study

Limitations to this study included participant numbers, self reported data, selection of participants, and timing of the data collection. The sampling of 142 preservice teachers was considered acceptable (Hittleman & Simon, 2006); however, a greater representation of universities and preservice teachers would have enhanced the generalisability of the findings. For instance, a wider field of responses would provide further insight into other middle school teacher preparation programs and how these influence preservice teacher confidence. Nevertheless, three Australian universities were represented and sampling provided an indication of their middle schooling preparation within these sites.

A limitation of this study is that the data collected was relying on the honest representation of the preservice teachers’ beliefs about their teacher preparation. Furthermore, the study was dependent on the memories of their experiences. For those preservice teachers studying a four year program, some of their experiences may have occurred three years prior. Self reported data is noted to have limitations relating to reliability and accuracy (Patton, 2002). However, the emerging themes noted in this research, demonstrated that preservice teachers shared many of the same beliefs about their teacher preparation regardless of the duration of their course or the program studied. Furthermore, as this
research was investigating the preservice teachers’ perceptions (beliefs, values and thoughts) about their middle school teacher preparation, self reported data was most appropriate for this study (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

Another limitation to this study was the participant selection process. Preservice teachers were selected to complete the survey and questionnaire using convenience sampling (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Those preservice teachers who attended university tutorials and lectures on the day of administration completed the survey and questionnaire. Through volunteer sampling (Hittleman & Simon, 2006), others elected to be part of the one-to-one interviews. Convenience and volunteer sampling can mean participants are not representative of the total Australian population, yet their comments provided insights into what develops their confidence for teaching and how universities and schools can further support their pedagogical development.

Data in this study were collected in the preservice teachers’ final semester of their course and this timing may have influenced the preservice teachers’ responses (e.g., see McMillan, 2008), that is, being in their final semester of study and possibly elated at completing coursework. Yet, quantitative and qualitative data indicated considerable variation in their responses about their confidence for teaching. Consequently, there appeared sufficient evidence to determine areas of most confidence and least confidence for teaching, and experiences that they perceived to influence their development.
7.4 Implications from the study

Universities, as facilitators of educational reform, need to be proactive in advancing middle schooling teacher preparation. The implications from this study include reviewing middle schooling preparation for: more specific middle years subjects, enhancing university lecturing approaches for middle schooling, extended school-based experiences, and supporting mentors in their roles. University coursework includes generic subjects applicable to a range of fields. Preparing middle years teachers requires specific subjects of study that includes coursework to address the teaching of early adolescents and related theories advocated by the literature. University lecturers and tutors need to present the practices suitable to the middle schooling context, including modelling these practices to provide further vicarious experiences for preservice teachers. This requires the university staff to possess knowledge and experience in teaching early adolescents to demonstrate realistic and suitable approaches to preservice teachers. Middle years subjects could be enhanced through proactive engagement with the profession resulting in guest lecturers from middle schooling contexts providing preservice teachers with broader perspectives to expand their repertoire of middle schooling teaching approaches.

Providers of middle school teacher preparation in Australia can promote university-school partnerships that extend experiences through practicum, volunteering in schools, and further school-based experiences. Informed by this study, such experiences can focus on middle schooling approaches and areas where preservice teachers lacked confidence (e.g., behaviour management, teaching literacy and numeracy, and assessment). Additionally, the variety of contexts provided through such partnerships will address preservice teachers’ need to experience a greater range of middle years contexts. It appeared that
carefully selected contexts may support the development of confidence and affirm middle years university coursework.

As mentoring of preservice teachers is variable, universities can create greater consistency by supporting mentors in their roles. University staff, in collaboration with the teaching profession, can devise mentoring programs that assist their understanding of guiding the preservice teacher through middle schooling practices. Collaboration between mentor teachers and university staff can further advance knowledge about middle schooling philosophy and practices. Teacher preparation for the middle years requires the perspective of all key stakeholders, especially preservice teachers who are recipients of the coursework. Such information can assist universities to improve coursework and create common understandings between teachers and university staff for facilitating the development of preservice teachers.

Also for consideration is the need for government bodies to carefully consider the findings of this research. The significance of supporting early adolescents is well documented in the literature (Section 2.3) and the importance of graduating teachers who are developmentally responsive to their needs is highlighted (Section 2.5). If reforms are to be implemented, government funding is required to provide: quality middle school practicum placements where mentor teachers are professionally developed to support early adolescents and can model appropriate strategies for preservice teachers; training for mentor teachers so the mentoring process is purposeful and organised; time for academics and support staff to liaise with the profession and expand school and community partnerships to provide preservice teachers with volunteer and community engagement
experiences; school staff with release time so they can offer the support required to
effectively mentor preservice teachers; time for academics to effectively re-write their
middle schooling teacher preparation courses to embed experiences within university
coursework and practicum to enhance and strengthen graduate teachers’ confidence. If the
quality of the teacher makes the difference as noted in government reports (Section 2.2),
adequate funding is required to support teacher education programs so they can graduate
competent and confident middle school teachers.

7.5 Directions for further research

There is considerable research required in the field of preservice teacher education,
particularly in preparing them to teach in the middle school. Future research could be
conducted in the fields of: advancing preservice teacher confidence for the middle years;
middle schooling practicum and the relationship to university coursework; mentor
teachers’ roles in middle schooling; the specific content, activities and assessment of
middle years university subjects and their effect on confidence; and the pedagogical
approaches of university lecturers that are effective in developing preservice teacher
confidence. Future research could also call for a deeper analysis of the data with a
comparison of the confidence of the participants in respect to maturity, gender and the type
of programs completed. Such information would elicit an indication as to whether female
preservice teachers are more or less confident than males, whether maturity impacts upon
the confidence of the final-years and how the various university programs compare in
producing confident teachers. Furthermore, universities may adapt the survey constructed
for this study to determine preservice teachers’ levels of confidence in programs they have
devised and analyse how their programs are perceived to meet the practices associated with middle schooling.

As another example, research is required around middle schooling practicum to understand how to prepare preservice teachers in areas such as behaviour management, transition programs, assessment, and literacy and numeracy. Research can determine if the expansion of practicum and the inclusion of further school-based activities, volunteering in schools and participation in professional development, as requested by the preservice teachers in this study, increases preservice teacher confidence. Associated with practicum, further research could investigate the specific attributes and practices employed by mentor teachers that best support the development of preservice teachers in the middle school.

This research demonstrated that the middle years subjects and the pedagogical approaches demonstrated by university lecturers emerged as influencing preservice teacher confidence. Further research could investigate the various middle years subjects studied at the three universities and the related assessment tasks. The confidence gained and the practical knowledge acquired by these subjects could be investigated in more detail to provide a complete picture of the various middle years teacher preparation programs offered at the universities. In addition, further research could be undertaken into the pedagogical approaches of the teaching staff that were most effective in increasing preservice teacher confidence for teaching.
This study could promote additional research as other researchers could use different methodological designs to elicit deeper information on advancing preservice teacher development in middle schooling. To illustrate, observational data with audio and video recordings of preservice teachers transferring skills learnt at the university to the classroom can provide deeper evidence on the effectiveness of the teacher education program. Using a similar research design with a larger sample of participants from more universities would provide further validity to the study and a stronger representation in the preservice teachers’ responses. In addition, middle years teacher education programs from various universities could be analysed and compared in relation to preservice teacher responses. The findings of such a study would inform effective approaches for designing and presenting future middle years teacher education programs.

Increasing the duration of the research by conducting a longitudinal study that tracks the development and confidence of the preservice teachers as they graduate and commence teaching could also be conducted. Indeed, their confidence for teaching and perceptions about the adequacy of their teacher preparation may change as a result of teaching in their first year, which would inform middle years coursework. As recommended by the authors of *Top of the Class Report*, “Longitudinal studies, while challenging and expensive, are absolutely critical to the future improvement of teacher education in Australia” (HRSCEVT, 2007, p. 10).
7.6 Significance of this study

As highlighted in the literature (see Chapter 2), successfully preparing teachers to engage early adolescents in the middle years of schooling is of importance to the education community both in Australia and overseas. As well as understanding the needs of early adolescents, middle school teachers need to be well prepared with the appropriate theoretical and pedagogical knowledge that will assist them to achieve positive student outcomes. Additionally, middle school teachers need to have high levels of confidence or self efficacy to succeed (Pendergast, 2010). This investigation is significant in that it has presented self reported data of final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling. Although previous studies in Australia have investigated teacher identity of graduates from one Australian university (Pendergast et al., 2007, 2009), this study overcomes the gap in the current research and provides additional information to inform the field of middle schooling teacher education.

Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) investigated the confidence of teacher graduates however, no such study had been conducted in the area of middle schooling. As part of her research, Woolfolk-Hoy developed a *Teacher Confidence Scale* in the form of a survey that gathered self reported data of participants’ levels of confidence towards aspects of teaching. As part of this current research, a survey was developed from the literature so preservice teachers could self report their confidence towards middle schooling practices. It is envisaged this survey that was reviewed by middle schooling experts prior to administering, will provide a tool for researchers so that they may undertake similar studies.
Bandura’s theory (1977, 1994) provided a sound theoretical framework for this study. This study confirms the significance of Bandura’s theory and its application to final-year preservice teachers studying to teach in the middle years of schooling. This investigation demonstrates the relevance of how participants’ confidence is impacted by: *mastery experiences* that provide practice for individuals to undertake a task; *vicarious experiences*, where others model an activity or situation; *social persuasions*, where confidence levels are developed from the social messages received from others; and finally, *physiological state* where the influence of stress, anxiety and mood impacts on levels of confidence. Indeed, this study substantiates that teacher preparation programs need to consider the importance of these experiences in producing confident middle school teachers.

Prior to this study, research relating to middle school teacher preparation in Australia has been limited to investigating teacher identity (Pendergast, 2007, 2009) and the nature of teacher preparation (e.g., Aspland & Crosswell, 2006; De Jong & Chadbourne, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2003). As already established (See Chapter 2), preservice teacher feedback can provide useful suggestions towards improving and advancing course structures and programs. This study extended this field of research by giving a voice to final-year preservice teachers so that they could present suggestions for enhancing future middle years courses. It is hoped that this research will inform future teacher education courses to maximise opportunities for quality graduates in the middle years of schooling.
7.7 Thesis conclusion

Middle years teacher preparation programs have been developed by various Australian universities as a move towards overcoming concerns about early adolescent disengagement in schools. Teacher preparation programs have been informed largely by literature and reports from the United States and Australia that highlight early adolescent development and effective middle school teaching practices. This thesis has attempted to contribute to the research about middle years teacher preparation in Australia by investigating final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle schooling teacher preparation. Using a mixed-method design, data has been collected, analysed and presented to inform future teacher education programs towards producing quality graduates who are competent and confident in the practices and attributes for teaching in the middle years of schooling.
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Appendices

Appendix 1

Participant Information Sheet

Name of project: Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of their Middle Schooling Teacher Preparation: A Sample of the Australian Context

Introduction

My name is Suzanne Hudson and I am conducting research as part of a Doctoral Study (PhD) in Education. The aim of the research is to investigate final-year preservice teachers’ perceptions of their middle schooling preparation, examine the strengths and improvements required in the course, and investigate preservice teachers perceptions of their confidence to teach in the middle schooling context. By investigating their perceptions of their confidence to teach, it will provide an indication as to whether their university course has assisted the preservice teachers to become competent successful teachers (e.g., see Ross, McKeiver & Hogaboam-Gray, 1994).

To conduct this research, a survey and questionnaire is to be administered to final-year preservice teachers undertaking a teacher preparation program that includes middle years subjects or is specially designed to graduate middle years teachers. It is hoped that the survey and questionnaire will elicit responses that will provide data that indicates preservice teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness to teach in the middle years context. Permission has been sought and granted from your university to include your cohort in the study.

What is this research?

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Participants are asked to complete a survey and a questionnaire that is based on middle years literature and the Queensland College of Teachers Standards for Teachers (2006). The survey and questionnaire will be administered during lecture or tutorial time so as to not impact on participants study time. The surveys and questionnaire are de-identified so the participants and the university remain anonymous. The completion and return of the survey and questionnaire are an indication of confirmation of participation in the study.

Preservice teachers are also invited to volunteer for involvement in 45 minute face-to-face audio-taped interviews. Again, the interview questions are based on middle years literature. The interviews will take place at a time and location that is suitable for both the participants and the researcher. Participants who agree to take part in the interviews will be asked to sign a consent form.

Participation in this study will not impact on academic results or any aspects of the participant’s teacher education course.

Once the study is complete participants are able to contact the researcher (through Southern Cross University) for the results or visit the Southern Cross University library in the future to read a copy of the doctoral thesis. The results of the research will be presented at conferences, and published in journal articles. Again, as a result of de-identification of the data, the cohorts involved in the study will not be recognised.
Responsibility of the researcher

It is the responsibility of the researcher to have all aspects of the study ethically approved by appropriate university bodies. Furthermore, the researcher must ensure the anonymity of the participants and provide them with a clear understanding of the research and the impact of their involvement. It is also the responsibility of the researcher to make certain the participants can obtain copies of the results of the research at the conclusion of the study.

Participants’ responsibilities

The responsibility of the participants is to complete the survey and questionnaire honestly. Participants can also volunteer to be involved in the 45 minute face-to-face interviews. Interviews will be held at a time and place that is suitable for the participants and the researcher.

Discomforts or risks

There are no potential risks to participants involved in this study.

Publication of results of this research

The results of this study may be published in education journals and presented at conferences.

Consent

Return of the survey and questionnaire is an indication of consent to participate in this study. Participants volunteering to be involved in the interviews will be required to sign a consent form.

Inquiries

To make further enquiries in regards to this research, please email the researcher at sm.hudson@qut.edu.au

This research has been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is: ECN-09-074

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the research, the following procedure should occur. Write to the following:

The Ethics Complaints Officer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

All information is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible.
Participant Consent Form

Title of research project: Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of their Middle Schooling Teacher Preparation: A Sample of the Australian Context

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Southern Cross University researcher for their records.

Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above. Yes ☐ No ☐

I have been provided with information at my level of comprehension about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences and possible outcomes of this research. I understand this information. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped and/or video-taped. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary. Yes ☐ No ☐

I can choose not to participate in part or all of this research at any time, without consequence. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that any information that may identify me, will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. Therefore, I, or any information I have provided cannot be linked to my person/company. (Privacy Act 1988 Cth) Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that neither my name nor any identifying information will be disclosed or published, except with my permission. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that all information gathered in this research is confidential.
It is kept securely and confidentially for 5 years at the University (unless there are special circumstances that have been explained to me. Yes □ No □

I am aware that I can contact the Supervisor or other researchers at any time with any queries. Yes □ No □

I understand that the ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee. Yes □ No □

If I have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research, I understand that I can contact the SCU Ethics Complaints Officer. All inquiries are confidential and should be in writing, in the first instance, to the following: Yes □ No □

Ethics Complaints Officer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au
Appendix 3

Middle Years of Schooling Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine your confidence to teach in the middle schooling context. The survey further explores what aspects of your course increased your confidence and what improvements need to be included for future coursework development. The results of this survey are confidential and all results are de-identified to maintain anonymity.

Please circle the following responses that apply to you.

1. Gender:  Male  Female

2. Please note the course you are completing (e.g., Grad Dip Middle Years, Secondary, Primary)__________

3. My practicum experience class/es have been with year/s: prep 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

4. Please write the nature of your previous degree or other qualifications (if applicable): ________________

INSTRUCTIONS: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by circling the appropriate letter to the right of each statement.

Key: SD = Strongly disagree  D = Disagree  U = Uncertain  A = Agree  SA = Strongly agree

In the Middle years of schooling I am confident in my ability to effectively:

1. Share my personal philosophy of teaching   SD D U A SA
2. Create a safe learning environment   SD D U A SA
3. Create a learning environment that fosters independence   SD D U A SA
4. Create a learning environment that caters for diversity   SD D U A SA
5. Respond to the individual learning needs of the students   SD D U A SA
6. Develop positive teacher – student relationships   SD D U A SA
7. Negotiate a classroom management plan with students   SD D U A SA
8. Implement effective behaviour management strategies   SD D U A SA
9. Provide clear and reasonable consequences for behaviour   SD D U A SA
10. Demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching   SD D U A SA
11. Plan appropriate learning experiences for students   SD D U A SA
12. Implement student-centred learning experiences   SD D U A SA
13. Develop learning programs that cater to students’ interests   SD D U A SA
14. Implement interdisciplinary (integrated) learning programs   SD D U A SA
15. Implement learning programs that demonstrate real-world connections   SD D U A SA
16. Implement learning programs that demonstrate global connections   SD D U A SA

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17. Implement learning programs that incorporate ICTs
18. Engage students in group work
19. Incorporate language and literacy strategies in planning and teaching
20. Incorporate numeracy strategies in planning and teaching
21. Use a variety of teaching strategies
22. Implement a constructivist approach to teaching and learning
23. Reflect and refine my teaching practices
24. Engage in further professional development
25. Engage students in intellectually challenging experiences
26. Align middle-years curriculum, pedagogy and assessment
27. Create a variety of assessment tasks including authentic assessment
28. Report on student learning
29. Demonstrate content knowledge of subject matter
30. Support students in their transition between year levels and from primary to secondary
31. Work in teaching teams
32. Provide regular feedback to parents
33. Foster positive relationships with the community
34. Foster positive relationships with parents

As a result of my course I am confident that:
35. I have the theoretical knowledge for teaching in the middle years of schooling
36. I have the pedagogical knowledge for teaching in the middle years of schooling
37. I have the curriculum knowledge for teaching in the middle years of schooling
38. My course has successfully prepared me to teach in the middle years of schooling
Middle Years of Schooling Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine what aspects of your course increased your confidence and what improvements need to be included for future coursework development. The results of this questionnaire are confidential with all results de-identified for anonymity.

1. What experiences have undertaken as part of your university course that increased your confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

2. What aspects of these experiences increased your confidence to teach in the middle years of schooling?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

3. What types of university experiences could be included in your course to better prepare you for teaching in the middle school?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Interview Questions

1. What course are you currently completing?

2. Other than your own schooling and the practicum completed as part of your course, what other in-school experiences have you completed?

3. What areas of teaching in the middle years context do you feel most confident and prepared?

4. What area of teaching in the middle years context do you feel least confident and prepared?

5. What strategies will you undertake to overcome this lack of confidence?

6. What university experiences in your course have increased your confidence to teach in the middle-years classroom?

7. What aspects of this/these university experiences increased your confidence?

8. What aspects of your course could be enhanced so that future preservice teachers would be better prepared and more confident for teaching in the middle-school context?