

**TALKING HEADS: AN EXPLORATION OF NORTHUMBERLAND MIDDLE
SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE
ACCOMPLISHMENT OF EDUCATING MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPILS.**

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ABSTRACT

In 2003 the Northumberland Local Education Authority, as it was known then, received an overall 'unsatisfactory' Ofsted report [Ofsted 2003, p. 49] and was subsequently challenged by the Department for Education and Skills for poor standards of achievement in the schools. The County Council decided in April 2005 to change the three tier education system in Northumberland to two tiers as it was of the opinion that the blame for poor standards lay with the middle schools. In the aftermath of the 2005 decision many middle schools addressed the 'poor standard' challenge and focused on effective education. I was interested in exploring middle school headteachers' perceptions of educating middle school pupils, i.e. young adolescents, and whether the headteachers had found a solution to the two/three tier debate and so devised an independent, critical, empirical inquiry. All middle school headteachers were included in the project: 11% formed a focus group; 52% returned the questionnaire and 23% were subsequently interviewed. In research I found little relating to middle schools in England and extended my exploration to include middle schools globally. I identified evidence of schools internationally with similar age

ranges, challenges, innovation and vision for effective young adolescent education. Through the investigation I have identified previously unshared and unspoken knowledge in Northumberland and have found three core categories in answer to the research questions, namely, the need for collaborative accountability in schools and partnerships, the need for fully developed personalised schooling and evidence of an accomplished middle school culture of provision which knows, understands and works with the young 21st Century adolescent.

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