In Chapter 1, you will look at middle schools today and see how they have evolved during the past 50 years. In addition to reading about what all middle schools should be like, you will review reports of selected states and professional associations. We pose several questions that you can consider to determine whether middle school teaching is really for you.

In Chapter 2, you can read about the early adolescence developmental period as well as about young adolescents themselves as we discuss their physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development and suggest implications for middle school educators who want to provide developmentally responsive educational experiences. Be sure to read our cautions about making generalizations about this very diverse group of learners.

Then, in Chapter 3, you will explore ways middle school educators can use advisor–advisee programs and collaborative teacher and counselor teams to address the challenges mentioned in Chapter 2. Also, you will see how teachers and counselors can work with students from diverse backgrounds.

After you read these three chapters, we hope you will begin to understand the purposes of middle schools as well as understand young adolescents, their development, and the challenges they face.
Objectives

After reading and thinking about this chapter on middle schools today, you should be able to:

1. explain a brief history of the junior high school and the middle school;
2. define student-centered and developmentally responsive middle schools;
3. provide a rationale for middle schools being distinctly different from elementary and secondary schools;
4. explain the major differences between middle schools and junior high schools;
5. name and explain selected middle school concepts such as those prescribed by the National Middle School Association (NMSA);
6. suggest future directions for effective middle schools;
7. explain the recommendations for middle school education as espoused by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD); and
8. describe what middle school teaching is like and what young adolescents are really like.
Scenario—The First Day of Student Teaching

Ami Chen took one last look at herself in the car’s rearview mirror. Then she put her cell phone on vibrate, opened the door, and slid out. Taking a deep breath, she walked resolutely toward Harrison Lakes Middle School. A 21-year-old teacher education candidate, Ami was both excited and apprehensive as she walked into her first student-teaching assignment.

She had been thinking about this day for 4 years. Now those days of sitting in college classes were over and she would face the ultimate test. Could she really teach middle grades students? Ami knew her professors had prepared her for middle school teaching; she knew about young adolescents, understood the essential middle school concepts, and knew the recommendations of the various reports on reforming middle school education. Still, this was the real thing, and she had heard stories of the pranks young adolescents pulled on green student teachers. To say that young adolescents were “challenging” to teach seemed like an understatement.

Ami had been assigned to Eva Maria Gillespie, a seventh-grade teacher with 19 years of middle school experience. In addition to being well liked by her colleagues and by the students, Mrs. Gillespie was known for her high expectations, both in student behavior and in academic achievement. Checking Mrs. Gillespie’s classroom Web site, Ami learned that “Mrs. G.” had been named Teacher of the Year and had several other awards for good teaching.

As arranged, Ami met Mrs. Gillespie in the main office before the students were scheduled to arrive. As the two were walking back toward the seventh-grade rooms, Mrs. Gillespie turned to Ami and asked, “Butterflies in your stomach?” Ami grinned. “How did you know?”

“I think we all feel that way at times,” replied Mrs. Gillespie. “Want to talk about it?”

“Well,” said Ami, “I’m concerned about student teaching. I always thought I wanted to teach in the middle school, but now I don’t know. When I visited last week, I kept watching the students. They’re so . . . diverse! I mean, physically, they’re all different sizes. And, I bet they’re on all different instructional levels, too. I spent the weekend worrying about today.”

As Mrs. Gillespie took the long way back to her room, she talked to Ami. “It’s true that these students are diverse. In fact, you’ll find almost every one of the developmental, learning, cultural, gender, and social class differences that you read about in college here at Harrison Lakes.” She went on to explain some of the ways the staff at Harrison Lakes addressed the differences and talked about school climate, developmentally responsive instruction, and guidance efforts.

Listening to Mrs. Gillespie, Ami began to smile. She thought to herself that Mrs. Gillespie sounded as though she was teaching a college class and listing all those essential concepts found in good middle schools. Ami also reminded herself that the reasons she had majored in middle school education were that she liked the idea of working in a school that was “student centered” and that she was looking forward to working collaboratively with other teachers.

As they neared the seventh-grade cluster, Mrs. Gillespie slowed and said, “Come on into the teacher area and let me introduce you to our interdisciplinary team.”

Ami followed her into the bright, cheerful room. “Maybe, just maybe, this will work out,” she thought.

Overview

Many prospective teachers have shared Ami Chen’s feelings as they entered the middle school classroom for the first time. The middle school is a unique place that differs distinctly from elementary and high schools. In this chapter, you will find an overview of many of the essential middle school concepts. In addition, you will have a chance to examine what it means to be a middle school teacher and to look at the challenges in this exciting profession.
Part I  Understanding Middle Schools and Young Adolescents

A Brief History of the Junior High School and the Middle School

Let’s briefly examine what existed prior to middle schools before we look at how middle schools developed.

Junior High Schools

During much of the 19th century, the traditional school organization plan was the 8-year elementary and 4-year high school pattern. This 8-4 arrangement provided opportunities for large numbers of students to obtain common schooling in the elementary school and for a select number of students to receive specialized academic preparation for college in the 4-year high school. By the 1890s, dissatisfaction regarding this arrangement was growing. Educators and others have spent more than 100 years since trying to develop a successful school in the middle that would both meet the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents and serve as a transition between the elementary school and the high school.

With higher education pressing the issue, numerous national committees met between 1890 and 1920 to discuss ideas related to altering the curriculum of the 8-4 plan. These committees considered shortening the elementary school program in years and enriching the curriculum in Grades 7 and 8 by the introduction of more rigorous academic subjects such as natural history, physics, foreign languages, algebra, and geometry.

Gradually, the 6-3-3 concept emerged, with an elementary school of 6 years and a secondary school of 6 years, the first 3 of those years spent in a junior high school. The first 3-year junior high schools, incorporating Grades 7 to 9, were established in Columbus, Ohio, in 1909. Then, in 1918, the National Education Association (NEA) Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education approved the junior high school concept.

Early junior high school programs focused on enriched academic programs for college-bound students and vocational programs for students bound for work settings. However, as the junior high school stabilized its curriculum, instruction, and organization, it became apparent that the school also needed to meet the unique social, personal, developmental, and academic needs of young adolescents. This developmental purpose soon became the guiding principle of the junior high school and the yardstick by which its proponents measured its success or failure.

A uniquely American institution, the junior high school experienced steady growth over the next several decades and became the dominant school organizational pattern for young adolescents. However, despite its growth, the junior high school experienced philosophical problems. Organizationally, the junior high school was a bridge between elementary and secondary schools, but philosophically, it was caught between competing elementary and secondary viewpoints. Instead of becoming what young adolescents needed, the junior high school was dominated by the high school. By failing to identify and develop a rationale of its own, the junior high school grew into its name and became a “junior” high school.

Middle Schools

Growing disenchantment with the junior high school accelerated the emergence of the middle school. Beginning in the 1960s and developing rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s,
middle schools soon outnumbered junior high schools, and the middle school concept dominated. Trying to avoid the mistakes of the junior high school, educators wanted the middle school to be a learner-centered school that would meet young adolescents' developmental needs. The middle school itself was to consist of Grades 6 to 8 and possibly Grade 5. The ninth grade, with its Carnegie units and its subject-centered emphasis, distorted the image of a learner-centered middle school and was generally excluded from the middle school organizational pattern.

Two of the more prominent theorists of the early development of middle schools were Donald Eichhorn and William Alexander. They emphasized the student focus of the middle school. Eichhorn coined the term *transescence*, which was defined as the developmental period beginning in late childhood prior to puberty and extending through the early years of adolescence. Research into the school performance of transescents, or young adolescents, suggested that, because of their earlier maturation and sophistication, sixth graders were more appropriately placed with seventh and eighth graders than with fourth and fifth graders.

Although Alexander and Williams' (1968) *The Emergent Middle School* is over 40 years old, it continues to be an influential book in the middle school movement. The authors described the middle school as a new and emergent school rather than as a reorganized junior high school. Ideally, they said, the middle school should build its programs on some of the positive contributions of the junior high school (i.e., core curriculum, guidance programs, exploratory education, and vocational and home arts). Simultaneously, the middle school would eliminate high school practices such as academic honor societies, competitive sports, and subject matter orientation.

You can find Internet sources with more information on the history of junior high schools and middle schools in Keeping Current with Technology 1–1.

**Keeping Current with Technology 1–1**

The following Web sites have information on the history of junior high schools and middle schools:

- Indianola Junior High school—the first junior high in the United States

- Junior High School—History in the *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood*

Middle School Organization Through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s
- http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/publications/On_Target/middle_or_high/middle_or_high_2.pdf

History of Education in America from Chesapeake College, Maryland
Middle Schools

Definition

For the purposes of Teaching in the Middle School, we define the middle school as a school organization containing Grades 6 to 8 (and sometimes Grade 5) that, first, provides developmentally appropriate and responsive curricular, instructional, organizational, guidance, and overall educational experiences; and, second, places major emphasis on 10- to 15-year-olds' developmental and instructional needs.

As our definition points out, we think middle schools should have a 5/6–8 grade configuration; however, there is a growing debate among some educators about how to address the needs of students “in the middle” (Breaking Ranks in the Middle . . ., 2006, p. 1). They ask whether we should keep young adolescents in 5/6-8 middle schools or put them in K–8 elementary schools or in 7–12 secondary schools. Ideally, school districts should make their decisions on grade configuration by considering what is best for middle-level students although some districts appear to base their decisions on school capacity and budgets (Breaking Ranks in the Middle . . .).

Rationale

Why, you might wonder, is it necessary to place special emphasis on middle schools? Unfortunately, for many years the school in the middle, regardless of whether it was called an intermediate school, junior high school, or middle school, did not fully understand its purpose. Although the K–5 school perceived its mission as teaching basic skills, the high school perceived its mission as providing general, academic, or vocational education. However, the school in the middle lacked a mission; it was a school without a clear sense of purpose and accompanying direction. Fortunately, this situation has changed.

Serving a far greater role than just being a transition school between the elementary school and the high school, the modern middle school

■ provides unique educational experiences that reflect the developmental and instructional needs of 10- to 15-year-olds;

■ meets young adolescents’ educational needs by implementing proven middle school concepts such as advisor–advisee programs, exploratory programs, interdisciplinary teaming and an organization, and positive school climates;

■ continues to refine young adolescents’ basic skills originally learned in the elementary school; and

■ offers opportunities for young adolescents to explore curricular areas and to discover unique abilities and talents.

Thus, although definitions are important, it may be just as important to emphasize the middle school concepts—those aspects just noted that really describe an ideal middle
school. The middle school tries to create students with egalitarian principles who are in touch with their political, psychological, and social selves and who focus on identity development and societal needs rather than on competition and individual advancement. Unfortunately, some educators believe that, by pursuing these admirable goals, some middle schools have not developed a strong academic program and have not demanded intellectual development of many young adolescents. In this book, we hope to show you that academic development does not have to be sacrificed to advance core middle school concepts.

Major Differences Between a Middle School and a Junior High School

Table 1–1 shows some of the key differences between the middle school and its predecessor, the junior high school. We will discuss many of these differences in more detail later in this chapter.

Middle School Students—Young Adolescents

The terms used to describe students in this developmental period include young adolescents, preadolescents, transescents, and middle schoolers. We prefer young adolescents, whom we define as students between the ages of 10 and 15 who experience the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive changes associated with the early adolescence developmental

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Characteristics</strong></th>
<th><strong>Middle School</strong></th>
<th><strong>Junior High School</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization of teachers</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary teams</td>
<td>Subject departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of students</td>
<td>Instructional grouping within heterogeneous learning communities</td>
<td>Homogeneous groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional planning</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>Flexible blocks</td>
<td>Rigid periods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student–teacher interaction</td>
<td>Team-based learning</td>
<td>Different teacher every 40 to 50 minutes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nurturing/caring</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Team cohort group</td>
<td>Constantly shifting groups in separate classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>One adult advisor/mentor for 25 or fewer students</td>
<td>Guidance counselor for 300–600 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of guidance</td>
<td>Advisories on a daily or biweekly basis</td>
<td>Guidance once or twice a year</td>
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</table>
Al-Hazza and Bucher (2010) maintain that minority and immigrant middle school students may feel developmental and transitional pressures more acutely than majority students. As young adolescents develop a sense of identity and self-esteem, they also begin to develop a sense of social and cultural identity. Immigrant and minority students must try to merge their traditional or native culture with the majority culture to achieve ethnic solidarity. If, however, they feel a sense of cultural bereavement or a loss of cultural identity, they may become alienated from their parents and/or their peers. Culturally based misunderstandings and incongruities can also have a negative effect on student learning, especially during young adolescence.

Looking specifically at young adolescents of Arab descent, Al-Hazza and Bucher find that although these students have traditionally done well at school, they may also have feelings of depression and low self-esteem. After providing an introduction to Arabs and their history and culture, the authors outline some of the specific problems facing Arab American and Arab immigrant young adolescents, including negative perceptions of their religion and clothing, and the conflict between the individuality valued by the majority culture and the collective and authoritarian emphasis of Arab society. Finally, the authors suggest specific young adult books that educators can use to make connections across cultures and to eliminate stereotypes and negative views of the Arab culture.


We cannot remember how many times we have heard comments such as these. Table 1–1 pointed out many of the differences between junior high schools and middle schools. Now we want to look at a few of the middle school concepts in more detail. Throughout this book, we refer to and build on these basics in our discussions about what makes middle schools unique.
Developmentally Responsive

Middle schools provide 10- to 15-year-olds with developmentally appropriate educational experiences that emphasize the education and overall well-being of the learners. Working collaboratively, teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents address young adolescents’ developmental needs and ensure some degree of success for all learners. They recognize and address young adolescents’ developmental diversity as well as their cultural and gender differences. In turn, young adolescents know that educators value academic achievement.

Our students who are preparing to teach in the middle school sometimes ask, “How can teachers tell whether a middle school is developmentally responsive?” We tell them that the list of questions to ask is almost endless, but in essence, they can ask themselves whether all middle school experiences reflect young adolescent development. Examples of such questions include:

- Does the school’s written philosophy state that curricular, instructional, and environmental practices are based on young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial, and cognitive developmental characteristics?
- Do the school’s curricular and instructional practices reflect the unique nature and needs of young adolescents, rather than perceiving 10- to 15-year-olds as children or adolescents?
- Do the school’s administration, faculty, and staff have professional preparation in understanding young adolescent development and are they experts in teaching 10- to 15-year-olds?
- Does the school provide communities of learning where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for personal growth and cognitive development?
- Do the school’s policies and practices recognize and address young adolescents’ cultural and gender differences as well as their tremendous diversity in physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development?
- Does the school have functioning strategies to reengage families in the education of young adolescents?
- Does the school organization include cross-age grouping, alternatives to ability grouping and tracking, schools-within-a-school, and other organizational strategies that address young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development?

In addition to this brief list, you can consider other aspects of the school day to determine the developmental responsiveness of a school. See if the middle school (a) uses a wide range of instructional strategies in response to the variety of learning needs in the classroom (e.g., simulations, experiments, community-based learning, and cooperative learning); (b) implements an exploratory program so that students may expand and develop individual interests; (c) encourages continuous progress for each individual so that each learner may progress at a preferred pace and in a preferred learning style; and (d) emphasizes individual growth of young adolescents rather than comparison to peers. It is also important for middle school educators to recognize and address young adolescents’ cultural and gender differences
(as well as their sexual orientation) and to place emphasis on helping students develop positive and healthy cultural, gender, and sexual identities.

**High Expectations and Success for All Students**

You might question why we grouped “high expectations for all students” and “success for all students” together as qualities of a good middle school. We believe the two are not contradictory; in fact, effective middle school educators can ensure both to some degree.

To us, high expectations means more than having more difficult tests or more rigorous standards. Also, creating success for all students does not mean lower standards for academic achievement. Together they mean setting high standards and helping students meet those standards. *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2010) suggested that middle school educators should hold high expectations for all learners; in fact, students themselves should have high expectations for success. These high expectations promote positive attitudes and behaviors and motivate students to achieve; low expectations lead to alienation, discouragement, and a lack of effort. As a teacher, your expectations are quickly conveyed to young adolescents through your gestures, comments, and overall attitudes.

When setting high standards, you must keep in mind that young adolescents differ significantly: Not all will achieve the same degree of success, become school leaders, or win “end-of-the-year awards” for outstanding scholarship. Also, as suggested in *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (CCAD, 1989), a classic document in middle school education, educators should provide all young adolescents with the opportunity to succeed at least to some degree in all aspects of the middle school program.

As one seventh-grade teacher told us, “I try to help all of my students feel successful at something. None of my students should go home in the afternoon thinking he or she failed all day.” In setting high expectations and ensuring some degree of success, you must remember the developmental needs of 10- to 15-year-olds. Young adolescents have fragile self-esteem and are developing expectations for both behavior and academic achievement that may last a lifetime. As a middle school educator, you should constantly consider the effects of high expectations on self-esteem and make necessary adjustments.

**School Climate and Heterogeneous Learning Communities**

For a long time, American educators have tracked or grouped students on the basis of achievement level and academic ability (e.g., standardized achievement tests, teacher-made tests, and previous teachers’ recommendations). They have assumed that most students share essentially the same personal attributes and learner characteristics and, therefore, can be placed in a single homogeneous group. Unfortunately, some students who deviate from the norm because of things such as special needs; racial, cultural, religious, or gender differences; or conflicting perceptions of school have sometimes received an inadequate education because many educators have not been trained to teach mixed-ability groups of students.

In the previously mentioned classic report *Turning Points*, the CCAD (1989) characterized tracking as “one of the most destructive of current practices” (p. 14). The NMSA in its publication *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) also advocated more flexible organization
structures. It is clear that current thinking reflects the realization that homogeneous grouping has a deleterious effect on students’ self-esteem and on their feelings about their ability to achieve academically.

A positive middle school climate is safe, inviting, and caring; it promotes a sense of community and encourages learning (NMSA, 2010). As you might recall, this is one of the aspects that Mrs. Gillespie described to Ami Chen in the chapter’s opening scenario. Payne (2001) in *This We Believe . . . and Now We Must Act* states that a positive school climate includes community involvement; high daily attendance; positive attitudes of teachers, students, and parents; a sense of ownership and pride in one’s school; high degrees of participation in schoolwide and systemwide activities; positive media relations and coverage; and rigorous academic expectations for all students. As you will read in Chapter 9, a healthy school climate should be a “place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for students’ personal growth and intellectual development” (CCAD, 1989, p. 10).

One solution to the problem of unacceptably large schools and to students’ feeling of anonymity in overly large groups is to create smaller learning environments. These communities might be called *schools-within-a-school* or *houses* and might contain 125 to 150 students. A positive middle school climate, both in the whole school and in the smaller learning communities, provides opportunities for students to interact, to find meaning in schoolwork and relationships, and to feel a sense of recognition.

**One Adult Advocate for Each Student**

In addition to creating a positive school climate and small communities of learning, effective middle schools provide an adult advocate for each young adolescent. According to *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010), all adults in developmentally responsive middle schools serve as advocates for young adolescents. However, all students should have at least one adult who knows them well, genuinely cares for them, and supports their academic and personal development. This advocate should be of good character and should be knowledgeable about young adolescent development and middle school education. Although the advocate is not a counselor, he or she can identify behavioral changes in students that need to be considered by counselors, administrators, other teachers, and parents. This advocate can also act as the primary person with whom the family makes contact when communicating about the child. To assist with advocacy efforts, many schools provide advisory programs, home-based groups, and team-based mentorships, as well as comprehensive guidance and counseling efforts. The ultimate result should be that no student feels unknown or neglected. This is especially important for students in this developmental period and in larger middle schools (NMSA, 2010).

**Curriculum**

John Lounsbury (2009), basically the founder of the middle school movement, maintained that the middle school curriculum is more than its academic content; it is responsible for developing “the skills, dispositions, and habits of mind” (p. 35) that young adolescents will
need to succeed in the future. Young adolescents need a curriculum that is not a rehash of the elementary school and not only a preparation for the secondary school. The middle school curriculum needs to be uniquely designed to meet young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial, and cognitive developmental needs.

What should be in the curriculum of an effective middle school? Your answer will depend on whether you approach this question on a global basis or look at it in a more traditional, discipline-specific manner. Ideally, curriculum in an effective middle school reflects the interests, concerns, and thinking levels of young adolescents. More than being simply a place to review elementary content or preview secondary content, a responsive middle school should base its program content on young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial, and cognitive levels as well as on their need to achieve, to experience success, and to have continuous learning experiences. Although you must consider the content that students learned in the elementary school and the content that they will learn in the secondary school, you must also keep in mind the uniqueness of young adolescents.

Middle level students are more unlike one another (e.g., early maturers and late maturers, just to offer one example) than are their elementary and secondary school counterparts. Thus, an effective middle school curriculum must take into consideration varying rates of cognitive, physical, and psychosocial development as well as different motivational levels. Specifically, the middle school curriculum should

- emphasize developmentally appropriate physical, psychosocial, and cognitive skills for continued learning—skills associated with information literacy, including the collection of information in a quickly changing technological age; the organization and expression of ideas; and the evaluation of information and ideas;
- teach young adolescents about the universality of the human condition, giving special attention to the ways that people satisfy needs and seek personal fulfillment in various times and places;
- teach students that peoples’ differences are not a matter of right and wrong or inferior and superior and help students learn to recognize, accept, and celebrate differences in light of their developmental perceptions of themselves and others;
- instill in students an appreciation for and age-appropriate skills in artistic expression and aesthetic sensitivity;
- teach students to think systematically;
- work to help students improve their self-concept and have appropriate responses to cultural and gender diversity; and
- provide a balance among skills, academic content, and actual experiences.

As you will read in Chapters 4 and 5, This We Believe (NMSA, 2010) calls for a challenging, integrative, and exploratory middle school curriculum. By challenging, we mean curricular experiences that engage young adolescents, emphasize important ideas and skills, provide relevant experiences, and emphasize developmental responsiveness. The integrative dimensions help young adolescents make sense of life experiences, and include courses and units that are taught by individuals and teams and that integrate issues that are relevant to
the students. The exploratory components should allow students to discover their interests and skills and acquaint them with healthy leisure pursuits.

Turning Points (CCAD, 1989) recommended a common core of knowledge that teaches middle school students to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically and lawfully, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society. As an educator, you should allow students to participate actively in discovering and creating solutions to problems. You should also use integrating themes across curricular areas to help students see relationships rather than memorize disconnected facts. Students should learn to use coping skills such as collaboration, problem solving, and conflict resolution. By emphasizing ethical and lawful behavior, you can expose young adolescents to the concept of social justice, the value of citizenship, compassion, regard for human worth and dignity, and appreciation of diversity.

It would be wonderful if everyone accepted these recommendations as the core curriculum for any middle school. Realistically, however, most educators continue to consider the core curriculum as language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. This will be true as long as test-makers continue to design tests that place priority on these four curricular areas and as long as teachers feel pressure (from administrators, parents, and the overall community) for young adolescents to excel in these four areas.

Instruction

If curriculum is “what is taught,” then instruction is “how things are taught.” Your perspectives and instructional strategies will be very important to young adolescents. When you are planning instruction in a middle school, you must

- recognize and accept differences in young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial, and cognitive patterns and rates of development by setting developmentally appropriate curriculum goals;
- place emphasis on thinking and on learning how to learn rather than focusing only on isolated skills and content;
- view guidance, by both counselors and teacher-advisors, as an essential component of middle school education;
- place value on gender and cultural differences and provide classroom organization and instructional approaches that recognize these differences;
- provide curricular materials that enhance young adolescents’ acceptance of self and others and that enable them to accept differences and similarities among people;
- promote integrated curricular approaches so that young adolescents will perceive relationships among and between curricular areas;
- allow young adolescents to make significant choices and decisions about grouping, organization, curricular, and management practices;
- ensure some degree of success for all young adolescents in all aspects of the school program;
■ recognize the importance of self-esteem and its influence on academic achievement, socialization, and overall personal development; and

■ promote heterogeneous grouping and seek other alternatives to homogeneous ability grouping and tracking.

There is no single best way to teach all young adolescents. Instead, perceptive teachers must use a variety of teaching and learning approaches. Learning inventories and questions posed by young adolescents, as well as interactive and reflective techniques, serve as ways to determine what students know and how they learn most effectively. As you work with young adolescents, you will undoubtedly be able to name other instructional techniques that work for you and your students.

Assessment

In Chapter 8, you will read in considerable detail about assessment in middle schools; however, because of the importance of this often controversial topic, it deserves to be mentioned here. Although some educators (as well as students and parents) might wish that the current emphasis on testing would go away, the call for high-stakes assessments may become even more intense. Faulkner and Cook (2006) found that although middle school teachers acknowledge the importance of student-centered instructional strategies, standardized tests dictate more teacher-centered instruction and “seem to drive the curriculum” (p. 1) away from the tenets of the middle school philosophy.

However, even with all the warnings about assessment, middle school educators must provide assessment and evaluation that reflect young adolescents’ development. For example, cooperative learning, with assessment based on both group and individual performance, capitalizes on the need for peer approval and promotes both academic learning and the development of social skills. Educators can emphasize what students have accomplished rather than label them as failures in reaching some arbitrary standard. Furthermore, they should help students and parents understand how a student’s performance corresponds with national or state norms and how such information can be useful when planning careers and future education. Still, assessment should not be the dominating concern during the middle school years (NMSA, 2010).

Organization—Interdisciplinary Teams

For too many years, teachers taught in isolation; they planned for classes, collected teaching materials, decided on methods of teaching, and decided on means of assessment. Working alone, they did not know other teachers’ successes, failures, and methods. Each teacher had her or his “own little world” in the classroom and taught a group of students without the benefit of praise or constructive criticism from other teachers. Naturally, because teachers never planned together, there was little curricular integration. Students went from class to class without seeing any connections among the subjects they were studying. They were taken to the school library for isolated “library lessons” that had no connection to the topics studied in their classes.
In an attempt to address the problems that resulted from teaching in isolation, middle schools have adopted interdisciplinary team organization (ITO). ITO, or interdisciplinary team teaching, is an organization pattern in which two or more teachers from different curricular areas share the same students, schedule, and adjoining areas of the school. With this integrated approach, teachers look beyond their own classrooms and view the middle school as a resource-based learning environment where school librarians and other teachers in the related domains join with core team members to provide active learning experiences for young adolescents, who now see relationships among the subjects that they study.

ITO also affects social bonding, or the daily interactions at school during which students value school and develop a sense of belonging as well as a sense of competence and emotional well-being. With an improved self-concept and a sense of school membership, students show improvements in social skills and academic achievement, behavior, and peer relationships (Wallace, 2007).

We will look at interdisciplinary instructional strategies in Chapters 5 and 6; however, in this chapter, we want to examine the organizational qualities of interdisciplinary teaming. Teachers on an interdisciplinary team plan together and work to draw connections among their subjects. Although these teachers may sometimes teach together, it is not required. However, what is required is that members of an interdisciplinary team engage in purposeful efforts to integrate learning from normally disparate disciplines.

With common planning times and a shared group of students, effective interdisciplinary teams include a balance in the teachers’ expertise, age, sex, and race; team leaders with specific responsibilities; an established team decision-making process (e.g., goals, grouping, scheduling, homework, and discipline); agreed-on procedures to assess students’ strengths and weaknesses; the development of a team identity; flexibility in student and master schedules; the support of school and district administration for the teaming concept and team efforts; sufficient time for team planning; adequate staff development; and team members who are proficient in using human relations skills.

**Guidance and Counseling**

As young adolescents grow and develop, acquire new interests and new peer groups, probe boundaries and test limits, explore a rapidly changing world via the Internet, and react to the advertising that bombards them, they need advocates to guide them. Integrated into the total middle school program, effective middle school guidance and counseling programs provide help that is specifically planned and implemented to address the ever-changing needs of 10- to 15-year-olds and that helps students maximize personal growth, acquire positive skills and values, set appropriate career goals, and realize their academic and social potential (Moore-Thomas, 2009). Rather than occurring only 1 hour a week or when a student requests an appointment with the counselor, effective middle school guidance and counseling programs are integrated throughout the school day in daily interactions between educators and students and in planned advisory programs.

Effective advisor–advisee programs (whether called advisories, teacher advisories, or home-based guidance) share several attributes: a designated staff member responsible for a small group of students; regularly scheduled meetings of the advisory group; ongoing individual conferences between the advisor and the advisees during the school year; administrative
support for advisory activities; parent contact with the school through the student’s advisor; and, most importantly, an adult advocate for each young adolescent. All faculty members serve as advisors. They plan and implement advisory programs, assist advisees in monitoring their academic progress, provide times for students to share their concerns, refer advisees to appropriate resources, maintain appropriate records, and encourage the advisee’s cognitive and psychosocial growth. They also meet with individual students about problems; offer career information and guidance; discuss academic, personal, and family problems; address moral or ethical issues; and discuss multicultural and intergroup relations.

School counselors support teachers in advisory programs, demonstrate and conduct classroom group activities, and offer both one-on-one and small-group counseling sessions for students as needed. They sponsor peer mediation and peer tutoring programs and share their expertise with teams and individual teachers, often serving as resource persons in classroom activities. They also meet with parents, usually in conjunction with teams or an individual teacher (NMSA, 2010). In a study to determine what young adolescents expect from a middle school guidance program, Moore-Thomas (2009) found that 35% of the students saw a counselor about a problem related to social and emotional well-being (e.g., getting along with peers or adults, understanding feelings, solving personal problems) during the past academic year.

Family and Community Partnerships

Another important part of being a middle school teacher is establishing good relationships with adults outside the school. Parental involvement declines progressively during the elementary school years. In fact, by the middle school years, the home–school connection is often abandoned. Yet, although young adolescents need greater autonomy, they rarely want a complete break from their parents and families.

One hallmark of effective middle schools is parent, family, and community partnerships that work to improve the education and overall lives of young adolescents. Research studies (NMSA, 2010) link the involvement of both family members and other adults in the community with higher levels of student achievement, improved student behavior, and greater overall support for schools. Home–school partnerships should include regular two-way communication between home and school; promotion and support of parenting skills; active parental participation in student learning through a variety of activities; and parental involvement in decision making at school. Successful middle schools promote family involvement by sponsoring parent education programs, creating and maintaining links between home and school, initiating volunteer programs, and establishing coordinated home–school learning experiences (NMSA, 2010) In Chapter 10, you will be able to read about these partnerships in more detail and explore ways to reengage parents and other adults in the education of young adolescents.

Inclusion and Inclusive Practices

Middle school educators have a professional responsibility to provide appropriate educational experiences for students with disabilities. Since 1975, when Public Law 94-142 came into being, terms such as disability, inclusion, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and
eligibility have become part of the vocabulary of most educators. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), coupled with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, have presented special challenges as schools attempt to provide all students with a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Struggling to make special education teachers “highly qualified” (Kinney, 2006, p. 30), schools must also must provide all students with disabilities access to all academic areas, give them the support they need to succeed, provide a variety of services, and meet the challenge of making adequate yearly progress (Kinney, 2006).

Some teachers are apprehensive about providing effective inclusionary practices and question whether students with disabilities have the skills to master regular classroom course content (Santoli & McClurg, 2008). However, most middle school educators are willing to make adaptations for students with disabilities and feel they have the skills to make such adaptations (Santoli & McClurg, 2008). Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Diming, and Peterson (2006) found that when students with learning disabilities (LDs) become actively engaged in the learning process and have access to materials other than textbook readings, they can learn relatively complex material as well as average-ability (without-LD) students. Instead of relying on lectures and whole-class discussions, teachers must provide materials that focus less on rote memorization; that are more comprehensible and accessible than textbooks; and that use a variety of instructional strategies that allow students to interact with their peers and the teacher during the lesson.

In contrast to the subject-centered approach of the junior high school, the student-centered emphasis of the middle school lends itself to the promotion of inclusion. In Theory into Practice 1–1 Patterson, Connolly, and Ritter (2009) demonstrate how teachers used differentiated instruction in a sixth-grade inclusion class to meet the needs of all students.

When teachers in an inclusion math class at Spartan Middle School found that 89% of the students “received some type of accommodation through 504 plans, IEPs, or Access for All Abilities plans” (p. 47), they realized that they would need to change their teaching format. They decided to use differentiated instruction and small groups with collaborative group instructional activities and assigned group roles. Their instruction followed a model of: teach new material, review/remediate basic skills, review new material, utilize a computer-based program to review new material, and expose students to upcoming material. Using the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test throughout the year, they found that “78% of all the students in the class and 81% of the original 16 students made improvements on the test for the entire year” (p. 51). When the teachers surveyed the students, “87% . . . reported [that] they felt they were learning more, 87% felt more confident to speak up in class, and 92% felt they received more individualized attention” (p. 51).

Directions for Effective Middle Schools

Effective Middle Schools

There are several reports that form the basis for effective middle schools. The CCAD issued two impressive reports on improving the education of young adolescents. The first and classic report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (CCAD, 1989), provided a comprehensive examination of the condition of young adolescents and the extent to which schools address their needs. The more current report, *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century* (CCAD, 1996), examined a similar topic. Finally, *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2010), the NMSA's official position paper on effective middle level schools, is one of the most influential documents on improving middle school education. Table 1–2 provides a look at the themes of these documents.

Keeping Current with Technology 1–2 lists some Internet sites that you can visit to learn more about other organizations and how some schools have implemented effective middle school concepts.

Table 1–2  Themes of Selected Reports on Middle School Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century (CCAD, 1989)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Creating a community of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teaching a core of common knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensuring success for all students</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Empowering teachers and administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Preparing teachers for the middle grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Improving academic performance through better health and fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Connecting schools with communities</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century (CCAD, 1996)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reengaging families with their adolescent children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Educating young adolescents for a changing world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Promoting the health of adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strengthening communities with adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Redirecting the pervasive power of the media</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Leading toward shared responsibility for young adolescents</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents (NMSA, 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Providing developmentally responsive educational programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Challenging all students with high expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Empowering students by providing them with knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Providing appropriately relevant and challenging learning opportunities for all students</td>
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</table>
Keeping Current with Technology 1–2

Visit a few online middle schools such as the following. Then, using the information about the characteristics and themes of good middle schools, find evidence of these concepts on the schools’ Web sites. What can you find that shows that these are middle schools rather than junior high schools?

- Jordan Middle School, Palo Alto, California
  http://www.jordan.pausd.org/
- Holland Middle School, Holland, New York
  http://www.holland.wnyric.org/11261058151546107/site/default.asp
- Meads Mill Middle School, Northville, Michigan
  http://www.northville.k12.mi.us/meadsmill/mmill.htm
- Port Chester Middle School, Port Chester, New York
  http://ms.portchesterschools.org/home.aspx
- Raymond B. Stewart Middle School, Zephyrhills, Florida
  http://rbsms.pasco.k12.fl.us/RBSMS/Home.html
- James Blair Middle School, Norfolk, Virginia
  http://ww2.nps.k12.va.us/education/school/school.php?sectiondetailid=56/
- Westbury Middle School, Westbury, New York
  http://westburschools.org/page.asp?id=85&name=westburymiddleschool

The following sites contain general information about middle schools. Identify the information from each of these sites that you believe supports the development of effective middle schools. Does the information repeat the Carnegie themes or does it expand them?

- California League of Middle Schools
  http://clms.net/
- MiddleWeb, a Web site “exploring the challenges of middle school reform”
  http://www.middleweb.com/
- National Middle School Association
  http://www.nmsa.org/
- New England League of Middle Schools
  http://www.nelms.org/

In a report titled What Makes Middle Schools Work (Wilcox & Angelis, 2007), researchers examined higher-performing middle schools to determine what made them so successful. They found five elements: trusting and respectful relationships; social and emotional well-being for all students; teamwork with collaboration among teachers, administrators, students, and community members; evidence-based programs and decision making; and a shared vision of the mission and goals used to raise student achievement. These elements must be present throughout the school, including staff selection, administration, instruction, guidance, assessment, and interventions.

Calling for a revitalization of education systems, Erb (2009) suggested improving schools at the community level by looking at the dropout rate. Instead of a single cause, factors include student skill deficits, unsafe conditions (anything from bullying to a location near a toxic dump), irrelevant curriculum, disengaging instruction, a climate of disrespect.
or distrust, outdated technologies, and disjointed learning experiences. By addressing these causes, educators will begin to improve schools.

Using a global perspective, Jackson (2009) suggested that middle schools should enter the global era. “The forces of globalization have and will continue to create a vastly different set of challenges and opportunities for today’s middle school students” (pp. 6–7). Jackson maintained that students need a new set of skills that “includes but goes beyond reading, mathematics, and science” (p. 7). Gaining a deep knowledge about others’ cultures and communication skills will prove beneficial to success in the 21st century. Global competencies, according to Jackson, include

- using creative and critical thinking skills and multiple perspectives to identify, define, analyze, and solve problems;
- understanding the interconnectedness and interdependency of international systems;
- developing “literacy for the 21st century” (p. 7), with proficiency in English and one or more other world languages;
- collaborating effectively in “diverse cultural situations” (p. 7);
- using technology and digital media;
- identifying, evaluating, and organizing opportunities to live and work in a global setting;
- making healthy decisions based on a global environment; and
- making decisions and choices to contribute to a “sustainable world” (p. 7).

**Elemiddle Schools**

While American education in general struggles with the challenge of increasing achievement for all students, middle schools have experienced some of the growing pains that young adolescent students often feel. A recent report found that only 10% of middle school students are “on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school” (ACT, 2008, p. 1). In addition, student achievement results have been flat, especially in literacy, with a gap in performance between minority and majority students. Have middle schools put “too much emphasis on the bottom line while losing sight of core values” (Erb, 2009, p. 2)? Or have they become “too child-centered” and failed to help students achieve academically? Is it time to explore other school organization patterns such as K–8 schools?

Facing problems such as poor attendance, low academic achievement, and discipline problems in middle schools, some urban school divisions, including those of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York, have begun to include young adolescents in K–8 or elemiddle schools rather than in separate middle schools (Viadero, 2008). However, research studies show mixed results. Byrnes and Ruby (2007) found that the new Philadelphia K–8 schools did not produce significant gains in student achievement. Other researchers questioned the wisdom of exposing young children to the culture of seventh- and eighth-grade students (Viadero, 2008). Although Hough (2009) presented findings from a national database on elemiddle and middle schools, he also noted (2005) the problems of comparing the two formats because not every 6–8 school is a true middle school, nor is every K–8 school an elemiddle school that implements best practices for middle-level learners.
Calling for educators to revisit and recommit to effective middle school practices, Lounsbury (2009) maintained that the general public’s perception of the middle school is based largely on the writings of critics who fail to distinguish between the “middle school concept” and the “middle school.” Calling a school a *middle school* does not mean that the school has adopted and implemented essential middle school concepts. Thus, researchers must look at true middle schools when discussing middle-level education. Case Study 1–1 looks at a school that is examining what it means to be a middle school.

### Case Study 1–1

**Implementing Middle School Concepts**

The members of the site-based management team at Oakwood Middle School decided that although the school had some effective student-centered programs, more needed to be done before Oakwood could accurately be called a middle school. The team agreed to study publications, such as *Turning Points* (CCAD, 1989), *Great Transitions* (CCAD, 1996), and *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) to find some recommendations. Some of the staff even downloaded parts of *Today’s Middle Level Educator*, a podcast series from the NMSA, and others visited Web sites for outstanding middle schools to check their curriculum listings. But when they made a list of all the recommendations in these resources, some skepticism arose. Clarence Bates, a sixth-grade teacher, shook his head and declared, “There’s too much here. Why even bother when we know we’ll never be able to do everything they recommend?” But Maurice Kinessi, a guidance counselor, countered: “Can’t we still be a good middle school without doing it all?”

After a lively—and sometimes quite heated—discussion, the members of the site-based management team agreed that giving teachers too many implementation plans at one time might result in only halfhearted efforts that would not lead to substantial, long-lasting changes. Instead, they decided to hold school meetings to involve as many teachers as possible, to discuss changes and issues of concern, and to attempt to set an agenda for change. The team, with the help of the teachers, would try to address concerns and problems, set some goals, and develop a long-range plan. The idea would be to avoid change just for the sake of change and to avoid making too many changes at one time.

Although the planning took almost a year, the administrators and teachers at Oakwood finally decided on a course of action in the form of a 3-year plan. The first year would focus on interdisciplinary teaming because they realized that much progress could be made during team meetings. In the second year, they would continue the work on the teams but add an emphasis on building effective advisor–advisee programs. If all worked well, by the third year, the school’s focus would shift to developing exploratory programs. During all 3 years, an emphasis on “making the overall school climate more positive” would be paramount. The administrators and teachers also agreed to revisit the 3-year plan periodically to assess their progress and redirect their efforts if necessary.
Questions for Consideration
1. What things should be present at Oakwood for the school to really be a middle school?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the items emphasized in each of the 3 years? Why or why not? What, if anything, would you change?
3. What other resources would you suggest the team consider?

Teaching in the Middle School: Questions to Consider
If you are reading this book, you may be a preservice teacher educator, wondering if middle school teaching is really for you, or an experienced in-service teacher, looking to find new ways to work with young adolescents. No matter which category you are in, as you read the following sections, ask yourself if you have the personal and professional commitment to teach in the middle school and to provide quality educational experiences to young adolescents.

What Are Young Adolescents Really Like?
Ami Chen, our fictitious student teacher in the chapter’s opening scenario, mentioned the tremendous diversity of young adolescents. You could say that young adolescents are so diverse that they are difficult to describe. But, remember—they are caught between childhood and adolescence. As one of our students stated, “They are old enough to find their bus home, yet young enough that we [teachers] can still influence them.” Chapter 2 will provide a more detailed examination of young adolescents and the challenges and issues many of them face.

What Does Middle School Teaching Require?
The most important quality teachers in the middle grades can bring to their classrooms is their commitment to the young adolescents they teach. Without this commitment, there is little substantive progress for either teachers or students. We agree with McEwin and Dickinson (2001) that middle school teachers need to bring a sincere commitment to teaching and nurturing young adolescents. To us, middle school teaching requires

- a genuine commitment to teach young adolescents in the middle school;
- knowledge of the curricular area(s);
knowledge of young adolescents, their development, and their diversity; and

- knowledge and expertise in essential middle school concepts.

Please notice that we made “a genuine commitment to teach young adolescents” our first priority. That was intentional. If you want to be an effective middle school teacher, you should be committed to young adolescents. As This We Believe (NMSA, 2010) points out, this commitment will be significant in determining the effectiveness of the middle school and its ultimate success in addressing the needs of young adolescents.

What exactly does this mean? First, you have to make a conscious choice to teach young adolescents. Just as you know the subject that you teach, you have to understand the developmental uniqueness of young adolescents. But more than that, you should enjoy being with 10- to 15-year-olds and should understand the culture of this ever-changing age group. You should be sensitive to individual differences and make sound educational decisions based on young adolescents’ needs, interests, and special abilities. Be prepared to serve as a role model; your behavior can be as influential as the curriculum you teach. In your curriculum, provide your students with a rigorous and relevant education based on their developmental needs (NMSA, 2010).

Don’t take a job in a middle school simply as a stopgap until you can find a teaching position in a high school. “I’m just teaching in this middle school until I can get a science job at the high school,” one teacher told us. Although she had a firm grasp of the science content, she had little understanding of young adolescents and middle school education. As a result, she was unhappy and her students were frustrated.

As a middle school educator, you need professional preparation in middle school education, including field experiences in exemplary middle schools. Having said that, we are realistic enough to know that not all teachers can be trained specifically for middle schools. Some teachers will be trained for either elementary or secondary schools and then will work toward middle school certification. We know of many teachers like this who teach in middle school and who are excellent teachers. However, they chose to teach at the middle school level and are not waiting for another teaching job to become available. We applaud the efforts of these dedicated teachers.

When one bright, enthusiastic young woman in our middle school teacher education program received her practicum placement in a seventh-grade class, we could tell that she was excited as well as a bit skeptical about teaching young adolescents, as was the fictitious Ami Chen. Although she was open to the experience, we did not think she was totally convinced that middle school teaching was for her. After the practicum, she sheepishly admitted that she had decided to pursue early childhood education. Although our middle school teacher preparation program had lost an excellent teacher candidate, we congratulated her on her decision and were glad that she had found where she wanted to be. We were also glad that middle school education would not have a teacher who preferred to be elsewhere. We think that teachers who are most successful with young adolescents

- want to teach and work with students in this age group regardless of the grade configuration;
- are genuinely caring and concerned about the students’ welfare;
- have high expectations for behavior and achievement;
Part I Understanding Middle Schools and Young Adolescents

- understand the culture of 10- to 15-year-olds;
- serve as advocates—not excusing bad behavior or poor choices but willing to help students learn from their behaviors and choices;
- know the subject that they are teaching; and
- believe in and support basic middle school concepts even in an elementary setting.

Undoubtedly, many other characteristics exist, but if you have these qualities, you should make a good middle school teacher. Care to join our team?

Closing Remarks

Middle schools are maturing and developing into schools where curricular, organizational, teaching, environmental, and guidance practices reflect the developmental and instructional needs of young adolescents. Educators have begun to understand the early adolescence developmental period and have implemented effective middle school practices. However, although the goals set forth in many middle school documents are in sight in many schools, other schools are facing a long and perhaps difficult journey. Fortunately, most middle school educators are working toward the same major goal: to improve the lives and educational experiences of young adolescents.

Suggested Readings


Heilbronner, N. N. (2009). Jumpstarting Jill—Strategies to nurture talented girls in your science classroom. *Gifted Child Today, 32*(1), 46–54. This excellent article should be required reading for all science teachers, especially those interested in involving girls in science achievement.


Developing Your Portfolio

Chapter 1: Middle Schools Today
Concepts and Teaching

The following are some activities that you might complete to add documentation to your professional teaching portfolio.

NMSA Standard 2 Middle Level Philosophy and School Organization:
Middle level teacher candidates understand the major concepts, principles, theories, and research underlying the philosophical foundations of developmentally responsive middle level programs and schools, and they work successfully within these organizational components.

Idea 1
Visit two or three middle schools that have implemented middle school concepts discussed in Chapter 1. Record your findings on the extent to which the schools have successfully implemented the middle school concepts. Prepare a comparison chart showing (a) each school’s specific middle school concepts, (b) the degree of success each school has experienced, and (c) the middle school concepts still to be implemented. (Knowledge)

Idea 2
Consider your school experiences in Grades 6 to 8 (Grades 7 to 9 if you attended a junior high school) and write a two- to three-page paper comparing your experiences and what Chapter 1 suggests contemporary developmentally responsive middle schools should do or be like. Explain which grade has the best practices. Are you a middle school advocate, a critic, or a little of both? In your paper, explain what you specifically like or dislike about the middle school and its unique concepts. (Dispositions)

Idea 3
During your professional visits to middle schools (e.g., observations, visits, practica, or student teaching), what have you done to promote the middle school concept? For example, did you participate on an interdisciplinary team, work to promote a positive learning environment, prepare a developmentally responsive integrated or interdisciplinary lesson or unit plan, work with an advisory program, or prepare and teach an exploratory lesson? If possible, enhance your documentation with evaluations or performance checklists that were completed by your cooperating teacher, university supervisor, or a school administrator. (Performance)