New to This Edition

First of all, this book has a new title, *Introduction to Middle Level Education*, rather than *Introduction to Middle School*. This new title represents the most recent philosophy and research of the Association for Middle Level Education, formerly the National Middle School Association. The point is this: it doesn’t particularly matter what the grade level configuration of the school is that houses young adolescents, as long as the focus is on the unique characteristics and needs of 10- to 15-year-olds! This text offers a contemporary and comprehensive body of knowledge while speaking directly to teacher candidates in a voice that invites them into today’s middle level classrooms. The third edition is a compelling look at a variety of current issues and topics affecting young adolescents, their teachers, and their schools, including discussions of 21st century knowledge and skill requirements such as global awareness, information literacy, and ethical responsibility. Also addressed are new approaches to physical, emotional, and academic safety in the face of the current societal context that can’t be ignored, including two significant challenges involving bullying and childhood obesity, which are both increasing at alarming rates.

And yet despite all the changes both students and teachers face, the developmental needs of young adolescents remain predictable. Relevant and challenging curriculum, engaging instruction, ongoing assessment that is growth-promoting, developmental responsiveness, and strategies for creating and maintaining a positive and productive learning environment—all of these and other vital components of middle level education must be firmly in place.

To help prepare teachers who will be effective facilitators of learning, the following features are new to this edition:

- **eText Access** As a Pearson etext*, this edition includes embedded access to websites and video features that invite readers to explore the personal stories of middle level teachers and students, as well as numerous resources that are valuable to teaching and learning.

- **Association for Middle Level Education Teacher Preparation Standards** The 2012 AMLE video standards are linked to chapter content throughout the text. Please read them carefully and think about how they apply to you as a future teacher.

- **This We Believe** The 16 tenets of effective schools for young adolescents are emphasized throughout the text. In addition, each chapter begins with a pertinent quote from *This We Believe*.

- **Goals for Young Adolescent Development** (*This We Believe*) The 13 goals for young adolescent development as stated in *This We Believe* are prominent in each chapter as the content addresses them. These goals call for young adolescents to:

* *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (2010). Reprinted with permission from the Association of Middle Level Education, formerly National Middle School Association.
• Become actively aware of the larger world, asking significant and relevant questions about the world and wrestling with big ideas and questions for which there may not be one right answer.

• Be able to think rationally and critically and express thought clearly.

• Read deeply to independently gather, assess, and interpret information from a variety of sources and read avidly for enjoyment and lifelong learning.

• Use digital tools to explore, communicate, and collaborate with the world and learn from the rich and varied resources available.

• Be a good steward of the earth and its resources and a wise and intelligent consumer of the wide array of goods and services available.

• Understand and use the major concepts, skills, and tools of inquiry in the areas of health and physical education, language arts, world languages, mathematics, natural and physical sciences, and the social sciences.

• Explore music, art, and careers and recognize their importance to personal growth and learning.

• Develop his or her strengths, particular skills, talents, or interests and have an emerging understanding of his or her potential contributions to society and to personal fulfillment.

• Recognize, articulate, and make responsible ethical decisions concerning his or her own health and wellness needs.

• Respect and value the diverse ways people look, speak, think, and act within the immediate community and around the world.

• Develop the interpersonal and social skills needed to learn, work, and play with others harmoniously and confidently.

• Assume responsibility for his or her own actions and be cognizant of and ready to accept obligations for the welfare of others.

• Understand local, national, and global civic responsibilities and demonstrate active citizenship through participation in endeavors that serve and benefit those larger communities.

• **Common Core State Standards** An emphasis on the Common Core State Standards that will profoundly influence teaching and learning in middle level schools is prominent throughout and includes a valuable Q&A feature addressing the development and implementation of the standards.

• **The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander** Extensive coverage of bullying, those affected by it, and ways to both prevent and respond to it are included in Chapter 4 as we address the societal context of middle level education.

• **Emphasis on the Development of Social Consciousness and Responsibility** Early adolescence is the ideal time to help students learn about the world outside their classroom, along with the realities and needs of people both in their neighborhoods and around the world. Helping young adolescents both develop
a sensitivity to others and the desire to serve them, all the while learning from their experiences, is emphasized in Chapters 6 and 9.

- **Social Media** Each chapter contains references to the ever-burgeoning technology for teaching and learning, with increased emphasis on cybercitizenship and the avoidance of cyberbullying and sexting.

- **Changing Demographics** The third edition features increased emphasis on how society and classrooms in America are changing in terms of race and ethnicity and the challenges of meeting the needs of all students, particularly those for whom English is not the first language.

- **Virtual Field Experiences** Throughout the third edition Pearson etext* readers view videos of teacher interviews and room tours, student interviews, classroom lessons, a middle school tour, a principal discussing what she looks for in teachers, and a variety of stories about teachers making a difference.

- **PowerPoint Presentations** In the Instructor’s Manual, each chapter is detailed in PowerPoint slides for classroom use.

*These enhancements are only available in the Pearson eText, and will not be available in third-party eTexts such as CourseSmart or Kindle versions. To learn more about the Pearson eText, please go to www.pearsonhighered.com/etextbooks.

**In Addition**
This content-rich, reader-friendly text presents a comprehensive introduction to the world of young adolescents and middle level education. The author, an experienced middle school teacher, examines the full range of middle level topics, including the development and diversity of young adolescent learners and the societal context of their lives; preparation and practice of middle level teachers; middle level curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and practices for creating and maintaining a positive, productive learning environment. Timely topics addressed include the impact of technology on young adolescents; the dilemmas surrounding English language learners in the classroom; verbal, physical, and cyberbullying that may occur among students; health issues such as adolescent obesity and substance abuse; and the middle level teacher’s responsibilities to differentiate to meet the needs of all learners.

In addition to the components that are new to this edition, the third edition of *Introduction to Middle Level Education* includes:

- **Activities.** Following each chapter are a variety of activities. Group Activities require readers to work cooperatively to accomplish particular tasks. Individual Activities give readers opportunities to explore middle level concepts on their own. The Personal Journal section asks readers to reflect on their own experiences.

- **Glossary.** An evolving common vocabulary among educators allows us to talk about our profession with mutual understanding. Some words and phrases have specialized meanings and nuances when used within a middle level education context. Many of these terms are explained in the glossary.
For instructors. The following are provided electronically: author suggestions for exploration of text content, PowerPoint slide presentations for each chapter, and a chapter-by-chapter test bank.

**Organization**

This book includes 11 chapters. Separating the body of knowledge of middle level education into discrete chapters seems arbitrary, but it is efficient to do so. Given the limits of the written word, I have chosen to organize this book in a traditional way. Chapter 1 focuses on the history of middle level education and the elements that have given it legitimacy and theoretical grounding. Chapter 2 is an overview of student physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and character development. Chapter 3 looks at the diversity among our students from cultural, to socioeconomic, to learning styles, and more. Chapter 4 addresses the societal context of middle level education. Chapter 5 delves into the structures of people, time, and place, including teaming, advisory, flexible schedules, and classroom/school facilities. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the middle level, and Chapter 9 details all levels of planning for instruction. Chapter 10 deals with the important topic of creating and maintaining a positive and productive learning environment. Chapter 11 explores some of the realities of teaching young adolescents, the relationships that are so crucial to successful teaching and learning, and the critical issues of transitioning into and out of middle grades.

**Author’s Note**

*Introduction to Middle Level Education* models the ideals of middle level education in that it is both academically rigorous and developmentally responsive—academically rigorous because it includes a comprehensive body of knowledge, and developmentally responsive because it approaches these topics without intimidating or boring the reader. I am an experienced middle level teacher speaking to other teachers whether they are teacher candidates completing bachelor or master degrees; career changers preparing to take their skills and backgrounds into the middle level classroom; elementary or high school teachers getting ready for the challenges and joys of spending their days with young adolescents; or teachers who desire to dig deeper into their profession, seeking insights and encouragement. Writing a book allows me only to speak, not actually converse. My hope is that readers will talk to each other about middle level education, prompted by my side of the “conversation.”

Teachers are my heroes. They make the minute-by-minute decisions on which student success and well-being depend. If knowledge is power, and I believe it is, the more we understand about the nature of early adolescence, with both its documented predictability and its absurd volatility, the more prepared we are to make the relatively insignificant, as well as life-changing, decisions. Yes, experience is the best teacher. However, opportunities to read, reflect, discuss, and speculate will sharpen our focus on, and widen our peripheral vision of, middle level education and all that is involved in teaching young adolescents. This book provides such opportunities.
The tenets of *Turning Points* (1989), *Turning Points 2000*, and *This We Believe*; the underpinnings of the Association for Middle Level Education; and the AMLE teacher preparation standards permeate every page. This strong conceptual foundation focuses us squarely on students and learning. As a unique phase of human development, early adolescence deserves continued concentrated research and study that will further deepen our understanding of how best to meet the needs of the students in our charge. The third edition of *Introduction to Middle Level Education* addresses the issues of teaching and learning with young adolescents in commonsense ways that infuse practicality with theory.

This book is a work of nontraditional scholarship—scholarly by way of knowledge base and nontraditional by way of personalization. I believe I best serve teachers, in whatever career stage, by speaking in first person from both a research base and my own and others’ experiences in the classroom. I welcome all readers to the adventure of exploring the landscape of middle level education!

**Acknowledgments**

I want to thank the teachers, students, and principals who allowed me to wander the halls of their schools, interview the people involved in middle level education, and take pictures of teachers and young adolescents in action. My appreciation goes to Jesse White, Jermaine Joyner, Sadie Fox, Keith Richardson, Jennifer Kinnett, Joey Huber, Sarah Gardener, Traci Peters, Deirdre McGrew—all wonderful teachers. Also thanks to these wonderful young adolescents and their parents: Zach Hall, DeVante Mackins, Kemaurye McLean, Gabe Hernandez, Zaira Ortiz, Andrew Burgess, Sierria McGinnis, Taylor Szucs, and Nikolaus Gunawan. For their assistance, I thank Tonya Farbo and Audrey Devine at Belmont Middle School, and Becky Ford and Cristi Bostic at Cramerton Middle School.

Special thanks go to my editor, Meredith Fossell, and production manager, Cynthia DeRocco, for their guidance and prompt responses to my questions and requests. My thanks go as well to Raghavi Khullar and the staff of Cenveo Publisher Services. I appreciate the time and suggestions given by four reviewers: Suzanne A. Gulledge of UNC-Chapel Hill; Kim K. Ruebel of Western Carolina University; Randall Stowe of University of South Carolina-Aiken; and Nance S. Wilson of Lourdes University.
Middle Level Education History and Philosophy
Vision has been viewed as an acute sense of the possible. Research and exemplary practice over the past four decades have provided middle level educators with a strong sense of what is, indeed, possible in the education of young adolescents. Idealistic and uplifting, the resulting vision reflects our best knowledge and lights the way toward achieving a truly successful middle level school for every young adolescent.

This We Believe, p. 27.

Dear Future Middle Level Teacher,

Teaching middle level learners is a career filled with exhilaration, challenge, day-to-day (and sometimes life-altering) decisions that affect young adolescents, and a complete absence of boredom. Sound intriguing? If so, this may be your destiny!

Middle level education is referred to in a variety of ways—middle level settings, middle grades education, middle school, schools in the middle, and so on. By whatever name, we are referring to a philosophy of educating young adolescents that is different from elementary philosophy, high school philosophy, or junior high philosophy. This philosophy calls for us to recognize the unique needs of young adolescents and meet them in developmentally appropriate ways.

Young adolescents are eager to grow up, but often frightened by the process. They sense that their bodies are changing due to puberty, and they experience confusing and sometimes conflicting emotions. One minute they may be playing with action figures or Barbie dolls, and the next crying over what a girlfriend or boyfriend supposedly said at lunch. One minute they may appear totally self-absorbed, and the next give away all of their allowance to a worthy cause. The unique set of contradictions displayed by kids in the middle—their curiosity, their quirky ways of expressing themselves, and their determination that life should be fair—both intrigue and inspire middle level teachers.

Middle level education is not for everyone. In fact, your friends may not understand the appeal of spending your days with young adolescents; they may cringe when they recall this stage of life. But that’s exactly the point.
Kids 10 to 15 years old need us to remember the difficult times, as well as the
good times, and determine to make this puberty-driven roller coaster of emo-
tions and social exploration safe and productive . . . and don’t forget about fun!
Middle level learners, their school settings, the vistas they discover, the
depth and breadth of what they know and can do, and the physical, cognitive,
emotional, social, and moral growth they experience are influenced by the teach-
ers who choose to spend their days in the middle. Welcome to the adventure!

**Brief History of Middle Level Education**

The years involved in the history of middle level education are relatively few, just
over a century. The first separate school organization established to bridge the gap
between elementary and high school began in 1909. These new schools were aptly
named *junior highs* and were established to be preparatory schools for students going
on to high school, where they would enter one of two defined tracks. The tracks had
two broad purposes: to provide enriched curriculum for college-bound students, or
to provide vocational training for those preparing to enter the workforce.

Elementary schools consisting of self-contained grade level classes were, and basi-
cally still are, intended to provide consistency and security for children, as experienced
ideally in a family setting. As they are today, high schools at the beginning of the 20th
century were basically departmentalized by subject area, with students changing class-
es four to eight times a day. The junior high resembled the high school in structure in
1909 but generally was smaller to allow for a greater sense of personalization, while
still functioning in a departmentalized fashion. Even though there was little written
research about the early adolescence stage of life, the junior high concept met a rec-
ognized need that made it a widespread and rapidly growing part of public education.

As early as 1945, some educators were troubled by what they observed in jun-
ior highs. An early advocate for junior high wrote about what he perceived as per-
sistent problems. His list included the following (Anfara & Waks, 2000):

- Curriculum that was too subject-centered
- Teachers who were inadequately prepared to teach young adolescents
- Classrooms that were teacher-centered and textbook-centered
- Students who were tracked (p. 47)

By 1960, approximately four out of five high school graduates attended junior
high as part of a 6–3–3 grade configuration—six years of elementary, three years
of junior high, and three years of high school. By the mid-1960s, variations began
to emerge, resulting in middle level schools consisting of grades 5–8 or grades 6–8 (McEwin & Greene, 2010).

In the summer of 1963, William Alexander broke ground for the establishment of what are now middle schools when he presented a “philosophy” of the characteristics needed in a transitional school at the Cornell University Junior High School Conference. Alexander urged the maintenance of the positive contributions of junior highs such as core curriculum, guidance programs, exploratory education, and vocational/home arts, and the elimination of high school practices such as competitive sports and subject matter orientation (Manning, 2000). He conducted a survey of junior highs whose grade configurations had evolved into grades 5–8 or grades 6–8 from original 6–3–3, 6–2–4, and 6–6 grade structures. A total of 101 middle level schools were located by contacting state departments of education. The results of this study were published in The Emergent Middle School by Alexander in 1969. This book described middle school as a new concept, not merely a rearrangement of junior high. A brief overview of some of the differences between traditional junior highs and middle level schools based on concepts proposed by Alexander and others is in Figure 1.1. All of the concepts presented in the middle school column are discussed in detail in this text.

In 1988, a second major research study was conducted, with a third study in 1993 and a fourth in 2001. The most recent study was conducted in 2009, the results of which will be referred to numerous times in this text. Conducted by professors Ken McEwin and Melanie Greene of Appalachian State University, this latest study published in 2011 provides valuable comparisons of the practices of middle level schools that excel in teaching and learning.

**FIGURE 1.1** Differences between junior high and middle school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junior High</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Subject-centered</td>
<td>Student-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emphasis is on cognitive</td>
<td>Emphasis is on both cognitive and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td>affective development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizes teachers in subject-</td>
<td>Organizes teachers and students in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based departments</td>
<td>interdisciplinary teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Traditional instruction</td>
<td>Experiential approaches to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dominates</td>
<td>instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Six to eight class periods per</td>
<td>Allows for block and flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>day</td>
<td>scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Provides academic classes</td>
<td>Provides exploratory, academic, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nonacademic classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Offers study hall and/or</td>
<td>Offers advisor/advisee, teacher/student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homeroom</td>
<td>opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Classrooms arranged randomly</td>
<td>Team classrooms in close proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or by subject or grade level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are more than 15,000 middle level schools in the United States. The most prevalent grade configuration is 6–8, but configurations of grades 5–8 and grades 7–8 also exist (McEwin & Greene, 2011). The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) continues to set high expectations for what an effective middle level school setting should be like, one that is guided by both developmental appropriateness and academic rigor.

Seventh grade teacher Traci Peters tells us that although she prepared to teach elementary students, she now loves spending her days with young adolescents and attending to their developmental and academic needs. Watch a video of Traci Peters talking about her path to middle level education and how she views her students.

Not all young adolescents attend middle schools. Some districts serve 10- to 15-year-olds in K–8 schools, while others utilize 7–12 grade bands, or even K–12. AMLE strongly endorses the idea of a unique school in the middle (between elementary and high schools), staffed by adults who understand and appreciate young adolescents, but the organization acknowledges that developmental appropriateness and academic rigor can be accomplished in a school regardless of the name out front or the grade level configuration within. Specific grade configurations and practices may always be controversial. This fact keeps us fresh and on our toes. Controversy stretches us. But remember, it’s all about the kids and our responsibility to do what’s best for them.

Middle level education is not without its critics. There are those who say public education is failing to meet the needs of young adolescents, especially those who attend middle schools. When middle school national and international test results are weak, the critics’ case is bolstered. Middle level philosophy as espoused by AMLE is blamed. But it’s not the philosophy. Every aspect of middle level philosophy is developed distinctly for the unique stage of early adolescence. It’s not the philosophy . . . it’s the lack of conscientious implementation in many schools that serve young adolescents. “There is nothing wrong with the middle school concept. . . . It is a flexible, responsive, integrated concept with the aim of providing a safe, secure, and appropriate environment for a young adolescent . . . ” (Dickinson, 2001, p. 1).

When we consider that most of the educators who invested their careers in the establishment and proliferation of middle level schools are still with us, and are still inspiring our efforts, the history of middle level education comes alive as an ongoing progression of events. The pioneers of middle level schools have made, and continue to have an impact and to witness, significant progress.

Organizations and Publications Focusing on Middle Level Education

Teachers and administrators whose careers focus on young adolescents are fortunate to have national and state organizations to support what they do, including the Association for Middle Level Education and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. In addition, three publications established middle level education
mission and philosophy: *Turning Points* (1989), *Turning Points 2000* (2000), and *This We Believe* (2010). The latter is the position statement of the Association for Middle Level Education. Many more publications have been written to give us guidance on how best to meet the needs of young adolescents, but these have been seminal in guiding middle level decision making.

- **Association for Middle Level Education**

The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), formerly the National Middle School Association, was founded in 1973. This organization is dedicated exclusively to the education, development, and growth of young adolescents. AMLE provides a voice and a professional structure for middle level educators and has grown to include members in all states and dozens of countries. More than 50 affiliate organizations of AMLE sponsor local, regional, and state activities focused on middle level education. The **AMLE website** is an excellent resource featuring ways to advocate for young adolescents, professional development opportunities, professional teacher standards, the latest research on middle level education, and a publications shopping bonanza for all who are interested in early adolescence.

One very important affiliate of AMLE is the **Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA)**, a university student organization with student officers and activities. Each CMLA chapter promotes middle level teacher preparation through group meetings featuring professional development, involvement of CMLA members in local schools above and beyond field experiences, and fundraising to support attendance at state and national conferences. I have been privileged to be a faculty sponsor of a CMLA and can personally attest to what wonderful organizations they can be. More information on beginning or enhancing a **CMLA** can be found on the AMLE website. Go to About AMLE and choose Collegiate Middle Level Association.

The largest selection of **books** written specifically for middle level practitioners is available through AMLE catalogs, at middle level conferences, and on the AMLE website by selecting AMLE Store. Five times a year AMLE publishes the *Middle School Journal*, a refreshing and informative compilation of articles that is highly regarded for both its topical and scholarly content. The **AMLE magazine**, a very practical journal featuring reader-friendly articles, is published nine times a year. Membership in the Association for Middle Level Education is accompanied by subscriptions to both the *Middle School Journal* and the **AMLE magazine**. AMLE also publishes Research in Middle Level Education Online, several online newsletters, and videos. In addition, the website contains AMLE position statements, along with the latest in news items and legislation affecting middle level education. You will also find membership information. College students can join AMLE and enjoy all the benefits of membership, including monthly journals, for only $25 a year.

One of the highlights provided by the Association for Middle Level Education is the widely acclaimed AMLE
annual fall conference. This conference draws thousands of teachers, future teachers, principals, central office personnel, university faculty, state department officials, parents, and community members, all vitally interested in the promotion of developmentally appropriate practices. It’s an exciting conference that all middle level teachers should have the opportunity to attend. Lasting three days, the main events include keynote speakers, concurrent sessions on topics of interest to adults who work with young adolescents, and site visits to local schools to view exemplary practices. Perhaps the major inspiration provided by this annual conference comes from the realization that we are not alone, the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of adults concerned with young adolescent development and education are represented by those who attend. State affiliates of AMLE also sponsor annual conferences that are perhaps more accessible to you than the national conference. Go to About AMLE and choose Affiliates.

- The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform is an organization of researchers, educators, leaders, and officers of professional organizations, all committed to advocating for young adolescents to improve academic performance and health. The National Forum is working diligently to promote best practices for young adolescents. In 1999 the National Forum launched the Schools to Watch initiative. Through this initiative middle schools across the country are identified because they meet, or are making significant progress toward meeting, specific criteria for high performance including academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity.
Chapter 1 / Middle Level Education History and Philosophy

**Turning Points**

*Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* was published in 1989 by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Yes, 1989 was a long time ago. In fact, many of you weren’t born yet. So why include words this old in a 21st century textbook? It’s simple. The philosophy is still relevant. The Carnegie Council’s research showed that substantial numbers of America’s young adolescents were at risk of reaching adulthood inadequately prepared to function productively. As a result of this finding, the Council developed a research-based document that has shaped middle school philosophy. This study continues to lead the way in both describing characteristics of young adolescents and prescribing ways to meet their needs within the school setting.

More than 100,000 copies of the full report and more than 200,000 copies of the abridged version have been disseminated. The eight tenets of *Turning Points* summarized in Table 1.1 provide a model of what a middle school can be. The

| **Creating a community for learning** | Schools should be places where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for students’ personal growth and intellectual development. |
| **Teaching a core of common knowledge** | Every student in the middle grades should learn to think critically through mastery of an appropriate body of knowledge, lead a healthy life, behave ethically and lawfully, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society. |
| **Ensuring success for all students** | All young adolescents should have the opportunity to succeed in every aspect of the middle grade program, regardless of previous achievement or the pace at which they learn. |
| **Empowering teachers and administrators** | Decisions concerning the experiences of middle grade students should be made by the adults who know them best. |
| **Preparing teachers for the middle grades** | Teachers in middle grade schools should be selected and specially educated to teach young adolescents. |
| **Improving academic performance through better health and fitness** | Young adolescents must be healthy in order to learn. |
| **Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents** | Families and middle grade schools must be allied through trust and respect if young adolescents are to succeed in school. |
| **Connecting schools with communities** | Responsibility for each middle grade student’s success should be shared by schools and community organizations. |

tenets are interrelated elements that, when taken as a whole, provide a vision for teaching and learning appropriate for young adolescents. Lee-Ann Stephens, the 2007 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, believes that teaching requires care, laughter, and relationship building, all of which are mirrored in Turning Points.

- **Turning Points 2000**

  The original *Turning Points* (1989) provided a framework for middle grades education, whereas *Turning Points 2000* (2000) gives us in-depth insights into how to improve middle grades education. Strong emphasis is placed on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The point is made that organizational changes (teaming, flexible scheduling, schools-within-schools, etc.) may be necessary, but not sufficient, for major improvement in academic achievement.

  *Turning Points 2000*, written by Anthony Jackson and Gayle Davis, traces the progress of middle schools, and the levels of implementation of middle level philosophy, since publication of the original *Turning Points* in 1989. *Turning Points 2000* reports that as schools implemented more of the tenets of *Turning Points*, and with greater fidelity, their students’ standardized test scores in mathematics, language arts, and reading rose significantly. These results occurred at both the low and high ends of proficiency scales. The report also states that still to be reached are the schools that need improvement most—the ones in high-poverty urban and rural communities where lack of achievement is rampant and pockets of excellence are few and far between. Middle school philosophy has achieved its greatest level of acceptance and success primarily in suburban and upper-income areas (Jackson & Davis, 2000). *Turning Points 2000* provides practical applications for implementing what research tells us is best practice for young adolescents. In doing so, it has made some alterations in the original eight tenets. The newer document contains seven recommendations listed in [Figure 1.2](#) that have at their core the goal of ensuring success for every student, reflecting the centrality of teaching and learning.

- **This We Believe**

  Contributing to our understanding of why middle level settings are unique and necessary is the Association for Middle Level Education position paper, *This We Believe*. Written in 1980 and then revised in 1995 and 2003, and again in 2010 as *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, this document presents four essential attributes of effective education for young adolescents:

  1. Developmentally responsive: using the distinctive nature of young adolescents as the foundation upon which all decisions about school organization, policies, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are made.

  2. Challenging: ensuring that every member of the learning community is held to high expectations.
**FIGURE 1.2 Turning Points 2000**

*Turning Points 2000* calls for schools that

- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
- Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best.
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

3. Empowering: providing all students with the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives, to address life’s challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge.

4. Equitable: advocating for and ensuring every student’s right to learn and providing appropriately challenging and relevant learning opportunities for every student (p. 13).

*This We Believe* seeks to isolate and quantify the unique aspects of young adolescents and identify the appropriate support, responses, and environment of an effective middle level setting. In doing so, it provides both a mission statement and benchmarks for what the effective school for young adolescents should be and has contributed a framework within which decisions about programs can be made. This document also outlines 16 general characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents, summarized in *Figure 1.3*. Throughout this text we explore schools that have at least some of these characteristics and ways to embed them in middle level settings.
FigurE 1.3  This We Believe

National Middle School Association believes successful schools for young adolescents include the following characteristics:

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them.
- Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning.
- Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant.
- Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches.
- Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it.

Leadership and Organization
- A shared vision developed by all stakeholders guides every decision.
- Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices.
- Leaders demonstrate courage and collaboration.
- Ongoing professional development reflects best educational practices.
- Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships.

Culture and Community
- The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all.
- Every student’s academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate.
- Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents.
- Health and wellness are supported in curricula, schoolwide programs, and related policies.
- The school actively involves families in the education of their children.
- The school includes community and business partners.

STANDARD 3: Middle Level Philosophy and School Organization

Element a. Middle Level Philosophical Foundations: Middle level teacher candidates demonstrate an understanding of the philosophical foundations of developmentally responsive middle level programs and schools.
Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards and Assessments

In 1995, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) recognized the need for the establishment of standards for the preparation of middle level teachers. Most schools of education are either accredited, or are seeking accreditation, through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the recently reconfigured and renamed NCATE organization. In 2000, the National Middle School Association (now AMLE) and NCATE (now CAEP) jointly established seven standards for middle level teacher preparation. In 2012, the Association for Middle Level Education revised these standards, with the major tenets in Figure 1.4. You can access the complete standards document on the AMLE website by choosing Browse by Topic then Professional Preparation. Each of the five standards includes two to four elements; an explanation; references; and a rubric indicating target, acceptable, and unacceptable performance. For instance, Standard 1: Young Adolescent Development includes the following four elements:

- Knowledge of Young Adolescent Development
- Knowledge of the Implications of Diversity on Young Adolescent Development
- Implications of Young Adolescent Development for Middle Level Curriculum and Instruction
- Implications of Young Adolescent Development for Middle Level Programs and Practices

Each standard, with specific elements, is addressed within this book. Familiarize yourself with the standards and recognize that many of the elements are addressed numerous times and in a variety of ways, chapter after chapter.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) has developed a series of assessments designed to test teacher candidates according to the standards established by most states in the areas of basic academic skills, subject knowledge, knowledge of teaching methods, and classroom performance. These assessments form the Praxis series. ETS tells us that there are three basic uses for the Praxis results: universities may use them to assess the knowledge of teacher candidates; states use them for granting initial licensure; and professional organizations require their successful completion as part of the criteria for certification.

You may have taken the Praxis I exam in conjunction with entry requirements for your teacher education program. The Praxis I exam
Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards and Assessments

**FIGURE 1.4 Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards**

**Association for Middle Level Education**

**Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards**

**All Young Adolescents:** The middle level standards interpret “all young adolescents” to be inclusive, comprising students of diverse ethnicity, race, language, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, regional or geographic origin, and those with exceptional learning needs.

**Middle Level:** The grade levels included in “middle level” are determined by middle level teacher licensure regulations in each state, for example grades 4–9, 5–8, 6–9.

**Standard 1: Young Adolescent Development**

Middle level teacher candidates understand the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to young adolescent development, and they provide opportunities that support student development and learning.

**Standard 2: Middle Level Curriculum**

Middle level teacher candidates understand and use the central concepts, tools of inquiry, standards, research and structures of content to plan and implement curriculum that develops all young adolescents’ competence in subject matter.

**Standard 3: 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.

**Standard 4: Middle Level Instruction and Assessment**

Middle level teacher candidates understand, use, and reflect on the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to data-informed instruction and assessment, and they employ a variety of strategies for a developmentally appropriate climate to meet the varying abilities and learning styles of all young adolescents.

**Standard 5: Middle Level Professional Roles**

Middle level teacher candidates understand the complexity of teaching young adolescents, and they engage in practices and behaviors that develop their competence as professionals.

Source: Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), 4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300, Westerville, OH 43081, 1-800-528-6672, www.amle.org.
assesses basic knowledge in reading, writing, and math. The Praxis II series is designed to assess specific knowledge and skills aligning with your chosen level of teaching and/or subject area. Exactly which tests are required varies from state to state. One of the most widely used tests in the Praxis series is the *Principles of Learning and Teaching* (PLT). This assessment is divided into grade levels, with middle level defined as grades 5–9, encompassing the ways in which middle level education is configured. Success on the test requires knowledge of young adolescent development, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and maintenance of an appropriate learning environment. The Praxis II series also includes subject-specific middle level tests in mathematics, science, literature and language studies, and history/social studies.

Now we’ll get to know nine teachers who have chosen to spend their days with middle level learners.

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**Meet the Teachers**

For centuries attempts have been made to list the characteristics of effective teachers. This is a healthy endeavor because it involves observation and reflection, and then articulation about teaching and learning. What we know for sure is that teachers who positively influence student learning may have only that characteristic in common. The ways they go about engaging students in learning, their personalities, and their teaching styles may widely vary. An interesting site all about young adolescents and their education is *Middle Web*. Dedicated to increasing achievement for all middle level students, the site features numerous articles and dozens of links.

Although researched and written at the end of the 20th century, the list of positive characteristics of middle level teachers is still quite relevant. In their book, *Middle Level Teachers: Portraits of Excellence* (1995), four major contributors to our knowledge of middle level education provide us with 16 research-based traits of effective middle level teachers. Al Arth, John Lounsbury, Ken McEwin, and John Swaim tell us that effective middle level teachers should strive to possess the characteristics listed in **Figure 1.5**. The wisdom in this list is sound, aligning with AMLE teacher preparation standards.

Let’s get to know nine teachers. They are real teachers, but some of their circumstances have been altered in these profiles. Their backgrounds, personal attributes, education, teaching styles, and attitudes mirror teachers I have known. We will meet the teachers now and learn from their experiences in the Professional Practice sections to come. They will interact with one another, with other teachers, and with students, as well as administrators, community members, and parents. Pictures of the teachers are provided so you will feel even better acquainted with them. Throughout the text they talk directly to you in a feature called “Teachers Speak.” Here are our focus teachers:
**FIGURE 1.5 The effective middle level teacher**

1. Is sensitive to the individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and exceptionalities of young adolescents, treats them with respect, and celebrates their special nature.
2. Understands and welcomes the role of advocate, adult role model, and advisor.
3. Is self-confident and personally secure—can take student challenges while teaching.
4. Makes decisions about teaching based on a thorough understanding of the physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development of young adolescents.
5. Is dedicated to improving the welfare and education of young adolescents.
6. Works collaboratively and professionally to initiate needed changes.
7. Establishes and maintains a disciplined learning environment that is safe and respects the dignity of young adolescents.
8. Ensures that all young adolescents will succeed in learning.
9. Has a broad, interdisciplinary knowledge of the subjects in the middle level curriculum and depth of content knowledge in one or more areas.
10. Is committed to integrating curriculum.
11. Uses varied evaluation techniques that both teach and assess the broad goals of middle level education and provide for student self-evaluation.
12. Recognizes that major goals of middle level education include the development of humane values, respect for self, and positive attitudes toward learning.
13. Seeks out positive and constructive relationships and communicates with young adolescents in a variety of environments.
14. Works closely with families to form partnerships to help young adolescents be successful at school.
15. Utilizes a wide variety of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies.
16. Acquires, creates, and utilizes a wide variety of resources to improve the learning experiences of young adolescents.

- Jermaine Joyner, 6th, 7th, 8th grade technology, African American, age 31
- Sadie Fox, 8th grade science, Caucasian American, age 26
- Keith Richardson, 6th grade language arts, Caucasian American, age 40
- Carmen Esparza, 6th, 7th, 8th grade bilingual language arts and social studies, Hispanic American, age 34
- Jesse White, 8th grade social studies, Caucasian American, age 29
- Traci Peters, 7th grade math, Caucasian American, age 36
- Deirdre McGrew, 6th, 7th, 8th grade remedial language arts and social studies, African American, age 48
- Joey Huber, 7th grade student teacher, Caucasian American, age 22
- Sarah Gardner, 6th grade student teacher, Caucasian American, age 21

(Continued)
 Jermaine Joyner

This is my fourth year working in a public school. Right after I got my degree in computer science, I went to work for a large chain store and made house calls with *Geek* on my name badge. After a year or so, I was unhappy with my job and decided to teach computer classes at a private school. After qualifying for state certification, I took a position at Jefferson Middle School, an inner-city school that was converted to a magnet school in the mid-1990s. I am almost finished with my master’s degree in administration, and I would really like to be an assistant principal here in a few years.

Jefferson’s magnet status is based on technology. We have laptop carts, 30 tablets, 30 iPods, and 30 video cameras. We also have SMART technology in each classroom. Students apply to Jefferson and are chosen by lottery. Those who apply must have at least a C average and a good attendance record. We have been able to attract quite a few kids from the suburbs. Those from the neighborhood around the school qualify for free lunch. The kids from the suburbs are wealthy enough to have private transportation to get here from outside the city. Actually, I think the mix works.

I am the computer teacher, and I teach six 45-minute periods a day, two for each grade level. Computer science is a related arts course, and all the kids take it for one semester a year. I’m able to build on what they know and can do from 6th to 7th to 8th grade. My job at Jefferson gives me lots of room to be creative. Two years ago I took a back room in the library and turned it into a TV station. It fits right in with our technology focus. I wrote grants and checked with the district and other schools trying to obtain all the equipment we would need to do daily student broadcasts. Now I have a small group of kids who come to me before and after school as the *Broadcast Club*. We tape a brief daily program shown each morning. Makes my day!

 Sadie Fox

You know, I had a lot of careers from which to choose. In college I thought about law school and pre-med. I know I could have been an attorney or a medical doctor, but I’m not. I chose, instead, to spend my days with kids, and I love it! They are quirky and unpredictable. Watching them grow is a delight.

I translated my love of science into teaching the subject to kids who often don’t seem to care very much. My challenge is to catch them enjoying some aspect of a lesson and then get them hooked by doing something just a little off the wall. Some of them get so interested that they begin to ask questions. My standard answer is, “Hey, when you find out, share it with us.” That sends them to the Internet or to the library. It’s great.

I guess I’ve always been pretty competitive. I began a science club at Valley View four years ago when I first started teaching. It grew quickly as we entered a Science Olympiad competition, and we won! We continued to win and made it to
the national level. Each year since, we have excelled. For a rural area with people scattered over almost 1,500 square miles with only a few places to shop and eat, having a team of 8th graders win national science competitions . . . well, let’s just say that the kids enjoy near rock star status.

Since I started teaching at Valley View, I have finished a master’s degree in science education and achieved National Board Certification. It’s been a lot of work, but totally worth it. One of these days I plan to go back to graduate school and get a PhD. I think I would enjoy teaching at the university level.

- **Keith Richardson**

Right out of high school I went to a community college and, as I worked in a local restaurant, completed an associate degree. That qualified me for a job in a textile mill where my dad and his dad worked for years. I got the job I wanted and got married at age 20. I received several promotions and had two kids. The problem was that I wasn’t very satisfied with how I was spending my days. I left the house at 7 a.m. and often didn’t get home until 6:00 in the evening. I was often asked to work swing shifts when someone called in sick. With two weeks of vacation a year and my sons growing quickly, I started reconsidering my choices.

I decided to go back to college and get a four-year degree so I could teach middle or high school language arts. This decision wasn’t really based on the time constraints of my job at the mill. I was always an avid reader and often wrote short stories for fun. I have taught Sunday School since I was a teenager and was often told I was a natural for getting people to understand things. As a teacher, the dilemma of not enough time with my family was solved. This was a decision I could live with!

I think I fit middle school. I’m patient, I can laugh at myself, and kids seem to like my easygoing style. I get restless with traditional instruction, and I know the students do too. I try to keep them hopping by doing active things. They read anything they want during DEAR (Drop Everything And Read). The catch is that they have to tell the class about what they are reading twice every nine weeks, and they can’t do regular book reports. They come up with some pretty crazy stuff, but the bottom line is, they read!

- **Carmen Esparza**

I’m a second generation American. My parents came to the United States when they were teenagers. They made a lot of sacrifices so my three brothers and I could have all the opportunities we enjoy today. We were born in Colorado and, therefore, are U.S. citizens. My oldest brother and I went to Colorado State. He’s an engineer, and I majored in Spanish and minored in secondary education. After teaching high school Spanish for a few years near Denver, I went back to school and (Continued)
got a master’s degree in English. I read a lot about bilingual education and made the decision to pursue a position in a middle school. I guess there aren’t many of us around with degrees in both Spanish and English, and I got a job right away. About that time I became pregnant. When my baby girl was born, I decided to be a stay-at-home mom for a while. Three babies later, I am back!

Teaching whole classes of English language learners is exhausting. I teach both language arts and social studies, about half in Spanish and half in English. I teach all the kids who need bilingual education in grades 6–8, each grade level in a separate class. The trick is to engage the students in their own learning and use lots of visuals.

The longer I teach, the more the reality sinks in that I can’t “save” kids by myself. I can influence them and maybe help a few stay in school, but it’s an uphill battle when I consider the strikes against them. Many aren’t citizens and live in fear of being sent back to Mexico or Central America. I try to stay positive and help my kids get to the place where they have choices in life.

**Jesse White**

I’ve been teaching for six years, all of them at Lincoln Middle School. I taught 7th grade science the first two years, and then a social studies position opened on the 8th grade Wildcats team. I jumped at the chance to be on a team with a couple of teachers I not only admired but who stepped in and served as informal mentors to me. I’ve been here ever since, and I’m quite happy with what I do.

Lincoln is a Title I school. We have mostly black and Hispanic students, and most get free breakfast and lunch. They almost all live within walking distance of the school. Funny thing . . . they’re never really anxious to leave campus. During the day they often act like school is the last place they want to be, but then they stick around after school. I made a commitment my first year to be a teacher who’s always accessible, so I stick around too. If I’m going to be here anyway, I figure I might as well help with the football and soccer teams. So I help coach and find that I get to talk with kids on the field who rarely participate in class. It’s a good outreach for me. I rarely get home before 6:00, but, if I worked in business or industry, I would have about the same length of workday. The difference is that once I get home, sometimes I’m not really finished with my work.

One thing I really appreciate about teaching on a team is team planning time. We teach three 90-minute blocks, with one block for planning, 45 minutes for individual planning, and 45 minutes with my team. As the social studies teacher, I find that I can integrate all kinds of things into American history. When we talk about our teaching plans for the week, I can often support what’s happening in language arts by emphasizing what’s being taught. For instance, if they are learning about poetry, I find poems written in the period of history we’re studying. If I can find something about an invention that goes along with the science curriculum, I throw it in. I like making connections. We still haven’t done a true interdisciplinary unit. That’s one of my goals for next year.
Traci Peters
I’m a 7th grade math teacher, and I can’t imagine doing anything else. I loved math as a student, but planned to teach elementary school. Well, I ended up in a middle school math classroom, and I’m so glad because it suits me. I enjoy organization and being prepared. These two qualities serve me well with my two algebra classes and two pre-algebra classes. I have a super team to work with. We all like each other, and that makes going to work fun! And, of course, the kids make it fun too, and also sometimes very frustrating. But that’s OK. Overall, it’s the best job anywhere. I have National Board Certification and that has added to my income and my sense of professionalism.

I’m married to a wonderful man who supports me in my career. I have a beautiful son who isn’t in school yet. That’s the one negative thing about teaching, but my mom takes care of Robbie for me and probably would throw a fit if I hinted at staying at home. I’m very fortunate.

Most of my students do really well on standardized tests. It’s hard to show a lot of progress in three of my classes because their scores are already good. The students I have in 7th grade algebra and pre-algebra are the ones who achieve at math. My fourth class is a mix of students who have never excelled in math and those who have recently come to the United States.

Our school is in a fairly well-to-do suburb, and most of the parents of my algebra and pre-algebra students are college educated. All the technology gadgets out there are likely in the hands of my students. They take to graphing calculators naturally. But when it comes to basic math concepts, I still rely on a whiteboard and an overhead projector. I use as many manipulatives as possible, like pattern blocks and paper folding. My philosophy is that experiencing math is the way to go.

Deirdre McGrew
Teaching is my fourth career. I started out as a journalist. Then I went to work for a publishing house, and then I became an associate minister at my church. Along the way I got two master’s degrees, a husband, and five children! Quite a life, don’t you think?

I’ve taught elementary school and both language arts and social studies in middle school. When my principal heard about what some schools were doing to meet the needs of kids at risk for failing, she started thinking about how we could adapt the plan at Cario. We don’t have a real large population of kids at risk, but we are always looking for new ways to reach them. Because my principal knows what a soft spot I have for kids who struggle, she suggested that we think about starting CARE, Cario Academic Recovery and Enrichment. I have a group of 12–15 students in grades 6–8 for half a day for language arts and social studies, and a colleague has 12–15 students in grades 6–8 for half a day for math and science. We switch kids at lunch.

(Continued)
Through CARE we can make instruction very personalized. I have eight computers to use with the Scholastic Read 180 program. I do whole group instruction on basic skills for just a little while each day. Then the kids read and work on projects that combine the language arts and social studies standards. I am able to spend individual time with each student each day. I can see regular progress. Makes it worth the planning and effort!

Will I teach for the rest of my career? I honestly don’t know. Life is full of surprises, and I’m always open to them.

- **Joey Huber**

I’m a student teacher. I have to keep saying it to believe it! I’m a student teacher. Most of my friends are business majors and have no idea what they’ll do when we graduate. They’re thinking maybe they’ll need to go to graduate school to get a job in their field. They’ve done internships, and most dreaded getting up in the morning to go. But not me! I love being a teacher! To be in my school all day every day for 16 weeks I had to give up playing college baseball. I had a partial scholarship for the first seven semesters of college but gave it up for one semester to be in the classroom. No regrets!

When I did some fieldwork at my school, I figured I needed to befriend my students. I wanted to be their buddy, and I accomplished it. But that wasn’t smart, as I soon found out. There’s a line teachers can’t cross and still be the teacher. I’ll tell you more about this later.

At my school the 6th graders are divided into teams with just two teachers. The 7th and 8th grade teams have three teachers on them. We have a math teacher, a language arts teacher, and a teacher who teaches science and social studies on a rotating basis. There are 86 kids on the Starfish team. Our classes are heterogeneous, with some really high achievers, some with IEPs, and lots in between. My cooperating teachers are different from each other, but they each seem to reach the kids in unique ways.

After school I am an assistant coach of the baseball team. This is one of the best experiences I have ever had and more than makes up for not playing the game myself. I can teach them all I know and demonstrate how to play. I know that when I teach I want to coach as well.

- **Sarah Gardner**

I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I was in Teacher Cadets in high school and went to college knowing that teaching was in my future. I loved the classes and now I am crazy about student teaching! I am assigned to a 6th grade team with two wonderful cooperating teachers. They are very responsive to the students, and I know I will learn so much from them. Half the students on our team are in the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program for academically and intellectually gifted students. The other half are considered regular learners, most of whom make adequate progress but aren’t designated AIG.
I’ll teach math and social studies for eight weeks, and then language arts and science for eight weeks. Math is really my favorite subject, but, because my certification will be in all the subjects for K–6, I need to experience all the areas. My plan is to teach middle school next year, though. I understand that I can take the Praxis II exams in math and maybe language arts and then be able to teach 7th and 8th grade in these subjects.

Something that bothers me a lot is that when we have the AIG classes we have mostly white students. When we have the other students, we have diversity. Everything I learned in my classes in college tells me that this is a problem. I remember learning about what’s called the soft bigotry of low expectations. My question is “How has this happened?” When I ask my cooperating teachers, they say it seems to have been this way for their whole careers. By the time students get to middle school, they have been labeled as AIG or not. I don’t mean to say that average achievers are not succeeding. If they are working hard and making progress, then they are succeeding. But did these students’ elementary teachers not expect them to be really bright? Would I have done any better? I’m starting to think about going to graduate school to learn more about gifted education. I’m interested in figuring out some answers to my questions.

**Why It Matters**

Middle level philosophy is grounded in two areas—our understanding of the unique nature of young adolescents and how we choose to respond to their needs. It’s a philosophy, an attitude, and a belief in possibilities that shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and all the ways we interact with our students. It’s not necessarily quantifiable. It requires reflection and the renewal of resources, both physical and psychological. Middle level philosophy asks the adults who touch the lives of young adolescents to stretch and grow right along with their students.

With ongoing growth comes the ability to balance what we know and understand about young adolescents with how we respond to their needs. To maintain balance is to continually weigh what we know against what we do. Sound and reasoned judgment, along with an eye for appropriateness, will maintain this sensitive equilibrium. As you read this text, you will develop a grasp of the enormity of the task for middle level teachers and the challenges that make middle level education rewarding.

**GROUP ACTIVITIES**

1. Obtain a wall map of your city and/or county. Locate and mark each middle school in your surrounding area as found on school and district websites. This will help put your future discussions of local middle schools in context.
2. As a class, begin an electronic or paper file to which you all have access. This file should have a section designated for each local (city or county) middle school. As data and observations are collected, add them to the file.

3. Assign each class member a middle school in your area to research. Go online to get the approximate number of students. Record the number of students and the published mission statement in your class file.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

1. Establish an electronic portfolio in which you collect your own work concerning middle level education. Include group activities, individual activities, your personal journal, observation and interview notes, helpful resources, media coverage of middle level education, and so on.

2. Choose a mission statement from a local middle school. Write a brief assessment of the statement as you examine it for elements of This We Believe.

PERSONAL JOURNAL

At the end of each chapter, there are questions and/or prompts that require you to draw on your own experiences. Feel free to react to any portion of the chapter beyond the items asked for. The part of your electronic file established in Individual Activity 1 should be for your eyes only, shared at your own discretion or at the request of your instructor.

1. What was the grade structure of your K–12 school experience? Was any part of it called Middle School? Briefly describe any aspect(s) of your middle level school.

2. What do you recall about the facility you attended during the middle level years? How was it different from your elementary and high schools?

3. Do you identify with or “see yourself” in one focus teacher more than the others? Briefly describe what traits led you to choose your teacher.

Professional Practice

This is the first of the Professional Practice sections you will find at the end of each chapter. Please copy this file in your electronic portfolio and complete the items. You may print and share as requested by your instructor. The scenarios, multiple choice questions, and constructed response items ask you to apply the knowledge in the text to classroom and school situations. The items are designed to provide practice for a variety of the Praxis II exams that may be required for certification. Most of the scenarios involve teachers you met in this chapter and the students you will meet in Chapter 2. When Lake Park Junior High changed the sign out front to Lake Park Middle School, it joined all the other middle level schools in the district.
Yes, they were way behind the national trend, but the community was growing and the decision was finally made to move 6th graders from elementary schools to newly formed middle schools. Ninth grade was moved to the high schools where additions had been built to accommodate more students.

Lake Park principal Mr. Hammond was given the task by the district superintendent of exploring middle level philosophy and arranging for an August staff day where junior high teachers would learn about how middle schools are different from junior highs and, more important, what to do with 6th graders in schools used to 7th, 8th, and 9th graders. He had read about the Association for Middle Level Education in the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) journals and recognized AMLE as the best source for direction. He went online and joined AMLE in order to receive publications. He ordered books on middle level philosophy and checked with the state to see if they could recommend middle schools for him to visit. It was June and he had little time to prepare for August.

1. In his efforts to explore middle level philosophy, which combination of sources of information might be most helpful?
   a. state education newsletters designed to share information on what’s happening in local areas; Middle School Journal; NASSP Bulletin
   b. Turning Points from the Carnegie Corporation; NASSP Bulletin
   c. Middle School Journal; Turning Points from the Carnegie Corporation
   d. This We Believe and Middle School Journal

2. What will likely be the most significant barrier for Mr. Hammond as he moves forward and envisions the August staff development day?
   a. principals who are resistant to change
   b. parental concerns about the districtwide change
   c. teachers who have not been specifically prepared for middle level education
   d. lack of viable role model schools in the area

3. From what you know about Mr. Hammond’s efforts, what is the most important element he is missing?
   a. attendance at a middle level education conference
   b. collaborative planning with teacher leaders at his school
   c. research about why the district now wants to incorporate middle level schools
   d. meeting with rising 6th graders to listen to their concerns about changing schools

**Constructed Response**

Return to the 16 characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents in Figure 1.3. Choose one characteristic in each of the three categories. What are the necessary factors for making each statement true about a school?
2 Development of Middle Level Learners
Learning Outcomes

LO2.1 Describe aspects of physical development including varying growth rates and puberty.
LO2.2 Summarize issues of intellectual development, including variability among middle level learners.
LO2.3 Analyze how emotional development is manifested and interrelated to other areas of development.
LO2.4 Explore social development involving adult and peer relationships.
LO2.5 Examine young adolescent character traits and ways to enhance healthy development.
LO2.6 Articulate This We Believe goals for young adolescent development.
LO2.7 Recognize the wide variability of young adolescent development.

Dear Future Middle Level Teacher,

Now let’s think about young adolescents and their development. The middle school years represent a unique and significant period of human development. Young adolescents are in a world of their own and yet are keenly aware of their surroundings—the places, people, and things that make up their world. By middle school, students have begun to develop diversified views of themselves. Often these views seem to conflict. Consider the following statements based on the work of Donna San Antonio, 2006. In what ways do they apply to your own development?

- Young adolescents may be fiercely independent, yet need and seek meaningful relationships with adults.
- Young adolescents may reveal emotional vulnerability, yet be deeply self-protective.
- Young adolescents may be capable of complex critical thinking, yet be disorganized and excessively forgetful.
- Young adolescents may be compassionate in their desire to make the world a better place, yet display a high level of self-centeredness and even cruelty toward a classmate.
In this chapter we discuss five broad developmental perspectives—physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and character development. Each of these perspectives interacts with, and influences, all of the others. In the ever-changing world of early adolescence, it is artificial to separate these areas of development. Exploring them separately must be considered only an organizing tool. Let the perspectives flow in and out of one another as you read and reflect.

One thing you can count on is that in your middle level classroom no two students will be at the same stage of development in all the areas at once, nor will an individual student develop uniformly across all areas. That physically developed boy may be painfully shy. The tiny girl who looks more like a 3rd grader may be ready to tackle the quadratic equation. It’s a fascinating world when you spend your days with 10- to 15-year-olds!

**STANDARD 1: Young Adolescent Development**

*Element a. Knowledge of Young Adolescent Development:* Middle level teacher candidates demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of young adolescent development. They use this understanding of the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and moral characteristics, needs, and interests of young adolescents to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments for all young adolescents, including those whose language and cultures are different from their own.

**Physical Development**

Remember the days when self-consciousness took priority over everything else? Maybe you were one of the lucky ones with looks and self-esteem that gave you the confidence to be relatively free of trauma when it came to your physical appearance. But let’s face it, even the cheerleaders and the coolest guy around had their moments of doubt. Perhaps the physical burden was never feeling quite good-looking enough. This desire to be physically attractive is part of the human condition and needs to be put in perspective. Easy to say as adults! Young adolescents, however, often lack perspective.

In the inconsistent world of early adolescence, there is one predictable factor: physical development influences every other type of development middle level students experience—emotional, social, intellectual, and character.

**Mismatched Parts**

If we held up a bag of male body parts and asked a blindfolded 12-year-old boy to reach inside, grab parts randomly, and become the young adolescent that is the composite of those parts, the result would be a middle level student in 6th or 7th grade.
grade. There is no such thing as “typical” because these newly double-digit-aged kids so often appear to be “Mister Potato Heads” in this awkward stage of life. Ears too big, arms too long, voices too squeaky. Girls, too, often resemble creatures of mismatched parts. Their hips may widen before their breasts develop, their noses may be too big for their faces.

Growth spurts usually occur for boys between the ages of 12 and 15, but for some boys, rapid physical growth may be delayed well into high school. Growth is seldom even or gradual for young adolescents. Bones tend to grow more rapidly than muscles. Although weight gain generally accompanies bone growth, without equivalent development of muscle, awkwardness and clumsiness are inevitable. Joint pain, leg aches, restlessness, and fatigue may accompany these uneven periods of growth. Outer extremities, such as hands and feet, grow before arms and legs. Have you ever heard someone say that you can predict the adult size of a puppy by looking at the size of its paws? Well, chances are if a boy needs a size 13 sneaker by age 12, 30 × 28 jeans will be history by age 14! So in his new 32 × 34 jeans, he walks into middle school to greet his 8th grade year as a remarkably different-looking young adolescent than his 6th and 7th grade teachers experienced. As a middle school teacher, I never tired of gasping (to the delight of many a boy), “This can’t be the same Cody who sat by the window in my third period class last year!”

Girls generally experience rapid growth a year or two before boys. Remember middle school dances when the tall, gangly girls giggled in one corner while shorter, “cutie-pie” boys taunted each other to ask for a dance—only to find that their faces often matched up with developing breasts?
Puberty

Outward growth spurts indicate big changes on the inside. Between childhood and the beginning of young adulthood is the transition period known as puberty. The word puberty often causes parent and teacher alike to shudder. If we think it’s scary as adults to spend time around kids in puberty, let’s try to recall what it was like to have puberty actually taking place inside us. During puberty, biological changes that make us taller, heavier, and more muscular are accompanied by hormonal changes that forever alter our bodies in equally significant ways. Although testosterone, the male hormone, and estrogen, the female hormone, are present in all of us, the balance of the hormones is broken during puberty so that one hormone takes over to influence sexual development. All of this is happening for some at the same time as those mismatched parts are appearing almost overnight. At this point, if you are thinking, “I’m supposed to teach these creatures subject-verb agreement and the Pythagorean theorem?” you are beginning to get the picture of some of the challenges (and the joys) of middle level education.

Many changes occur during puberty. Hair growth develops under arms, on legs, in pubic areas, and on the face. The voice changes as the larynx grows larger. Girls’ voices may become mellow, and boys’ voices may go through those embarrassing falsetto-crack-bass-crack-falsetto moments. Oil and sweat glands may begin to function, resulting in all kinds of potentially embarrassing situations. Acne medication, shampoo, and deodorant appear on shopping lists, and longer, more frequent showers become part of a daily routine.

Sexual Maturity

With puberty comes sexual maturation. Yes, these awkward, funny-sounding, often aromatic configurations we call young adolescents have all the parts necessary to reproduce themselves. Because the body often matures before mental and emotional decision-making skills, developing middle level students are at high risk for either poor decisions or not thinking at all before acting. Ill-timed sexual experimentation can easily lead to multiple unfortunate consequences, only two of which are sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

Timing

Perhaps at no other stage of life does timing play such an important role. Rapid physical changes, puberty, and sexual maturation generally take place, in starts and stops, between the ages of 10 and 14. Puberty, with all its miraculous changes, is a challenging period of life for many young adolescents.

The changes experienced by growing children happen sporadically, predictable only in the sense that there are growth patterns. These patterns happen rapidly and early for some, and slowly and haltingly for others. The “early bloomers” may be boastful but are often embarrassed. The “late bloomers” are almost always self-conscious. There are emotional consequences associated with physical changes that can lead to
long-lasting and very memorable scars on the psyche that haunt for a lifetime. Let’s look at some issues that may accompany physical development and explore some ways we, as teachers, might make the “child-to-adolescent” passage a bit less chaotic.

● **Physical Development Issues**

Physical development issues are many and are often uncomfortable for teacher and student alike. Here are some of the reasons for concern, along with suggestions for how we can make a difference, both as individual teachers and on school and district levels.

► ISSUE 1

Middle level students need information on physical development.

Not only do middle level students have a hard time finding answers, they can rarely define the question or problem when it comes to physical growth and changes. A comprehensive health education curriculum is invaluable. National and state standards are available that outline what 10- to 14-year-olds need to know about wellness, puberty, and sexual maturation. A health educator is needed in every school—someone who is honest, straightforward, trustworthy from a student perspective, and accessible. Boys and girls should be separated at times to allow for more honest and detailed questions and answers.

► ISSUE 2

Physical changes affect behavior.

Teachers serve students well when they recognize and accept a variety of behaviors that may result directly from the turmoil caused and/or aggravated by the
biological aspects of puberty. When opportunities arise to address the unspoken questions and resulting behaviors, teachers should reassure students that their anxieties are normal, and even expected.

Middle level students are restless and uncomfortable much of the time. Because of varying growth rates and the excess energy that may accompany these periods of rapid growth, regulation desks arranged in rows do not always provide the physical setting students need. Providing a classroom with a variety of seating possibilities can prove very beneficial. Perhaps a couple of tables with chairs, desks of varying sizes, a few comfortable chairs, and a couch will provide ample choices. I realize that this gives students a lot of freedom, and many teachers are hesitant to build their classroom environments in this way. However, I have found that most middle level students respond positively when their needs are taken into consideration and when teachers do things that show respect for them.

The legitimate restlessness resulting from growing bodies may be exacerbated by long periods of sitting, regardless of the variety of chairs provided. It’s no secret that active learning is more effective than passive learning. Movement stimulates the learning process. Find ways to get students up and moving as part of instruction.

**ISSUE 3**

Rapid growth requires increased and balanced nutrition.

There are two problems when it comes to young adolescents increasing what they eat in a balanced way. Body image worries scream “thin” to many middle level students. And then, when they’re hungry, their taste buds, along with peer pressure, often lead them to less nutritional food choices.

A comprehensive health program will include lessons on good nutrition. But the health educator can’t do it alone. All of us need to emphasize healthy eating. When we have a snack, let’s make it something nutritional like an apple or carrot. When we eat in the cafeteria, let’s model healthy eating habits. Middle level kids are often hungry. If, as a faculty, a decision can be made to allow eating during the day other than at lunchtime, then find a way to let kids have snacks, perhaps mid-morning or mid-afternoon, provided the snacks follow healthy eating guidelines you and your team/administration have established.

**ISSUE 4**

Young adolescents should not be stereotyped according to physical characteristics.

Many growth issues factor into physical ability. Some middle level students experience athletic success as they mature. Others find themselves lacking the coordination and stamina they may have had in elementary school. Let’s give middle level students the opportunity to explore athletics and find their talents and interests according to their own timing. Tall boys are not automatically talented at, or even

We discuss obesity and anorexia in Chapter 4.
interested in, basketball. Petite girls are not all destined to be gymnasts. Physical development sometimes leads to a child’s interest in a particular activity or sport, but mental development also influences activity choices.

Plan ways to incorporate a variety of intramural opportunities that allow even less physically skilled students to participate in team and individual activities. Offer classes in exploratory time or after school that help students learn skills such as dancing, tennis, martial arts, and so on.

Chorus quality depends on vocal cord development. Some activities in home economics and home/shop arts require dexterity, and some art forms require coordination/spatial sense. Although we would like all middle level students to experience success in all areas, we need to understand that while the brain may be willing, biological development may not have caught up. Let’s make sure that exploratory courses and intramural activities are opportunities to experience and experiment in broad areas that allow for and accommodate differences in development.

► ISSUE 5
Many girls will experience the first signs of a menstrual period during the school day.

This development alone will cause most girls to be upset and anxious, depending on the amount of information they have or the level of openness they have experienced among friends and family. A common cause of absenteeism among young adolescent girls is menstrual pain. Teachers need to be very sensitive to girls’ requests to leave the classroom suddenly, as well as to girls who are late to class or stay in the restroom longer than expected. Of course, the key to knowing the legitimacy of these events is knowing our students. Not every tardy girl is menstruating. Just be aware that questioning tardiness or restroom requests in front of other students is not appropriate. Make sure your school clinic has feminine hygiene products available. Menstrual discomfort is real, not psychosomatic, and can’t simply be willed away. As with other physical aspects of life, some will use cramping as an excuse to miss activities in class when perhaps it’s not necessary. We should try to err on the side of belief, however, rather than punishing sincere girls who need our understanding.

► ISSUE 6
Some middle level students (and I’m not just talking about girls!) feel a compulsion to check themselves out visually on a regular basis.

I found that having a full-length mirror in an out-of-the-way place in the classroom served a positive purpose. I also placed a smaller mirror on the wall by the pencil sharpener, so it was never obvious who needed visual reassurance and who simply had pencils with bad lead. These mirrors were up in August and were a natural part of the classroom setting. As a result, I had very few problems related to them.
Overactive glands may cause difficulties.

Because glands of all kinds may be newly activated or overactive in young adolescents, by mid-morning a student may realize that he forgot to use deodorant, or perhaps he feels the need for just a touch of something that smells good. Consider having a brown paper bag in a supply closet with spray deodorant and an inexpensive bottle of aftershave, along with a very light fragrance for girls. As with the mirrors, this may be an “extra” that some teachers may not be comfortable providing. Very few students will ever use these items, but you may save some 12-year-old a world of embarrassment. It’s worth the effort.

If comfortable with both the issue and the students, we may have occasions to initiate a personal hygiene discussion with students who, for whatever reason, need our brown bags of smell-good items. A trusted guidance counselor may be a better choice than the classroom teacher for this kind of heart-to-heart. It all depends on the individuals involved.

The physical development of young adolescents may come in sudden spurts or with gradual subtlety. The changes accompanying physical development may be met with emotional turmoil or casual acceptance. In fact, all four of these descriptors may be manifested in one student. Regardless of student responses to physical changes, they are sure to affect the other areas of development. Let’s look next at intellectual development.

Intellectual Development

Middle level students experience a transitional state between childlike thinking and adult thinking. Childlike thinking is characterized as concrete. This means that children organize information and experiences around things that are visible and familiar. They have difficulty visualizing concepts that they cannot see or touch. In the concrete stage, children have rigid patterns of thinking. Middle grades students who are concrete thinkers learn concepts much more readily when they are taught using manipulatives and hands-on activities that help bridge the transition from concrete to more adult abstract thinking and learning.

The intellectual transition that occurs in puberty opens whole new worlds for children progressing to the teen years. They begin to think in more general terms and to visualize events without having to see them. They can form mental connections, put things in perspective, and predict in more complex ways.

Becoming

We must not lose sight of a very important word—becoming. As vital as it is to understand how the terms concrete and abstract apply to the thinking process, it is
just as vital to understand the transition between the two distinct stages. Middle level learners are generally concrete thinkers at age 10, and some may remain basically concrete through age 14. However, they may be concrete at age 10 and well on their way to abstract thinking capabilities by age 11. One thing is certain: they are becoming. Some researchers tell us that the complete transition into abstract thinking may not take place until the age of 17 or 18. In fact, research evidence now shows that some parts of the brain do not fully develop until the mid-20s.

Although we may be able to identify and characterize stages of mental and intellectual growth, we must remember that the process of moving from concrete to abstract thinking is completely individual. In other words, becoming is idiosyncratic. It happens at different rates and at different ages for all of us. To complicate matters even further, the other areas of development influence this intellectual growth. By itself, intellectual development is variable, but just think about how physical, emotional, social, and character development figure into the mix of progressing from childhood to adolescence and subsequently to adulthood. It’s a complex period of development, to say the least.

**Intellectual Development Issues**

We should be aware of the variety of intellectual development in the classroom and of the issues this variety presents to the teacher. This awareness leads us to seek ways we can assist in this important growth process.

> **ISSUE 1**

The attention span of young adolescents may not be as great as it was in late elementary school or will be in high school.

This issue has profound implications for instruction. Expecting a middle level learner to sit through a 20-minute lecture, much less a 45-minute one, and gain a great deal of knowledge is often unrealistic. Attention will wander and learning will be hit or miss at times. Breaking up blocks of time into manageable segments is a technique that should be mastered by middle level teachers.

> **ISSUE 2**

Middle level students often have very vivid imaginations that can be linked to concepts as abstract thinking develops.

Purposefully channeling imagination into learning experiences conjures up creativity that has not been possible before. Encouraging students to use their imaginations and creativity to discover nuances and possibilities, rather than simply feeding them information, helps them take advantage of this imagination-meets-abstract-thinking stage of life.
Because intellectual development is so variable among young adolescents, a group of 25 seventh graders may represent a whole spectrum of developmental levels.

This is one of the biggest challenges of middle level education. The question is, “How do we facilitate the learning of a prescribed curriculum, that is, state and national standards, in a classroom filled with students who are at very different places in development?” As teachers, we must be observers, constantly monitoring what’s working and what isn’t, and for which students at which times. We must fill our “instructional toolboxes” to the brim with ways of teaching concepts and skills to students at variable levels of readiness. One size does not fit all!

As the shift from concrete to abstract thinking is ongoing, it is possible to lose opportunities to challenge middle level students. We must adjust and readjust our lesson components; we must watch closely and listen carefully to our students. We need to vary our instructional approaches to make the most of learning opportunities.

Physical development and intellectual development happen concurrently.

Active learning should take precedence over passive learning. Let’s get middle level students up and moving. They have a need to experience learning—to move, to touch, to manipulate, to search for meaning and understanding. The concept of inquiry, or discovery, learning should pervade what we do in the classroom.

A major shift in the intellectual development of middle level students is their newly acquired ability to think about their own thinking, or to experience metacognition.

We “miss the boat” when it comes to helping students take charge of their own learning if we fail to ask them to reflect on their learning processes. We can help them explore how their thinking takes place and what happens inside and outside the classroom that increases comprehension and makes learning specific skills easier and faster.

Middle level students begin to understand what is meaningful and useful, with application to their lives.

This intellectual development issue has major implications for what we teach, or the curriculum. Framing our lessons in the context of real life makes learning a more natural process of satisfying intellectual curiosity that arises from this sense of purpose and usefulness. There are times when young adolescent intellectual development appears to be at the mercy of emotional development.
Emotional Development

Parents, teachers, and even young adolescents themselves often refer to the roller coaster of emotions that accompany the middle level years as difficult to understand and impossible to predict. If you have ridden a roller coaster, you can no doubt close your eyes and recall the exhilaration of expectation, the sheer terror of the actual descents, and brief moments of calm during leveling off sections. But even in those “catch your breath” phases of the ride, there is an anticipation that keeps the adrenaline flowing and a sense of peace at bay. That’s how early adolescence can be characterized.

Dan Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), says that emotional intelligence determines about 80 percent of a person’s success in life. Goleman tells us we need to include five dimensions of emotional intelligence into what we do in schools. These five dimensions are self-awareness, handling emotions, motivation, empathy, and social skills. He believes it is possible to raise the emotional intelligence of students by, among other things, being available to them with an empathetic ear. *Six Seconds* is a nonprofit organization that helps individuals, parents, and educators navigate emotional issues in ways that increase emotional intelligence.

**Variety of Emotions**

Numerous descriptors are used when referring to the emotional states of early adolescence. Young adolescents may have emotions that are unpredictable, extreme, and unstable. They may be moody, anxious, angry, and embarrassed by things that we don’t see as important. Of course not every 10- to 15-year-old experiences all these characteristics and, when compared to the student next to him at lunch, none to the identical extent.

Although these descriptors seem to be negative in nature, my experience leads me to add hopefulness, optimism, and excitement to the list. I see these positive emotions exhibited every day by young adolescents. The message here is that variability makes for a wide emotional spectrum of middle level students. All of the descriptors are tied into the concept of self. The development of positive self-esteem is crucial but often elusive. The sense of losing control over the environment contributes to self-consciousness, often resulting in loss of self-esteem. The transition from elementary to middle school carries with it myriad changes that to a 10- or 11-year-old may seem overwhelming. Add this transition to the physical changes continually experienced and it’s entirely understandable that self-esteem would suffer. Developing positive self-esteem, challenging for many young adolescents, may prove to be especially difficult for minority students. As teachers we must create learning environments that account for cultural, ethnic, and racial differences.

**Interrelatedness**

Emotional development is interrelated with both physical and intellectual development. The physical changes described in this chapter are enough to cause emotions to occasionally go haywire. Imagine going from 4 feet 11 inches to 5 feet 4 inches
Many factors contribute to the development of self-concept in young adolescents. The emotional roller coaster ride often includes dips that lead to periods of sadness.

in the three short summer months between 7th and 8th grade. Or consider the creamy, smooth complexion that becomes embarrassingly blemished during the first semester of the 7th grade. How about the unpredictable erections that occur while finding the surface area of a cylinder or discussing the merits of the Panama Canal? The list of physical changes that can provoke emotional responses could go on and on, with each of us adding our own personal traumas. Be keenly aware that each time you are in a classroom of 25 middle grades students in the process of becoming, there are potentially 25 cases of moodiness and insecurity and emotional distress in there with you. Dealing with the physical changes taking place in their bodies is a persistent emotional challenge for young adolescents.

Emotional development is also entangled with intellectual development in ways we are just now beginning to understand and document. Brain researchers tell us that emotions strongly influence our ability to pay attention and retain information. The implications of this for the way we approach teaching and learning are tremendous. Emotional concerns can impede academics unless middle level teachers know how to work with these factors and channel concerns into productive results by understanding the context of the student’s world. “The affective side of learning is the critical interplay between how we feel, act, and think. There is no separation of mind and emotions; emotions, thinking, and learning are all linked” (Jensen, 2005, p. 71).
Worry

Middle grades students worry about almost everything. Their fears have changed from those of childhood to concerns about social and appearance issues. “Do I fit in? Do my jeans look like everybody else’s? Is my hair right? Will they want me to sit with them at lunch? Did he notice my braces? Will I be in the ‘right’ group on the field trip?” Worry, fear, and anxiety are common emotions of early adolescence. From an adult perspective, the sources of these negative emotions may seem trivial, but remember that our perceptions become our realities. To middle grades students, their worries are legitimate and quite real. To try to convince them otherwise is futile and potentially harmful. If we denigrate their concerns, we are, in students’ minds, denigrating them and adding to their anxieties and uncertainties. Our responses should be tempered with understanding and the absence of judgmental attitudes. When a 12-year-old girl is crying because she found uncomplimentary notes written about her by kids she considered friends, the last thing she wants to hear is “It’s no big deal, you’ll find new friends.” Instead, we should acknowledge that she is hurt. The gift of an understanding ear will allow her to express her feelings and know that someone cares. It won’t take away the hurt, but it will legitimize her emotions and give her the opportunity to work through the grief of the moment.

Emotional Development Issues

Our goal regarding emotional development should be to help our students find their way toward emotional maturity. This task is compounded by the challenge of teaching socially acceptable ways of both controlling and expressing emotions. Along with displaying emotions in socially acceptable ways, emotional maturity must include dealing with personal emotions in mentally healthy ways. Middle level schools must provide opportunities for students to see that a wide range of emotions is normal. Creating an environment that says “It’s OK to feel the way you do” will enhance self-acceptance and allow emotional maturity to progress.

ISSUE 1

Because emotions may occur suddenly and without warning, self-regulation is very difficult.

Sensitivity to the emotions of our students should make us acutely aware of the volatility they are experiencing. When an outburst of emotion or some sort of personal affront is aimed at us, we have the perfect opportunity to model self-regulation. The sage advice of “take a deep breath and count to 10” has a lot of validity in a middle grades setting. Show how it’s done and encourage students to do likewise.

ISSUE 2

Because of emotional variability, young adolescents may be at high risk of making poor decisions.

We can help students recognize that many emotions are fleeting, that what they feel at one moment may change quickly and unexpectedly. Through thinking
out loud when a decision needs to be made, we can model the difference between reacting and responding. Reactions are emotionally triggered, whereas responses are the result of thinking through those emotions. We want our students to make decisions based more on rational thought than on emotions.

**ISSUE 3**

Some incidences and events trigger emotions to the point of disruption of the learning process.

As individual teachers, but preferably as a team of teachers, we have a very beneficial tool for dealing with emotions. That tool is providing a psychologically safe environment in which concerns may be aired. This environment may include appropriate readings and videos that present possible solutions to emotionally charged dilemmas and situations. Encouraging students to role-play and involve themselves in simulations may be a vehicle for venting worries, anxieties, and emotional distress and preventing the disruption of the learning process.

Not only can the learning process be affected by emotions, but social relationships and growth are often impacted by emotions. Closely linked to emotional development is social development, which, in turn, affects overall development of easily influenced and socially self-conscious young adolescents. Let’s explore social development.

**Social Development**

As young adolescents become aware of the unique aspects of themselves, they also become acutely aware of others around them—most specifically their peers. They develop an exaggerated view of themselves, often thinking that everyone’s attention is on them. This perception may make them uneasy in social settings. The emotionally laden search for personal identity integrates experiences with developing bodies, biological drive, new thinking capacities, and expanding social roles. Although it may be uncomfortable, socialization plays a major role in the psychological growth process, as it is influenced by, and interrelated with, physical, intellectual, and emotional development. “Perhaps the most significant stress in a young adolescent’s life is the sense of not fitting in. For most students, good adjustment and performance in school require some level of social comfort” (San Antonio, 2006, p. 10).

As a 6-foot-tall 12-year-old, David McBeath’s physical development far exceeds his emotional, social, and cognitive development. Watch an interview with David and one with his mother.

The need for socialization is especially strong during early adolescence. As we explored in Chapter 1, middle level philosophy originated partially from the belief that the school can and should play a major role in both the cognitive and affective dimensions of the development of the whole child, including aspects of socialization.
• **Adult Relationships**

Young adolescents often find themselves caught between their desire to be safe and secure (as in childhood) and their desire for freedom and independence. Because adults generally represent security, the struggle for change often revolves around relationships with them. Although affirmation of parental love and teacher approval are secretly sought, young adolescents may act out in argumentative and rebellious ways against those closest to them, in many cases against parents, guardians, and teachers. This rebellion, in its many forms, is normal and even necessary, as attempts are made to demonstrate that they have minds of their own. Considering the options, perhaps rebellion during early adolescence is preferable to rebellion at other times in life when even more dangerous options become available.

Even as young adolescents tend to disassociate themselves from family, they may seek to emulate other adults. They easily buy into fantasies about adults, often created in the media. This leads to hero formation, most likely of movie stars and sports figures. In fact, Mee (1997) found in a large-scale study that boys almost exclusively named sports figures as their role models. Both genders may fantasize that adult life can be (or is) glamorous; that money is easily made; that outward beauty equates to happiness; that TV sitcom life is realistic; that those successful, carefree beer-drinking people in the advertisements do so with no consequences; that casual sex is desirable. . . . The list goes on.

• **Peer and Group Relationships**

As young adolescents begin to discover that it is unlikely that they can always please the adults with authority over them as well as the kids they hang around with, a loyalty shift usually takes place. Friends generally take on greater significance. Fear of being different, and therefore not accepted by peers, is a drive that for most is unavoidable. They adopt personalities and appearances that will win them placement in a group. I remember distinctly the groups that existed during my middle level years, and I'm certain you remember yours too. “Natural selection” played a role in group formation. There were certain groups with which I knew I could not align. The “cheerleader,” for instance, was not a possibility for me because I didn’t look the part, regardless of how I tried. I recognized the choices that were realistic and found my way into a group that was comfortable. Being part of a group provides security and is a source of feedback when experimentation and dilemmas occur. It seems that simply being part of a group is more important than which group. Most of us don’t choose our families or teachers, so choosing friends and a peer group takes on importance as a factor in establishing identity and independence. It’s a decision-making opportunity.

Group alignment creates peer pressure, the driving force created by the need/desire to conform. Giving in to peer pressure is absolutely normal at any age. Peer pressure can have a positive or negative influence. If peer pressure dictates that good grades, church attendance, and politeness are the norm, then most adults cheer the influence. However, if peer pressure leads to smoking, drinking, drugs, vandalism, or early sex, then it is viewed as negative. Most peer pressure is somewhere in between...
and varies according to circumstances and timing. Like it or not, the influence of peers is a phenomenon that is inevitable. Adults can and should attempt to influence the choices of friends and peer groups, but the truth is that young adolescents will assert their need for independence and make choices that only locking them in their rooms until age 21 could prevent.

In the beginning of early adolescence, around ages 10 to 12, same-sex friendships are the most vital. The need for a “best friend” to whom there is uncompromising loyalty and from whom the same is expected is a driving force. Once best friend status is achieved, relegation to “second best friend” is a devastating prospect. This appears to be much more pronounced in girls than boys. Girls will bare their souls to best friends, whereas boys are often content to be in a group where they laugh at the same things and are physically active in the same interest areas. When and with whom opposite-sex attractions occur occupies a place in young adolescent variability that exceeds most other aspects of the age. Some “puppy love” experiences heavily influence 11-year-olds, but for others opposite-sex attractions do not wield a great deal of influence until age 16 or so.

The social development of early adolescence includes some notable paradoxes. In their quest for independence, adolescents will freely conform to fit in. They rebel against adult authority while doing what they can to become adultlike. Social development implies relationships with other people, and yet this is an age of egocentricity and perhaps selfishness. These paradoxes take place simultaneously with expanding possibilities for violence, bullying, aggression, and a variety of abusive scenarios.

The alliances formed in early adolescence are often very strong.

In Chapter 4 we consider the societal contexts of middle level education.
Social Development Issues

There are many issues involved in the social development of young adolescents. Our own memories of the preteen and early teen years serve as acute reminders of just how significant social issues can be during this period of life.

ISSUE 1
Young adolescents have a very strong need to be part of a social group.

Students who are part of advisory groups—small groups who form close relationships with each other and an adult in the school—often feel a bond of trust, or at least a sense that they know the others in the group. Clubs give students chances to get to know others with similar interests. At a minimum, we should adhere to the Turning Points tenet that calls for us to create small learning communities. This translates into teams, the basic organizational foundation of middle level education. In addition, giving students “free time” during the school day allows for informal socialization.

If we do not allow for socialization time, we are depriving our students of growth opportunities. Kids are going to talk, pass notes, send text messages, gather in groups, and so on. If we don’t give them time for such activities, they will take the time from us. Showing that we understand socialization needs should be part of our visible attitude toward our students. Social validation is important.

ISSUE 2
Some young adolescents are targets.

Kids often pick on others as a way of diverting attention from themselves, their differences, or their insecurities. Regardless of the reasons, it happens. As educators, we need to do what we can to stifle this activity. Be sensitive to the kids who seem to be the outcasts, and never say things like “stop picking on Sam” in front of Sam or other kids who aren’t involved. This will just make things worse for unfortunate Sam as students tease him because the teacher has come to his rescue. Instead, we need to find interests and activities that Sam does well and capitalize on them. Identify kids with similar interests/skills and arrange for Sam to get together with them. We should also encourage Sam not to react to teasing. Then it will no longer be fun for the perpetrators and it will lessen the occurrences. As strange as it may seem, some kids who become “targets” actually thrive on it in a perverse way. Attention, even though it’s negative, gives a sense of identity. These students would benefit from multiple visits with the school counselor.

ISSUE 3
Early adolescence is a prime time for shyness, given the self-consciousness of the age.

Young adolescents may experience symptoms such as blushing, sweating, and increased heart rate. The need to conform to group norms may cause them to hide...
the symptoms and appear to be confident. Whether shyness is obvious, or not, it can be painful and viewed as a negative trait by peers and adults. As with Issue 1, providing a variety of outlets for socialization will help ease shyness. Offering activity opportunities that vary enough to appeal to a variety of students may help shy students find their talents and interests, and find other students who share them.

**ISSUE 4**

Teachers' social backgrounds may be different from their students' backgrounds.

This is a very common phenomenon. We may teach students with whom we have difficulty relating. Our realities may be very different from those of our students. Student learning will be more meaningful if teachers understand the young adolescent. Knowing student social realities will assist us in relating to them and connecting them more fully to school experiences.

### Character Development

The character of young adolescents is “determined by what they do and what happens to them. But these take place in a concrete social medium. . . . The content and quality of this social medium plays a significant, formative role in shaping the character of students” (Dobrin, 2001, p. 275). The discussion of character development has the potential to become value-laden as we deal with morals and ethics. Rather than steering clear of the topic because of possible controversy, or embedding it in discussions of emotional and social development, let’s take a look at the characteristics of early adolescence in terms of character development and explore how “what they do and what happens to them” may be dealt with in healthy ways within our middle schools. The “concrete social medium” referred to by Dobrin is the 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week life of students. Time spent in school accounts for a major chunk of this time. So the school is an influential part of the social medium that shapes the character of students.

#### Young Adolescent Character Traits

Many generalizations can be made about typical character traits of young adolescents. Here are some to consider. Young adolescents often

- are concerned about fairness.  
  Telling a teacher “you’re not fair” is a terrible rebuke. Middle grades students have definite ideas about what adults should be and should do in regard to treating students fairly. When adults disappoint them, students are not quick to forgive or forget.
ask unanswerable questions.
Middle grades students want to know answers to major questions, such as the meaning of life and what their roles should be in society. They usually realize that adults don’t have all these answers, but they at least want adults to treat their questions seriously.

need support, but seldom ask for it.
To make wise decisions about moral issues, young adolescents need us to be positive role models to help them with issues of right and wrong.

make poor decisions as a result of their strong need for peer acceptance.
During the middle level years, students often value social approval over moral convictions. This may lead to decisions that have harmful, often life-changing consequences.

Listen to what Ruth Meisen, the 2008 Illinois Teacher of the Year, has to say about the tremendous power teachers have to influence all areas of student development.

School Programs
Understanding that young adolescents are continually struggling with character development, we naturally ask ourselves how we can help them. Over the years, schools have institutionalized many character-development programs delivered to students in a variety of ways. Classes and/or occasional meetings devoted to character development are often plagued with controversy over exactly what values and aspects of character should be promoted in public schools. Even with the controversy, there is a renewed call for schools to address character issues, perhaps due to the increase in violent incidents in our schools at the end of the 20th century.

Groups of citizens and educators often debate which character issues to emphasize. From Aristotle’s universal values of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice, to C. S. Lewis’s list that includes respect, responsibility, honesty, compassion, and fairness, we struggle to impart a sense of right and wrong that will not conflict with religious values or be politically incorrect. Communities attempt to come up with what they consider universally (or at least locally) acceptable values.

Most character-building curricula specify qualities of good character. Following are some of the most commonly used terms for the desired characteristics of many programs:

- Trustworthiness
- Respect for others
- Responsibility
- Fairness
- Caring
- Citizenship
Character Education Partnership is an umbrella organization for character education, serving as a resource for people and organizations that are integrating character education into their schools and communities.

As teachers we have the capacity to be the character-building program. Actually, we have no choice. Whether students acknowledge it or not, they watch us and count on us to model exemplary character. So even if your district or school doesn’t have an organized character-development program, your students are observing, and to some degree internalizing, the morals and values you exemplify.

Character Development Issues

The issues involved in character development tend to be more dependent on the context of home and community than those in other developmental areas.

 ISSUE 1
Some students grow up in homes that emphasize a very strict moral code, and others live in homes in which there are few moral guidelines or restrictions.

We need to understand that home life heavily influences the behaviors and attitudes of the kids in our classes. Through conscientiously being positive role models, understanding home influences, and finding ways to gently prod students toward what our communities consider good character, we will be teachers who make a difference. We cannot lose sight of the variability of influences outside the school. Individualizing our approach to character development is essential.

 ISSUE 2
Students are continually faced with contradictions concerning character.

We can’t erase or deny contradictions. Creating a forum that allows students to candidly discuss their disappointments in adults, in their personal lives, or in the media will help them understand that they are not alone in their feelings. Through discussion comes opportunity for growth. We need to remember, however, that when kids come to us to talk about character, emotional, or social issues, sometimes they simply want to talk and need someone who will listen rather than give advice.

 ISSUE 3
Middle grades students are especially vulnerable to falling in with the “wrong crowd.”

Before values are established, being accepted by a group may take precedence. As we’ve discussed, socialization is a major force during the middle grades years. When socialization leads to the acceptance of values, morals, or ethics that result in undesirable behavior, we have a problem. As middle grades educators, we have the responsibility to expose kids to all kinds of relationships and groups. We can, in fact, act as engineers in our own classrooms as we build experiences that give our students social and value choices in a context that allows them to question and to change their minds.
Goals of Middle Level Education

Current wisdom rightly emphasizes the need for focus on the results of educational efforts rather than on the efforts themselves. A practice may appear to be ideal for young adolescents, but if, in a particular circumstance, it doesn’t result in increased learning or positive growth physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, or morally, then why do it? Some refer to this philosophy as a results orientation. Makes sense, doesn’t it?

The teacher is the most influential factor in student learning and positive growth (Rand Education, 2013). What we do, and how we do it, matters. For centuries researchers have attempted to compile lists of characteristics that succinctly describe effective teachers. Collecting traits and making lists are healthy things to do because the more we consider teacher effectiveness, the better. However, teaching is a profession composed of individual interactions among teachers, students, and content/skills in the teaching and learning process and, as such, defies an exact recipe for teacher effectiveness. There is one defining ingredient, however: effective teachers promote student learning and positive growth.

So what does student learning and positive growth look like? This We Believe (2010, pp. 11–12) explicitly lists student characteristics that signal learning and growth, the purposes of effective teaching and learning. I have numbered the characteristics for convenience as they are listed, but the list is not hierarchical. Each statement stands alone as a distinct goal for helping each young adolescent “become a fully functioning, self-actualized person” (p. 11). Each young adolescent should:

**TWB Goal 1.** Become actively aware of the larger world, asking significant and relevant questions about the world and wrestling with big ideas and questions for which there may not be one right answer.

**TWB Goal 2.** Be able to think rationally and critically and express thought clearly.

**TWB Goal 3.** Read deeply to independently gather, assess, and interpret information from a variety of sources and read avidly for enjoyment and lifelong learning.

**TWB Goal 4.** Use digital tools to explore, communicate, and collaborate with the world and learn from the rich and varied resources available.

**TWB Goal 5.** Be a good steward of the earth and its resources and a wise and intelligent consumer of the wide array of goods and services available.

**TWB Goal 6.** Understand and use the major concepts, skills, and tools of inquiry in the areas of health and physical education, language arts, world languages, mathematics, natural and physical sciences, and the social sciences.

**TWB Goal 7.** Explore music, art, and careers, and recognize their importance to personal growth and learning.

**TWB Goal 8.** Develop his or her strengths, particular skills, talents, or interests and have an emerging understanding of his or her potential contributions to society and to personal fulfillment.
Quite a list, isn’t it? They aren’t just words: in each statement we find a lens through which we should view each and every student in our middle level classrooms. Throughout this book these statements will appear in the margins when we discuss attitudes, approaches, and actions that promote student learning and positive growth in one or more of the 13 specific areas. The temptation will be to just look past these important margin notes because you’ve read them before, but please resist. These characteristics need to be ingrained in us. They need to be our vision for every young adolescent we serve. In these statements we find the results that define our effectiveness.

Meet the Students

We’ve established that young adolescent development is idiosyncratic, meaning it occurs in stops and starts, is seldom predictable, and no two students develop in the same ways at the same time. Reading about student development and diversity serves as foundational knowledge. When we see the concepts through real kids, we internalize them. That’s why including focus students is a vital part of this textbook. Here you meet our nine focus students in 6th grade. They represent only a portion of the elements of diversity among young adolescents. These kids are included in the Professional Practice exercises at the end of the chapters, as well as in a feature called See How They Grow as we watch them grow from 6th to 7th to 8th grade. Get to know these students, and think about how you might use what you read in subsequent chapters to be an effective teacher for them.

**Zach** • 6th grade, Lincoln Middle School

Zach is basically a good kid. He experienced his own bouts of trouble in elementary school but is doing fine so far in 6th grade. Zach’s mom, Melinda, teaches at Lincoln Middle School where Zach is now a student. She lives near the Title I school because, as a single mom with responsibility for her aging parents and her son, the house they all share is less expensive. Her concern is...
that Zach is one of the few Caucasian kids at Lincoln. She knows as a teacher that skin color shouldn’t be an issue, that it’s really socioeconomic, but she still worries. There are discipline and motivational issues at Lincoln that other schools, primarily in the suburbs, don’t face as frequently. She hopes that Zach is growing up to be well-rounded and culturally sensitive and that those qualities will serve him well.

Zach was diagnosed with ADHD in 3rd grade. Mom and his teachers watched him carefully for two years before going to his pediatrician with their concerns. Melinda didn’t want Zach “labeled” unless there was a significant problem and a promise of help through either behavior modifications or medication, or both. Zach began taking Ritalin in the beginning of 4th grade, and the medicine appears to be helping him concentrate and learn. It also assists him with behavioral issues he faced earlier.

DeVante • 6th grade, Jefferson Middle School

DeVante is surviving as a beginning 6th grader at Jefferson Middle School, but life wasn’t always so good for him. After failing both kindergarten and 3rd grade, DeVante is considerably taller and more socially streetwise than others about to enter middle school. His granny and sole guardian was at her wit’s end. She didn’t like the neighborhood school but didn’t know what else to do. She needed help and managed to get DeVante into the Boys and Girls Club near their downtown apartment the summer after 5th grade. It was difficult to convince him to try it because he only wanted to hang out with the kids his age (13) rather than the 11-year-olds who just completed 5th grade with him. One of the volunteers at the Boys and Girls Club told DeVante’s grandmother about Jefferson, a magnet school not far away. DeVante reluctantly applied and was accepted.

DeVante’s granny gets by on food stamps and other government assistance. This means, as a 6th grader, he rarely has spending money. When he hangs out with the older kids, they buy him things—food, shoes, an occasional beer. They like DeVante, and that’s a problem. The 13- to 15-year-olds in the neighborhood are being groomed by a local gang. Most will do whatever gang members say and actually idolize the older boys who have dropped out of high school. No wonder Granny is concerned.

Emily • 6th grade, Madison Middle School

Emily is shy and immature. Her mom worries that she is too young for middle school. She was allowed to start kindergarten at age 4, and it’s quite obvious that another year in elementary school would have been good from a social standpoint. Mom divorced when Emily and her older brother were quite young. Emily spends one weekend a month with Dad and his second

(Continued)
wife. Her mom remarried two years ago, and, in the bargain, Emily got three young stepsiblings.

Emily has a speech impediment that accounts for some of her shyness. If she just says a few words, it’s not obvious. More than that, and it’s easy to pick up on. In elementary school she spent time each day with a speech therapist and dreads doing the same thing in middle school. Now that she’s in 6th grade, she’s just waiting for the first day when someone comes to the door and asks for her. She’s quite nervous about being singled out.

Kim  6th grade, Jefferson Middle School

Kim could have been a character on The Cosby Show. Dad is a doctor and Mom is a bank executive. She has an older brother and a younger sister. Life for three generations on both sides of the family has been good, with lots of successful careers and lifestyles to match. Kim is a good student, but not particularly interested in math, science, or social studies. She likes to write and begged her parents to let her attend Jefferson Middle School, an inner-city magnet school focusing on technology and communications. They were reluctant but decided to give the school a chance. Kim has wanted to be a television news anchor ever since her aunt became a successful broadcaster in Atlanta.

Kim is very visual. She learns best when she sees what’s supposed to be learned, and graphic representations appeal to her. Just hearing something often goes right past her. Kim’s elementary school teachers understood this. Mom and Dad are a little concerned about her transition to Jefferson. Kim’s visual learning style is accompanied by a seemingly nonstop need to talk.

Gabe  6th grade, Valley View Middle School

Gabe is a quiet, small-for-his-age Hispanic boy who was born in the United States. His mom, dad, and two younger sisters speak Spanish at home. Dad works as a farmhand 10–12 hours a day to provide a meager living for the family. For three months a year the family moves across the Kansas border so Dad can work in a restaurant when he’s not needed on the farm. This poses a problem for Gabe now that he is a 6th grader at Valley View Middle School. He seems pretty happy at school, but doesn’t stand out, either in a positive way or as a behavioral problem.

The fact that Gabe is a U.S. citizen makes his parents happy. They know their three children will have more opportunities than they had. They adore Gabe and his sisters but have found that helping Gabe with homework is a thing of the past. In the middle of 4th grade they were at a loss to help, and Gabe’s teacher assumed it was because of language difficulties. But that’s not the whole reason. Gabe’s parents completed only the equivalent of 6th grade in Mexico.
Janie • 6th grade, Cario Middle School

Janie has always liked school and done well. Her circle of girl-friends has been together since kindergarten. They go to the mall and the movies and talk on the phone incessantly. She has lived in the same neighborhood since she was 2 years old. Her dad is a successful Realtor; her mom cares for Janie and her 7-year-old brother full time in their home. As she happily enters 6th grade, Mom and Dad are confident that Janie will be fine at Cario Middle School. Their only concern about her actually has a possible positive side. The summer after 5th grade Janie became conscious of her weight and started cutting back on sweets and spent more time riding her bike. She wanted to lose weight for middle school.

Janie loves to read. She was a Judy Blume fan in elementary school and read some of the books three times. She anxiously awaited each Harry Potter book before she could read them with comprehension. She knew her parents would read them to her. Now she has discovered Jodi Picoult. Mom thinks the books are a little old for her, but she’s just glad Janie’s love of reading continues.

Andy • 6th grade, Hamilton Middle School

Andy lives in a trailer on the outskirts of a small southern town. He’s an only child whose mom died of cancer two years ago. Andy and his dad hunt and fish every weekend during the school year. He’s not at all out of place in his rural community where there are definite social strata. The two quite distinct groups of people get along as groups, but a look at the children in the school gym shows that some of their lifestyle priorities and resources are quite different.

Andy has been heavy all his life. When he was a baby, everyone thought he was adorable. Now that he’s in 6th grade, he has become more conscious of his size but still doesn’t care very much. Unfortunately, he has started using chewing tobacco. He is often distracted in class and sometimes makes inappropriate remarks to other students. He’s always been an average student who does much better when he experiences a concept rather than reading about it or doing paper and pencil work.

Darma • 6th grade, Lake Park Middle School

Darma, his parents, and younger brother emigrated from Indonesia when he was 6 years old. He is a very interesting boy who enjoys playing chess and collecting comic books. He has a close group of friends and doesn’t really care to socialize with other kids outside this circle. He’s fine with going to middle school and knows he will continue to be in an academically gifted class where he is very comfortable. Darma’s last name is Suparman, a common surname in his native country. His friends, of course, call him “Superman,” a nickname he actually likes.

In Indonesia many people speak both Indonesian and English. Darma has grown up speaking English outside his home, so language is not a problem for

(Continued)
him. Although he does well in all his classes, Darma is fascinated with patterns and sequences, making math a favorite subject. He is meticulously organized and has trouble relating to kids who don’t share his passion for order. Teachers, of course, look forward to having Darma in class because he consistently meets or exceeds their expectations.

**Maria • 6th grade, MLK Middle School**

Maria was born in Mexico and came to the United States when she was 7 years old. Her dad took her brothers back to Mexico to help care for his parents, and she hasn’t seen them in three years. Her mom is a housekeeper at a downtown hotel and works evenings and weekends. Since she was in 4th grade, Maria has been staying by herself after school until Mom returns after midnight. On weekends she watches TV and mostly sits around, locked in her apartment. Her mom wants her to have all the advantages she didn’t have, but Maria is sad most of the time. Her mom hasn’t learned much English, and neither has Maria.

Each year Maria barely passes to the next grade. Teachers have suspected a learning disability, but, because she’s an English language learner, it’s been hard to pinpoint. In middle school she may fall even further behind. Emotionally and socially Maria is growing more and more restless. She doesn’t want to stay inside anymore now that she’s in middle school. This worries Mom, but she doesn’t know what to do about it. She wants Maria to be successful in school and to have nice friends.

**Why It Matters**

There are as many possible combinations of developmental traits as there are middle level students. All of our students are evolving and becoming—they are not finished products. Our challenge as teachers is to accept them as they are and do what we can to help them grow in healthy ways physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially, and with positive and productive character traits.

Now that we have briefly considered the development of young adolescents, you may be thinking, “What does all this have to do with teaching them how to factor binomials?” The answer is everything. Or perhaps you are thinking that your future students will be enamored with the American Revolution and will leave their prepubescent/pubescent selves behind when you grab their imaginations with your detailed lecture. Think again. The jolt of becoming is often so staggering that learning is not a given but mind-wandering likely is. Case in point . . . I read this years ago in a journal, the name of which I can’t recall. The timing may not be scientifically derived, but the point is valid. “An 8th grade boy likely thinks of sex every 20 seconds.” Binomials and the American Revolution have some significant competition. Better have a plan for really engaging instruction!
As middle level teachers, we contend with much more than content. Somehow we find ways to capture attention and keep it long enough to engage young adolescents in their own learning. The more we understand about what affects our kids, the better we are at helping make early adolescence a period of positive development for young adolescents.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. In small groups, make bulleted lists of possible characteristics or descriptors of middle level students for each of the five developmental areas discussed in this chapter. Feel free to add to what this text covers. It would take volumes to be comprehensive! Share your lists with other groups.

2. How do movies and television shows portray middle level students? As a class, brainstorm about all the 10- to 15-year-olds we see on TV and in movies. What characteristics from your lists do these fictional kids exemplify?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

1. Interview at least three of your friends and ask them to describe themselves as young adolescents in the five developmental areas. Write brief sketches of them using your interview notes. Would you have predicted them to be as they are today given their self-described young adolescent personas?

2. Go to a place where you are likely to see groups of young adolescents. Try the mall, a fast food restaurant, a sporting event, or another afterschool hangout. Describe what you observe during a 10- or 15-minute period. Include their physical size/shape, clothing, accessories, hairstyles, socialization patterns, and so on. This exercise may bring back memories! Be prepared to share your observations with your class.

PERSONAL JOURNAL

1. Write an honest appraisal of yourself during early adolescence. Try to think about the span of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade rather than one particular time frame. Consider all five areas of development at each grade level.

2. Call at least two family members, if possible, to ask them to recall what you were like as a young adolescent. Assure them that you can remain objective about their comments because you are now a mature teacher candidate. Try the “if you’ll be honest with me, I’ll be honest with you” ploy. Compare your family members’ observations to your own self-assessment.
Professional Practice

Jermaine Joyner has so much energy and is filled with ideas he wants to implement at Jefferson Middle School, a technology and communication magnet school in an urban area. Magnet status was given to Jefferson in 1998 in an effort to draw students from the suburbs to downtown to achieve both racial and socio-economic integration. Magnet schools encourage students from across an entire school district to attend them based on a theme or special emphasis. The plan had worked. About half the Jefferson kids were from the immediate neighborhood and half from various areas in the district.

Mr. Joyner is the school’s computer guru. He teaches all three grade levels and has been able to build a program that allows students to start at a basic computer literacy level and steadily progress to more advanced computer applications. One of his pet initiatives is the development of a television studio where five-minute daily programs are taped and broadcast to the whole student body. The Broadcast Club meets before and after school.

DeVante • 6th grade
DeVante is one of the new 6th graders at Jefferson. The school is not in his immediate neighborhood, but he gave in to Granny’s urging, reluctantly applied, and won a spot at the school through lottery selection. DeVante has a troubled past. He has failed twice and prefers to hang around with older kids, many of whom have gang ties. He’s unhappy about having to leave his own neighborhood for school.

1. Which barrier is most significant for Mr. Joyner to overcome in his sponsorship of the Broadcast Club?
   a. getting kids interested in spending extra time the club requires
   b. finding ways to encourage kids from across a wide spectrum of lifestyles to work together
   c. convincing other teachers that the five minutes required for the broadcast is worth the time
   d. maintaining equipment and the expense required to do so

2. Which circumstance will likely have the most positive impact on DeVante?
   a. being in classes with a variety of students
   b. learning computer skills in Mr. Joyner’s class
   c. being older and physically larger than other kids, which will help keep him from being a target
   d. joining the Broadcast Club at the insistence of Mr. Joyner

3. During his first few months at Jefferson, DeVante is hesitant to even crack a smile. He is attending the school begrudgingly. It wasn’t his idea. About the first week in December Mr. Joyner sees a spark of interest as DeVante actually starts a conversation with him. What is the most likely reason DeVante shows signs of interest in the Broadcast Club?
   a. Having Mr. Joyner as a role model of a successful African American man is having an impact.
   b. He sees broadcasting as a possible career interest.
   c. He has made close friends with kids in the school.
   d. He has reconciled himself to the fact that Jefferson is his school and he might as well make the most of it.

Constructed Response

Explain the meaning of this Donna San Antonio quote: “I believe that we cannot accomplish our academic goals without a purposeful and thoughtful focus on social development.” How does this statement relate to middle level philosophy? Why is it a significant statement to consider when thinking about the challenges posed by DeVante’s move to Jefferson Middle School?