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## Characteristics of the American middle school

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## Characteristics of the American middle school

### Abstract

If we look back on the history of education in the United States, we find many patterns of school organization. Prior to the establishment of middle schools, the middle level of schooling was commonly known as junior high school. According to Van Til, et al., (1967), the first junior high school was established at Columbus, Ohio in 1909. Since then, both the 8-4 plan and 8-5 plan, the standard organizational patterns used for public schooling in the United States after the Civil War, have been gradually changed to the newer form--the 6-3-3 plan. The first prompting to establish a junior high school came in a report of a subcommittee of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

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A Graduate Paper  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of Arts in Education

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by  
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## CHAPTER 1

Middle level schooling prior  
to the establishment of middle schools.

If we look back on the history of education in the United States, we find many patterns of school organization. Prior to the establishment of middle schools, the middle level of schooling was commonly known as junior high school. According to Van Til, et al., (1967), the first junior high school was established at Columbus, Ohio in 1909. Since then, both the 8-4 plan and 8-5 plan, the standard organizational patterns used for public schooling in the United States after the Civil War, have been gradually changed to the newer form--the 6-3-3 plan. The first prompting to establish a junior high school came in a report of a subcommittee of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies. In their report the subcommittee stated:

In preparing these programmes, the Committee were perfectly aware that it is impossible to make a satisfactory secondary school programme, limited to a period of four years, and founded on the present elementary school subjects and methods. In

the opinion of the Committee, several subjects now reserved for high schools--such as algebra, geometry, natural science, and foreign languages--should be begun earlier than now, and therefore within the schools classified as elementary; or, as an alternative, the secondary school period should be made to begin two years earlier than at present, leaving six years instead of eight for the elementary school period. Under the present organization, elementary subjects and elementary methods are, in the judgment of the committee, kept in use too long (National Education Association, 1969, p. 45).

This report was the immediate result of the proposal made by the college faculty and administrators criticising the 8-4 plan. They were concerned because the average age of college admission had steadily risen until it was over eighteen years--in fact, nearly nineteen. Bossing and Cramer (1965) reported that Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, was the principal spokesman for higher education, and led the movement to reform the pattern of America's public education. In an address made before a National Education Association meeting in 1892, Eliot said:

On reviewing the progress of this reform since I had the honor of discussing the question "Can School Programmes Be Shortened and Enriched?" before this Department of Superintendents, four years ago, I see many evidences that a great and beneficent change in public school programmes is rapidly advancing. The best evidence is to be found in the keen interest which superintendents and teachers take in the discussion of the subject. (p. 11)

Eliot then made three recommendations to shorten the elementary school. First, he suggested reducing the number of grades "from ten to nine, or nine to eight." He suggested that the combined primary and grammar school period end at fourteen or thirteen years of age. Second, he suggested that capable pupils be allowed to progress as rapidly as possible so that many might complete two grades in one year. Third, he advised the elimination of some useless work as, for example, when he indicated that too much arithmetic was being taught; he suggested more was being taught than most of us ever use.

In terms of enrichment, he first called for the introduction of certain subjects earlier in the school



program: elementary natural history earlier than now offered, elementary physics in the later years of the program, algebra and geometry at age twelve or thirteen, the opportunity to study French, German, or Latin after age ten. He also proposed the use of improved classroom methods, greater flexibility in allowing pupils to choose subjects, and more flexibility in promotion and graduation requirements.

These proposals were followed by the formation of several major committees of the Committee of Ten in 1892. The work of these committees was known as the reorganization movement. Melton (1984) said that out of these committees came the basic concepts underlying the junior high school idea which included:

1. better provision in the school programs for the needs of adolescents
2. provision for the exploration of pupil-interest and ability
3. individualization of the instructional program
4. better articulation between elementary and secondary education. (p. 6)

Tye (1985) reports the following recommendations from the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education made in 1918:

... a reorganization of the school system whereby the first six years shall be devoted to elementary education designed to meet the needs of pupils approximately 6 to 12 years of age, and the second six years to secondary education designed to meet the needs of pupils approximately 12 to 18 years of age.

The six years to be devoted to secondary education may well be divided into two periods which may be designated as the junior and senior periods. In the junior period emphasis should be placed upon the attempt to help the pupil explore his own aptitudes and to make at least provisional choice of the kinds of work to which he shall devote himself. In the senior period emphasis should be given to training in the fields thus chosen. This distinction lies at the basis of the organization of the junior and senior high schools.

In the junior high school there should be a gradual introduction of departmental instruction, some choice of subjects under guidance, promotion by subjects, prevocational courses, and a social organization that calls for the initiative and

develops the sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of the group. (p. 35)

These recommendations have provided the framework for the restructuring of many American middle level schools.

## CHAPTER 2

## The middle school movement

The middle school movement began in the 1960s in response to several criticisms of the junior high school. These criticisms have been widely published and expounded upon at professional conferences. J. H. Hull (1960) described the junior high school as a poor investment because "... it puts the unstable child at a most vulnerable period in his life in a situation more appropriate for older youth" (p. 78). On the other hand, it is commonly accepted that children today mature earlier, physically and socially than did their parents fifty years ago. There is evidence that the majority of girls enter puberty between the ages of ten and twelve, the majority of boys between the ages of eleven and thirteen, and that these children share common development problems. Havighurst (1965), said that "... the adolescent today is more precocious and more complex ... He has many experiences earlier than his parents had these experiences." (p. 2).

Based on these arguments, the proponents of the middle school criticized the junior high school saying it had failed to provide special educational opportunities for preadolescents and early adolescents.

One proponent, Klingele (1979), said: "There appears to be more likeness among youngsters at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels than with youngsters above or below these grade levels. Thus, there is now less compatibility between eighth and ninth graders than before" (p. 11). Therefore, the proponents of the middle school suggest that there is a need for a special school for persons who are no longer little children, but who are not yet fully adolescents.

Another criticism of the junior high school is that it is too subject-matter oriented and that it places too much emphasis on traditional styles of teaching, with the teacher lecturing the students rather than allowing them to explore topics on their own. Nickerson (1966), quoted a report made by 102 observers all over the country who went into eighth-grade classrooms on May 3, 1962. This is part of what they saw:

... a miniature lecture hall inhabited by a central figure of authority and his helpless captives... It does seem almost indisputably evident that the typical eighth-grade situation is teacher-dominated, with pupils psychologically absent a large portion of time. There are abundant examples of both physical and

psychological wandering (by pupils) and a great variety of random activity: twisting hair, biting nails, cracking knuckles, thumbing through books and papers and the like. The classrooms observed reflected clearly these kinds of instructional practices rather strikingly: (a) lecture - demonstration, (b) read - recitation, (c) correct - explain - practice. These patterns of instruction were predominantly under the explicit direction of the teacher ... students seemed to receive few pushes to substantiate, show causality, or project the possibilities of further application. (p. 9)

The same arguments have been cited by Klingele (1979) and Alexander, et al. (1968). Klingele said that the apparent problem of the junior high school is the lack of teacher preparation for the specific age group, as well as a lack of commitment on the part of many teachers at this level. Therefore, there is often little difference in instruction between the junior and senior high levels. (p. 11)

Alexander, et al. explained, "the junior high school

has generally become a school more like the high school, better geared to the teenager than the 'in-between-ager'" (p. 5).

In addition, according to Calhoun (1983), the junior high school also frequently allows sophisticated social activities, such as fraternities, sororities, and evening dances. These practices go beyond the maturity level of the age group. Klingele (1979) said: "... the junior high school has been directed toward the acceptance of high-school-like social and athletic activities. Many times these programs are community supported, which makes changing them all the harder" (p. 12). These activities and conditions are considered by middle level educators to be inappropriate for the socially transitional student.

According to Calhoun (1983), the middle school proponents put forth four major criticisms of the junior high school; these criticisms are based on ideas developed by Moss (1969):

1. Junior high schools never achieved their original purposes.
2. Junior high schools evolved into a "cheap imitation" of the high school.
3. The 9th grade continued to emphasize college preparation despite being housed with the 7th

and 8th grade.

4. Junior high schools tended to encourage racial segregation by delaying the departure from neighborhood schools until 7th grade. (p. 83 - 84)

On the other hand, Booker (1978) claimed that the emergence of the middle school resulted from the over population of the elementary and high school caused by the post World War II baby boom and consequently forced administrators to shift grade level organizations in order to cope with the swelling in particular grades as the baby boomers passed through the schools.

The emergence of the middle school came also because of dissatisfaction with the elementary school program and its organization in the upper grades. Howard and Stoumbis (1970) described:

The teaching pattern within grades 5 and 6 are too often very like those of the lower grades. The self-contained classroom predominates, and within this is frequently found the same segmentation of subject areas as that of a departmental program - without the instruction provided by specialists. A great number of elementary teachers are competent in many fields yet feel inadequate and insecure in



teaching such areas as science, art, industrial arts, home economics, and physical education.

(p. 207)

The selected criticisms cited above caused several changes in the middle level of schooling beginning in the 1960's. Woodring (1965), in an article entitled "The New Intermediate School," stated that "... It now appears that the 6-3-3 plan, with its junior school, is on the way out" (p. 77). According to Alexander and George (1981), in 1963, a proposal for the establishment of middle schools was made at the Cornell Junior High School Conference. This has had an impact on public awareness of the need for redesigning curriculum for the middle grades.

One of the first requests to establish a middle school came in a letter from Superintendent Dr. Carl R. Streams of the Upper St. Clair School District to the Pennsylvania Department of Instruction in August, 1959. He wrote:

We are requesting that the school be composed of grades 6-7-8.

The reasons why we believe that this program is desirable and educationally sound are:

1. From the physical and psychological point of

view it is a more natural grouping. There appears to be less of a differential in maturity between the sixth and eighth grade than between the seventh and the ninth grade.

2. The social patterns are more nearly the same in grades 6, 7, and 8 than in the conventional pattern of grades 7, 8, and 9. The social maturity of the ninth grade student more nearly parallels that of the older students. At the present time the ninth grade sets a pattern which is too advanced for the younger students. A better social program could be carried on without the ninth grade student.
3. The transition from the self-contained classroom to a departmentalized program may be more gradual. (Eichhorn, 1966, p. 2-3)

He then received permission from the department to develop a program which had a grade six through eight plan of organization. This program was subsequently planned by a faculty and administration led by Donald Eichhorn, with the program, Fort Couch Middle School, going into operation in 1962-1963 (Alexander & George, 1981).

Since then, many hundreds of schools have either

been converted from junior high schools to middle schools or have been opened as middle schools.

Alexander (1981) reported that between 1967 and 1968, there were 1101 middle schools in operation and these numbers increased to 4060 a decade later. These modern middle schools can be categorized in three different patterns:

1. Grade five through eight
2. Grade six through eight
3. Grade seven and eight.

The middle school movement, however, should not be viewed as merely a regrouping of grade levels but a new plan which integrates more appropriate subject area emphases and instructional practices. Middle schools provide greater individualization and more variations in delivery systems are employed to accommodate different maturational and cognitive levels.

## CHAPTER 3

## The functions of the middle school

Middle schools are unique because they are specifically designed to provide educational opportunities for early adolescents. These youngsters are very different from young children in the elementary school and from older adolescents in the high school. Their physical, emotional, social and intellectual development changes rapidly. The transescent is the term given to them by Eichhorn (1966). He described transescence as:

The stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based on the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes in body chemistry that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes. (p. 3)

Transescence is meant not only to provide a label for

for this group of youngsters from ten to fourteen years of age, but to emphasize the many changes through which these youngsters are going in order to become adolescents and, finally, fully functioning adults. Therefore, there is a general agreement that these unique persons are in need of unique programs. Klingele (1979) reported that according to two surveys, conducted by Alexander (1968) and Compton (1974), that these youngsters are found in at least three, but not more than five grades, including grades six and seven with the exclusion of grade nine.

It is the uniqueness of the transescents which needs to be addressed when determining the functions of the middle school. Therefore, a brief review of their characteristics may be of value. Howard and Stoumbis (1970) describe these characteristics as:

1. A resentment of authority, particularly if the authority seems to be arbitrary; this resentment is augmented by the striving of the youngsters for sophistication.
2. An eagerness, or at least a readiness, to take on responsibility. This clearly suggests a need for guided approaches to student self-direction and self-study.
3. The need for acceptance and approval, formerly met by

the approval of adults, now to be partly satisfied by peers. Group standards are adopted in order to gain the security which comes from group identification. Conformation to these standards confers status and recognition. The school has an important obligation to develop desirable values, attitudes and standards.

4. A sharp sense of fair play and justice combined with a marked tendency toward idealism. An adolescent requires guidance in the development of his or her own values when parents are indecisive about values. The adolescent develops admiration for those who are successful and competent, as judged by his or her standards.
5. Compared to adults. adolescents are highly emotional. Intense emotions do not allow for any middle ground and many troubles are blown far out of proportion.
6. The selfishness and self-centeredness of the adolescent often seems paradoxical to adults when it coexists with youthful idealism.
7. While the interests of early adolescents change quickly and often, the interests are constantly broadening. Direction and expectation are required to help maturing students cope with responsibility.
8. The development of values is complicated by the

- growing awareness of self, which causes the priorities of the adolescent to shift almost daily.
9. Physical matters (growth, appearance, ability, and skills) become a common concern.
  10. Intellectual expansion occurs concurrently with the physical growth of the adolescent as all pupils increase in general intelligence with age. The inherent academic ability of these youngsters varies widely. The interests, ability, and talents of the individual student and the standards set by the peer group affect the performance of mental tasks.
  11. There are many internal and external conflicts in the life of the adolescent, but the greatest are those from adult society. Some protection from the social systems of older adolescents must be provided by the organization of the school.
  12. Children are ready at an earlier age today to deal with concepts, abstractions and responsibility because they are maturing earlier in the physical, social, emotional, and mental spheres. There is ample evidence of this earlier development.

Based on these transescent characteristics, the middle school functions are developed. However, if we study

the middle school literature, we would find that a variety of functions have been published. Alexander and Williams (1965) have offered the following as one set of possibilities for a model middle school:

1. The needs of older children, preadolescents, and early adolescents must be kept in mind when designing a genuine middle school. These needs include freedom of movement, opportunities for independence, self-determination, and different groups and different teacher specialists for the intellectual stimulation required by ten to fourteen year-olds. These youth can eagerly handle very different experiences from those available in a typical elementary school, but, at the same time, they do not need the anxiety of interschool competitions, tense social functions or the rigid departmentalization found in normal junior high schools. Providing a smooth transition from childhood to adolescence and fostering the transition from dependence to self-sufficiency should be the objectives when planning a middle school.
2. The long-held ideal of individualized instruction should be actualized in the middle school. Coordination of each pupil's total program should be



handled by a teacher-counselor working with other teachers and specialists. Individual deviations from standard programs can be facilitated by the use of diagnostic services.

3. The intellectual components of the curriculum should be important in the middle school program and this requires a planned sequence of concepts and skills. Exciting and rewarding learning, rather than the mastery of a limited range of academic subjects, should be the controlling principle. Individuality rather than uniformity should determine the challenges given to each student. The idea that learning can be its own reward should be reinforced by a middle school environment free from an extrinsic system of rewarding or punishing such as grades. Each pupil should be exposed to scheduled opportunities for the development of both creative and disciplined thinking.
4. Continued learning skills should be developed through various inquiry and discover modes which will bring home to students the joy of learning. The learning experience itself should be the object of constant attention as teachers guide students in the use of sources, the formulation of questions, the gathering of data and materials and the testing of hypotheses.

Increasing opportunities to assume responsibility for learning should be made available to the pupils. This is of primary importance.

5. Exploratory experiences, particularly in new fields of interest, should be provided through special interest centers for each curriculum area as well as in such other areas as reading, photography, acting, typing, ceramics, and personal grooming. The teacher-counselor can make use of such youth programs as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts when designing a program for a student. These exploratory experiences should be a part of each pupil's schedule. Though supervision is required, the activities should be open on a flexible time basis.
6. Programs appropriate to this age group are needed in such areas as personal hygiene, physical fitness, heterosexual group games, sports activities that can be carried over into the child's life outside of school. Corrective and remedial programs, adequate facilities, and specialized supervision are needed.
7. Because of the physical and psychological changes which children in the age group are undergoing and trying to understand, an underlying emphasis on values should exist throughout the school program. These youngsters require a frank but calm examination

of their new roles that will help them deal with the discrepancies between idealism and reality. This need must be incorporated into the program.

8. The special abilities and interests of the teaching staff should not be ignored in planning the school program. A twelve-month contract with provisions for in-service training, study leave, and planning time will help each teacher make his or her maximum contribution.

Tobin (1973) stressed that the major planning direction should be toward providing for both the general and individual needs of the students to be served by the school. He said that the functions of the middle school are:

To provide a program for pre- and early-adolescents that is relevant to individual needs and societal demands in a world where there is constant change and a rapidly expanding body of knowledge. Such a program would consciously aim toward the continuing development of self-directing individuals, capable of solving problems through both rational and creative endeavors.

To provide an educational environment where the child is most important and has opportunities for success. Such an environment would facilitate

communication and interaction and afford opportunities for meeting interpersonal needs.

To provide orientation to and exploration of the broad spectrum of educational experiences in the world of work, living, and leisure.

To provide for a transitional period of continuous adjustment between the elementary school and the senior high school. This would include emphasis upon a continuation and enrichment of basic education in the concepts and skills pertinent to the general education of the pupil.

To provide more adequately for guidance and counseling through the provision of special services and personnel. Aptitudes, interests, and capacities of individual pupils would be discovered by testing, counseling, and exploratory work. (p. 203)

Indeed, a variety of functions have been described by the proponents of the middle school. Compton (1969) pointed out some common elements found in middle schools:

1. Articulation with the elementary school to assure easy transition for youngsters. This

may necessitate a pseudo self-contained classroom approach during a portion of the school day for the first year of middle school education.

2. Team teaching by subject-matter specialists in areas of general knowledge which are closely related--English language, literature, history, geography, economics, anthropology, science, art, and music.
3. Skills laboratories staffed by technologists with subject-matter competencies to provide remedial, developmental, and advance instruction in such skills as reading, listening, writing, mathematics, science, foreign language, art, music, and physical education.
4. Independent study for all students, commensurate with the topic selected for study and the student's needs, interests and abilities.
5. A home-base group assigned to a teacher with special training in guidance and counseling, as well as the time and the opportunity to aid children with personal and academic problems on a regularly scheduled basis.

6. A program of activities in which each student will be able to participate--based on the personal development of students rather than on enhancement of the school's prestige or the entertainment of the public.
7. A plan of vertical school organization providing for continuous progress of students.
8. Evaluative techniques in light of individual progress, rather than the prevalent punitive system of assigning grades in terms of some elusive "average" for a particular chronological age group.
9. A program tailored to the needs of each student, with individualized student schedules.
10. An instructional and administrative staff with an understanding of the in-between-ager, competence in teaching at least one subject area, and a genuine desire to provide the best possible program for these youngsters. (p. 110)

The following is an outline of the key ingredients for a successful middle school offered by Calhoun (1983):

1. Grade organization

At least three grades--usually five through eight

or six through eight--should be included in a middle school

2. Team teaching

Team teaching draws on the best each teacher has to offer, makes it easier to group students and allows teachers to plan together.

3. Instructional planning

Faculty, instructional leaders, and administrators should all participate in team planning.

4. Student grouping

Depending on the particular instructional activities, students in the middle school may be grouped in many ways, including one-to-one, small groups, and large groups.

5. Flexible scheduling

Because of the diverse nature of the student population, the middle school must meet the needs of the students through flexible scheduling.

6. Continuous progress

Individual needs, rate of learning, and abilities should be emphasized through continuous progress.

7. Individualized instruction

The needs of each student should be met through individualized instruction.

8. Independent study

Development of individual interests may be attained through independent study.

9. Instructional materials

Varied instructional materials should be used so that the diverse interests of all students are met.

10. Basic skills

Remedial programs in such basic subject areas as reading and math are needed to reinforce what students have learned in their previous schooling.

11. Exploration

A strong elective program is needed to enable students to explore all types of subjects.

12. Creative experiences

Middle school students should be able to express themselves through a variety of activities such as school newspapers, drama, music, art, and creative writing.

13. Social development

The development of social skills should be enhanced through special programs and guidance.

14. Intramural sports

In addition to supplementing the physical education program, intramural sports programs offer students an important outlet for developing physically.

15. Focus on development



Middle school students require help coping with the changes going on in their bodies.

16. Individualized guidance

Classroom teachers can aid in tailoring counseling programs to meet the needs of each student.

17. Home base program

A home room teacher can offer personal, daily guidance to each student.

18. Values clarification

Identification of appropriate values and clarification of conflicting values is an important part of the middle school program.

19. Student evaluation

The individual and personal treatment of a student's work contributes to a positive and nonthreatening evaluation.

20. Transition from elementary to high school

The transition from the self-contained elementary classrooms to departmentalized high school programs may be accomplished through the middle school.

The effective middle school is, therefore, more than a regrouping of grade levels. It is a school which includes these components and reflects the philosophy of an educational program designed for transitional pupils.

## CHAPTER 4

## The middle school curriculum

In constructing a middle school curriculum, emphasis should be given to the growth characteristics and needs of children approximately ten to fourteen years of age. Community expectations, available buildings, and teachers should be considered as secondary factors. For example, interscholastic competition expected by a community should be replaced with a strong intramural program. The disadvantage of interscholastic competition is that only a few youngsters succeed and are recognized. On the contrary, the intramural program permits all students who desire to do so to participate. Grooms (1967) points out that an intramural program:

makes it feasible for student planning to conceive and out-line the program. Skill development, sportsmanship and appreciation for both team and individual sports become more important than winning at any price. Student support for individual teams can prove a stimulating and effective emotional release as in any inter-school athletic program without the undesirable social side effects associated with the latter activity

(p. 21)

If we observe middle school curriculum across the United States, we will find that it differs from one school to another. However, several guidelines for curriculum planning are available. Alexander and Williams (1965) developed one of them. They suggested that the middle school curriculum can be viewed as consisting of three components:

1. Learning Skills Phase:

Continues and expands basic communicational and computational skills development begun at the primary school level, with increasing emphasis on use of library tools and skills of independent study. Skills for emphasis are identified and included along with content goals in each unit of work in all General Studies areas. A remedial program of skills development is conducted in special laboratory centers.

2. General Studies Phase:

Includes those learning experiences which give the learner a heightened awareness of his cultural heritage and those other common learnings essential to civic and economic

literacy. Content would be focused on major concepts and unifying themes drawn from the areas of literature, social studies, mathematics, science, and fine arts. Some of the instruction in this phase might be in groups of up to 100 pupils.

3. Personal Development Phase:

Includes those experiences which fulfill personal and remedial needs, permit exploration of personal interests, and promote physical and social growth; health and physical education geared to the 10-14 year-old; individually planned experiences in foreign languages. typing, technical training, music, art, dramatics, journalism; student-managed enterprises; community work projects; advanced work in science, mathematics, and other areas of individual special competence and interest (pp. 221-222).

These three components should be developed within an instructional organization made up of the homeroom unit, the wing unit, the vertical unit, and special learning centers. Alexander and Williams (1965) describe these units as follows:

1. Homeroom unit: There should be approximately 25 heterogeneously grouped students of the same grade level in this unit which is to be directed by a teacher-counselor who is able to give basic general studies instruction and who is skilled in planning individual programs. Using diagnostic and performance data as well as input from other teachers, the homeroom teacher-counselor will work out a plan for each individual pupil. As students progress from one grade level to the next, the amount of time spent in the homeroom would decrease; the exact amount of time spent there would vary according to a particular student's needs.
2. Wing unit: The four homeroom groups and their teachers would comprise this unit. There would be teachers with expertise in each of the general areas of study, such as language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. These teachers will function as a curriculum planning committee and as a teaching team. Students may receive instruction in groupings ranging in size from all 100 students down to very small groups for basic skills instruction or interactive discussions.
3. Vertical unit: Four wing units (one from each grade level, five through eight) come together to

make up this unit of about 400 pupils and 16 teachers. Providing a wider community for exploration and social development, this unit is a school within a school. Its small size will promote a sense of identity and belongingness. Because all four grade levels are represented, great flexibility in programming and individualized instruction would be possible. Younger students would benefit from the maturity of the older students and the older students would have leadership opportunities.

4. Special learning centers: Exploratory interests and special and remedial needs of pupils may be met through these centers. Both long-term and short-term learning can be accomplished in these centers which would include: library, home arts, reading laboratory, foreign language laboratory, typing and writing laboratory, music room, arts and hobby center, and physical education-recreation center. Students should have access to these centers after school and on Saturday.

Although middle school programs display a considerable variety, they appear to have some common characteristics. Williams (1968) outlines these characteristics as follows:

1. In combining the features of the self-contained classroom found in most elementary schools with the features of departmentalized high schools, an attempt is made to benefit the student by offering the best of both worlds. As students move through the grades, they would spend less and less time in a self-contained situation and more and more time in specialized classrooms.
2. Inclusion of programs which develop self-understanding centered around the special concerns of young adolescents.
3. Self-direction and self-responsibility are stressed through emphasis on independent study, resource centers, and resource materials. This necessitates great changes in instructional approach.
4. The elimination of interscholastic athletics and a marked reduction in student activities, particularly those requiring a high level of sophistication. Alternatives must be developed in the middle school.
5. Because of the newness of the middle school, there is a tendency to capitalize on such innovations as nongrading, team teaching, programmed instruction, flexible scheduling, laboratory facilities and other new media. Departures from the traditional are often found as well as a marked tendency toward

flexibility.

6. A more personalized approach to learning and more frequent use of individualized student programs are strengths of the middle school

The uniqueness of the middle school is that it is developed to serve the educational needs of the transescents. One of the most important things we should have in mind is that these transescents exhibit a very wide range of differences on many traits and abilities. Therefore, the middle school's curriculum should provide many different experiences and content so that each pupil can select the experiences best suited to his or her particular needs and abilities. Klingele (1979) stressed that:

At the same time it must also provide common experiences and content so as to meet the needs that youths have in common. However, because people are so different in so many different ways, the curriculum must allow pupils to gain the common learnings in different ways and different amounts. Furthermore, the curriculum maker must consider the effects of the curriculum on pupils' self-concepts. Perhaps at no other level of education is such a statement more appropriate and more deserving of attention by curriculum planners



(pp. 287-288).

Prior to the development of the middle school curriculum, the planners should first identify its goals. Klingele (1979) has provided us with a good example in the following goals which were designed by the Downey Unified School District in Downey, California:

Goal 1

By offering instruction in such areas as reading, mathematics, social sciences, English, physical education, and science, the middle schools will enhance the development of basic skills and the acquisition of knowledge.

Goal 2

Learning by doing activities will be provided by the middle schools.

Goal 3

By the selective use of appropriate educational programs, the middle schools will make it possible for students to proceed at their own rates.

Goal 4

Problem-solving strategies will provide emphasis to the process of learning for middle school students.

Goal 5

Different materials and approaches will provide a variety of experiences for middle school children.

Goal 6

Life-long learning, resourcefulness, adaptability, and self-development will be encouraged through the middle school providing an appropriate learning environment.

Goal 7

The curriculum of middle schools will encourage students to value quality in ideas, products, performance, and human behavior.

Goal 8

A positive self-image, self-confidence, and awareness of cultural heritage will be encouraged through a variety of experiences within the middle school.

Goal 9

Satisfying leisure time activities will be developed through various experiences in a variety of middle school settings.

Goal 10

Physical and mental health standards will be developed through individualized programs in the middle schools.

Goal 11

Successful living in the family unit will be enhanced through the middle school curriculum.

Goal 12

The dignity and worth of the individual and an appreciation of all ethnic groups and cultures will be promoted by the middle school atmosphere.

Goal 13

Effective communication in human relationships will be encouraged through the atmosphere and curriculum of the middle school.

Goal 14

Students will learn to function within a group without compromising their individual principles through techniques learned in the middle school curriculum.

Goal 15

Students will learn the value of pursuing an interesting and rewarding career through the middle school experience.

Goal 16

An understanding of basic economic principles and workable solutions to economic problems will be presented by the middle school.

Goal 17

Students will gain an understanding of how the behavior of the individual is controlled by commonly accepted rules.

Goal 18

Experiences provided through the curriculum will

develop awareness of current technological development  
and accelerated change in relation to people and  
society.

## CHAPTER 5.

## The middle school teachers

There is common agreement among proponents of the middle school that the heart of a middle school is its students who are in transition between childhood and adolescence. These youngsters differ from younger children in the elementary school and from the high school's fullfledged adolescents. Because of this uniqueness of the middle school students, the prospective staff of these youngsters should be thoroughly prepared professionally. They should possess an extensive understanding of both the physical and mental growth processes of transescence, and particularly an awareness of these growth patterns in relation to the student's learning process. The most modern facilities and materials and the best planned curriculum are of no avail unless the teacher is prepared to work with the transescents. Therefore, recruitment of personnel is a primary factor in developing a successful middle school.

Teachers are the most important ingredient in determining a school's progress. If the teachers are qualified to work with youngsters of this age, the greater the likelihood that the middle school will be

successful. For this reason, the department of education should employ only teachers who have specific middle school teaching certificates to teach in the middle school, and provide in-service courses for those teachers who are not yet qualified as middle school teachers. Such staff qualifications and in-service programs are absolutely essential if the middle school is to succeed in responding to transescent learners' needs.

There are four components considered essential for an effective middle school preparation program at the baccalaurate level.

1. General education

This component is important because about half of the middle school education program is made up of general education. The general education program contains courses in humanities, social science, mathematics, science, and physical education.

Compton (1973) stressed that:

this program is viewed as a means of preparing the well-rounded individual whose profession is middle school teaching. It is recognized that preparation should be just as individually tailored for the prospective teacher as the program of the middle school is for the

transescent it serves. (p. 215)

2. Academic content preparation

Prospective teachers should concentrate at least in two academic fields in order to broaden the perspective of the teaching profession and enable him to demonstrate the relationship between the various subject areas.

3. Professional sequence

This component should focus on the knowledge of early adolescence, the nature of programs needed by middle school students, and effective strategies for teaching at this level. McEwin (1984) in explaining this component says that:

Courses such as "Teaching the Emerging Adolescent," "Nature of the Middle/Junior High School Learner," and "Middle School Curriculum and Instruction" are included in exemplary programs. These courses focus on the unique characteristics of early adolescents and their implications for instruction and schooling. Emphasis in methods courses is generally placed on courses relating directly to academic concentration selected, with at least one course in teaching reading at the middle level included. Courses in special education,

educational psychology, educational foundations, guidance, and early adolescent literature are examples of other professional courses often included. (p. 117)

#### 4. Field experiences

These experiences should be provided initially during the junior year in college and continue through student teaching (practicum). "Through this early experience, prospective teachers can decide if they want to continue in the program designed for a specific educational level, transfer to another program, or pursue a career other than teaching" (Compton, 1973, p. 215).

There are general guidelines for effective staff development programs for the middle school. The following are the guidelines outlined by Bondi (1977) for the preparation of middle school teachers in Florida:

1. Middle school teacher education should promote continuity of educational experience. All aspects of the teacher education program should be closely interrelated to provide a meaningful professional experience for the prospective middle school teacher.
2. Middle school teacher education should assure the development of personal qualities as well



- as professional abilities.
3. Middle school teacher education should be highly personalized. It is important that the individualization of instruction sought for the middle school should also be a goal of middle school teacher education.
  4. Middle school teacher education should be a simultaneous blending of didactic instruction and practical experience. Practical experiences should be coordinated with didactic course work to provide meaningful professional education experiences for prospective middle school teachers.
  5. Middle school teacher education should use those principles, techniques, and materials appropriate to middle school teaching insofar as they are consistent with the level of understanding and maturity of prospective middle school teachers. (p. 35)

Besides these general guidelines for effective staff development programs, the middle school teachers should be competent with the specific middle school philosophy. These competencies are very important to middle school teachers to enable them to work

effectively with young adolescents. Calhoun (1983) has summarized eighteen competencies needed by the middle school teacher:

Relating middle school philosophy to curricular and instructional materials.

Teaching according to the philosophy and goals of middle schools.

Requiring students to accept responsibility for their own behavior.

Taking into account the transescents' socio-emotional characteristics when planning instruction.

Contributing to the development of positive self-images through successful experiences.

Taking into account the transescents' physical characteristics when planning instruction.

Helping transescents accomplish developmental tasks.

Offering varied pace and type of classroom activities.

Providing new resources for the classroom.

Using self-evaluation to improve teaching.

Cooperating in planning and revising curriculum.

Building on the students' skills learned in elementary school.

using varied and numerous activities in the classroom.

Helping the students develop higher order thinking abilities through the Socratic method.  
(p. 111)

Since the middle school emphasizes the transescent's needs, a middle school teacher must be a person who likes children, specifically at this age level. This kind of teacher which is needed in a middle school can be defined as one who is able to establish rapport with his students. He should enjoy students who are active, energetic, and loud, and should take teasing in his stride. He should be flexible and sensitive to quick changes of moods and needs, and should sense group feeling and student interaction. He should be the one the students can identify with as a peer, like an older brother. His classroom should be warm and comfortable, where students feel secure in reaching out to try something new.

A middle school teacher should place primary importance on the students and not on the subject matter. Therefore, he should expect students to perform up to their capacities. For example, a middle school teacher is not teaching math to his student. Instead he

should provide support to his student so that he can learn math in accordance with his ability to learn. By doing this the teacher has recognized that each student has a unique learning capacity and that the same learning psychology is not applicable to every learner. He should also have expectations of himself, one of which is to learn as much as possible about each student. Therefore, he should trust his students and solicit their evaluation of him as a teacher. When the students do not work well, he must first look at himself to see if he could do something differently and thus help the students be more successful.

Transescents find their identity by identifying with the group; this attitude illustrates the importance of group standards. The teacher must, therefore, strongly believe in the "we" philosophy. He should plan and work with the students individually and in groups to help each achieve success. It is through the success of his students that the teacher of transescents experiences his success. Transescents learn from each other; teachers should encourage students to interact and not rely too much on teacher dominated discussion as the mode of instruction.

There are several specific skills and characteristics required of teachers of middle school

students in order that they understand, cope with, and successfully educate early adolescents. Klingele (1979) stated that:

Teacher success with middle school instruction is dependent on the teacher's ability to effectively relate to the learners. An initial task of a teacher or a team of teachers in preparing for instruction is to become well aware of the general characteristics of the age group of youngsters to be taught. (p. 42)

Therefore, the key requirement for a successful teacher is not only that the teacher must be knowledgeable about the nature of the student, but he must also be able to relate effectively to his student.

## CHAPTER 6

## Conclusion

Although there are many reasons for the development of the middle school in the United States, there is one reason upon which there is common agreement: a special program is needed for the transescents. By developing a special program for early and young adolescents, the United States is providing a protection to these children from too much pressure, from precocity, from premature heterosexual pressures and from dropout at the middle level of schooling. This paper was written to provide a set of guidelines for starting new middle level schools in the writer's country, Malaysia.

The current middle level school in Malaysia is known as "the lower secondary school." The rationale for the development of this lower secondary school is not based on adolescent needs. Instead, its purpose is to provide secondary education for all pupils for a period of three years after primary level. This is in line with the government's policy to give opportunities to pupils to continue schooling until the age of fifteen (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1985, p. 18). The lower secondary school comprehensively consists of

grades seven to nine. Almost all students of this level are placed in the same building with the upper secondary school students, and they use the same facilities.

These lower secondary schools enroll students from age 13 to 15 and the same pattern is implemented throughout the whole country. Prior to 1965, the Malaysian children were only provided by the government with six years of free elementary school. Only those sixth graders who pass the Secondary School Entrance Examination are promoted to the secondary school. According to Ministry of Education Malaysia (1985), only 42.7% of them were successful in gaining admission into the first year of secondary school in 1964 as a result of this entrance examination.

Since 1965, this policy has been changed. All students who graduate from elementary schools are eligible for another 3 years of secondary school education. At the end of the third year of secondary school, the students have to sit for an examination to obtain the Lower Certificate of Education. Only those students who have passed this examination are promoted to the fourth year of secondary school and continue receiving free education for two more years. The lower secondary school's student progress is not based on the

needs and abilities of the students. In fact, the level of progress which the students should achieve has been predetermined for them. If they fail to achieve a certain standard, they will have to leave school. Usually about 50% of them will be dropouts after the Lower Certificate of Examination.

The lower secondary school provides completely departmentalized programs that are similar to those provided at the upper secondary schools. These are quite subject-matter oriented and place much emphasis on traditional styles of teaching, with the teacher lecturing the students rather than allowing them to explore topics on their own. These children are not free of the rigidity of total departmentalization, the pressure of interschool competition, and the tensions of older adolescent social functions that loom so large in typical junior high schools in the United States. Students are required to attain the uniform standard rather than be challenged to perform well at whatever level they are capable of attaining. Very little consideration is given to the learning process itself. The emphasis is put on subject matter rather than on developing skills for continued learning and on personal development. All the lower secondary schools use the same curriculum imposed on them by the ministry



of education without any considerations that reflect the philosophy of the local district.

Because of these circumstances, the teachers teach the subjects in the same manner to all students. Thus the teachers are more concerned with subject matter than with the children. There is almost no attention given to early adolescent needs and no special environment is designed to meet their particular need for variety, movement, and exploration. Besides this, the lower secondary school also neglects the fundamental fact that a child needs the security of an environment in which he is well established while he is getting his physical and emotional growth. The problems of early adolescence make him awkward, scared, confident, timid, infantile and adult all at the same time.

The typical lower secondary school system of Malaysia today has several similarities with the United States junior high school in the years before 1960. Hull (1960) describes it as follows:

The present junior high program puts this unstable child, at a most vulnerable period in life, in a situation in which he has to adjust to many new environmental changes daily, and then asks him to study effectively. He is shuffled around among

strange teachers who don't really know him at the very time he most needs understanding adults in his life. (p. 79)

It is apparent that the Malaysian lower secondary school is a "cells and bells" type of school, where from 40 to 45 children use the same room, the same text and prepare the same assignment. It is hoped that this research paper will provide important ideas which help to explain the system of the modern middle school and its characteristics that have been implemented in the United States. Therefore, it is recommended to the Malaysian curriculum planners that they consider an alternative curriculum for the middle level of schooling. This new curriculum should enhance both the further development of early and young adolescents, and should provide a wide range of learning opportunities for the students. Hopefully, the content presented in the five preceding chapters might be a good starting point for a study on the development of a new curriculum of lower secondary school in Malaysia.

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