INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION

SARA DAVIS POWELL

4e

Introduction to Middle Level Education

This page intentionally left blank

Fourth Edition

Introduction to Middle Level Education

Sara Davis Powell
Belmont Abbey College

Director and Publisher: Kevin Davis
Portfolio Manager: Drew Bennett
Managing Content Producer: Megan Moffo
Content Producer: Yagnesh Jani
Portfolio Management Assistant: Maria Feliberty
Executive Field Marketing Manager: Krista Clark
Procurement Specialist: Deidra Headlee
Cover Design: Pearson CSC, Jerilyn Bockorick
Cover Art: Hill Street Studios/Blend Images/Getty Images
Full Service Vendor: Pearson CSC
Full Service Project Management: Pearson CSC, Mohamed Hameed
Editorial Project Manager: Pearson CSC, Gheron Lising
Printer-Binder: LSC Communications
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color
Text Font: PalatinoLTPro-Roman

Credits and acknowledgments borrowed from other sources and reproduced, with permission, in this textbook appear on appropriate page within text (or on page iv).

Photo Credits: Photo on page 3 courtesy of John Lounsbury; photo on pages 55 and 177 courtesy of Rhonda VanPelt; photo on pages 163, 193 and 215 courtesy of Jon Theiss/Pearson Education, Inc; photo on page 232 courtesy of Molly Morrison; photo on page 276 courtesy of Nancy Ruppert. All the other photos taken by the author, Sara Davis Powell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Will be provided upon Request

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 RRD-VA 14 13 12 11 10

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-498680-7
ISBN-10: 0-13-498680-6

To my husband, Rus, who makes all aspects of our life together a delightful partnership.

To my sons, Jesse, Cody, Travis, and Noah, and their families, who continually give me so much pleasure and many reasons to be proud.

To middle level kids and teachers, who grow and learn together every day.

Brief Contents

Contents

About the Author

SARA DAVIS POWELL is a teacher—from the middle school classroom to teacher preparation as a professor—and chair of education at Belmont Abbey College in North Carolina. She is a young adolescent advocate who writes about middle level teacher preparation, emphasizing a balance of developmentally appropriate and academically rigorous practice. Actively involved in local classrooms and the middle school community through the facilitation of professional development, supervision of clinical interns, and research and writing about middle level issues, she is also a frequent speaker at regional and national conferences, where her enthusiasm for middle level education is contagious. Powell's most recent books include *Your Introduction to Education: Explorations in Teaching,* third edition (Pearson, 2019) and *Wayside Teaching: Connecting with Students to Support Learning* (Corwin, 2010).

Married with four sons, four daughters-in-laws, and three grandchildren, she enjoys watching lakeside sunsets at home with her husband, Rus, and spending time with her sons and their families. When not on her dock, with her family, or writing at home, chances are she can be reached at Belmont Abbey College, 100 Belmont-Mt. Holly Road, Belmont, North Carolina 28012; (704) 461–5059; sarapowell@bac.edu.

Preface

New to This Edition

Introduction to Middle Level Education offers a comprehensive and contemporary body of knowledge that speaks directly to teacher candidates in a voice that invites them into today's middle level classrooms. The fourth 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, civic engagement, information literacy, and ethical responsibility.

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.

New Chapter

Chapter 11, "Citizenship and Civility in the Middle Grades," is completely new and extremely timely. Our nation is faced with increasing levels of violence, divisiveness, and rancor never before experienced by the majority of today's population. Now is the time to promote citizenship and civility among young adolescents who encapsulate the future of our republic. Topics in this new chapter include:

- Civic knowledge across the curriculum
- Current events
- Elections
- Civic skills across the curriculum
- Global citizenship skills
- Civic skills related to the Common Core
- Digital citizenship
- Civic dispositions
- Civic engagement
- Social consciousness and responsibility
- Service learning
- Civility.

An extensive list of resources available to help teach citizenship, civic engagement, and civility in our classrooms is provided.

New Features

Making the Teaching and Learning Connection consists of personal letters written directly to readers by outstanding teachers and middle level leaders. All include a photo of the letter writer and most include a video. The topics are pertinent to our relationships with young adolescents. It's coincidental, yet worth noting, that *Making the Teaching and Learning Connection* includes the initials *TLC*, often recognized as standing for *Tender Loving Care.* This is what middle level teachers must provide for young adolescents as we help them grow and become healthy, happy, altruistic, and productive citizens.

- Chapter 1 *TLC*: John Lounsbury, a legend in middle level circles, and one of the finest gentlemen and teachers I have ever known, tells us about his philosophy of teaching that includes spiritual aspects of our profession.
- Chapter 2 *TLC*: Dani Ramsey tells us how she uses bio poems as an outlet for young adolescents to explore who they are and how their emotions and social experiences impact them.
- Chapter 3 *TLC*: Amy Goodwin understands that she teaches the whole child. She tells us how she addresses bullying through literature and class discussion.
- Chapter 4 *TLC*: Charlie Bull's devotion to kids raised in poverty is evident as he describes his students and his teaching style.
- Chapter 5 *TLC*: Traci Peters tells us she thrives within structure and organization and that her middle level students do as well.
- Chapter 6 *TLC*: Derek Boucher writes about his commitment to teaching students to read with fluency and comprehension.
- Chapter 7 *TLC*: Macy Ingle tells us that she realized what she had missed in her own science education when she started using the 5E lesson plan—engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate.
- Chapter 8 *TLC*: Dee Lanier explains his school's emphasis on solving real-world challenges and how he continually assesses student learning.
- Chapter 9 *TLC*: Kurt Hansen, an admitted science geek, tells us active engagement in the classroom is vital, as is linking lessons to curricular standards through careful planning.
- Chapter 10 *TLC*: Kadean Maddix writes about his journey toward the middle level math classroom and his devotion to his students.
- Chapter 11 *TLC*: Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's dedication to civic knowledge and skills shines through in this chapter's *TLC*.
- Chapter 12 *TLC*: Nancy Ruppert, a true leader of middle level education and former president of the Association for Middle Level Education, gives heartfelt advice about the value and power of relationships.

New Concepts and Emphases

- In Chapter 1, increased emphasis is placed on middle level education philosophy as expressed by the founders of the middle school concept. Their legacy remains a driving force in how we interact with, and educate, young adolescents today.
- In Chapter 2, the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL) is examined. Executive skills, or executive function, comprise a set of mental qualities that help us get things done. These skills are applied to middle level classrooms.
- In Chapter 3, we explore issues revolving around gender and gender identity, including dilemmas involved with childhood gender nonconformity and transgender youth.
- In Chapter 4, statistics concerning young adolescent substance abuse are both updated and enhanced. Sleep, essential to productivity, is a new topic in the societal context of middle level education.
- In Chapter 5, emphasis is placed on common planning time as vital to effective teaching and learning in a middle level setting.
- In Chapter 6, strategies for helping young adolescents increase their memory capacity are included.

- In Chapter 7, an extensive section has been added addressing neuroscience research and implications for middle level teaching and learning. A section addressing the importance of choice and how to include it in the classroom is added.
- In Chapter 8, additional emphasis is provided on formative assessment, common assessments, and response patterns.
- In Chapter 9, the gradual release model has been added, along with the concept of academic language, a component of edTPA. In addition, SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol is addressed not only as beneficial for English learners, but for all learners.
- In Chapter 10, de-escalation strategies of the Crisis Prevention Institute are applied to middle level classrooms to help prevent behavior issues.
- Chapter 11 is entirely new.
- In Chapter 12, a major section addressing professionalism is added, including becoming a reflective practitioner, balancing professional and personal life, and maintaining positive dispositions.

New Accountability

Each chapter consists of three to six major topic sections. Each topic section is followed by four multiple choice items with explanations for each answer choice. Students can use the self-checks to make sure they are grasping the knowledge in the chapters.

New Videos

This fourth edition includes 10 videos from the third edition and 22 *new* videos illustrating concepts throughout the text. The Instructor's Manual includes accountability questions for every video that may be used as study guides or as quizzes to make sure students are watching the videos when assigned.

Included in This Edition

To help prepare teachers who will consistently make the teaching and learning connection, the following features from the third edition are retained in this new 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 teacher preparation standards are linked to chapter content throughout the text.
- ***This We Believe:*** The 16 tenets of effective schools for young adolescents are emphasized throughout the text.
- ***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.
- ***Common Core State Standards:*** An emphasis on the Common Core State Standards that 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.

- ***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.
- ***Virtual Field Experiences:*** Throughout the fourth 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.

The fourth edition of *Introduction to Middle Level Education* also 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: a comprehensive Instructor's Manual including author suggestions for exploration of text content, PowerPoint slide presentations for each chapter, and a chapter-by-chapter test bank.

Organization

Introduction to Middle Level Education includes 12 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 philosophy and 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 addresses citizenship responsibilities and ways to promote civic engagement and civility. Chapter 12 explores some of the realities of teaching young adolescents, the relationships that are so crucial to successful teaching and learning, elements of professionalism, 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's 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* (Carnegie Corporation, 1989), *Turning Points 2000 (Jackson & Davis, 2000)*, and *This We Believe (NMSA, 2010)*; 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 fourth 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 non-traditional scholarship—scholarly by way of knowledge base and non-traditional 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.

Special thanks go to my editor Drew Bennett, production manager Yagnesh Jani, and Gheron Lising and Mohamed Hameed of Pearson CSC for their guidance and prompt responses to my questions and requests. I appreciate the time and suggestions given by four reviewers:

Chapter 1

Middle Level Education Philosophy and History

Sara Davis Powell

> 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, 2010, P. 27.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this chapter, you will have knowledge and skills to:

1.1 Define the basic elements of middle level education philosophy.

1.2 Describe the history of middle level education.

1.3 Explain the function and value of organizations and publications focusing on middle level education.

1.4 Summarize middle level teacher preparation standards and teacher candidate assessments.

1.5 Recognize that while characteristics may vary, effective teachers make the teaching and learning connection.

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 emotions 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 teachers who choose to spend their days in the middle. Welcome to the adventure!

SDP

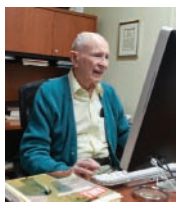
LO 1.1 Philosophy of Middle Level Education

Before considering the history of middle level education, it's imperative to explore the philosophy that guides and gives life to successful education of young adolescents, often referred to as middle level/school concept. A philosophy is a system of thought and principles that guide practice. Middle level philosophy is composed of principles based on the needs of young adolescents and our best thinking about how to meet those needs through effective practice. Throughout this text we examine these principles.

Developmental responsiveness requires that we understand the unique nature of young adolescents and continually consider how we can use that knowledge to build a supportive learning environment. All our interactions with, and decisions that affect, young adolescents must be built on our unambiguous determination to be developmentally responsive. The school organization or structure, policies, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher-student relationships must focus on the attributes of young adolescents. Developmental responsiveness is not a "warm and fuzzy" concept as some may perceive it, but rather a research-based component of effective teaching and learning. You will see the word *relationships* repeatedly in any information discussing young adolescents and middle level schools. There's no way to overstate the value of healthy, trusting relationships among students and the adults who serve them.

Making the Teaching and Learning Connection is a feature in every chapter. It's a wonderful coincidence that the title of the feature contains the letters TLC which once stood most prominently in pop culture for Tender Loving Care. This is descriptive of the overall approach that brings the most positive and productive results when teaching middle level kids in ways that lead to their learning. It's not soft or permissive, but involves the determination to do everything possible to care for the growing young adolescents in our classrooms. In this chapter's TLC we have words of Dr. John Lounsbury, a name you will read throughout this book. Young adolescents and middle level education have no better or wiser friend than Dr. Lounsbury; he has a history of promoting teaching and learning for more than 70 years. He is the man I consider my most valuable mentor through what he has written, the words he has spoken at meetings and conferences, his leadership of the Association for Middle Level Education, and our personal friendship. Read his words once, and then again, and then again. They are rich and meaningful.

Making the Teaching and Learning Connection



Dr. John Lounsbury continues to positively impact the ways we make the teaching and learning connection with young adolescents. Here he shares his belief that teaching is a moral endeavor with a spiritual dimension. Read his words carefully and internalize them.

"In real estate, the three factors that are tied to success are: location, location, location. While in teaching, the three factors that spell success are: *relationships, relationships, relationships*.

Teaching is a very human experience—and a moral matter. What teachers inevitably teach is who they are. The content falls to second place. Rudyard Kipling, long ago, penned these lines, my favorites:

"No printed word nor spoken plea can teach young minds what they should be.

Not all the books on all the shelves, but what the teachers are themselves."

These words are sobering, to say the least, for what teachers teach are who they are as persons—their values, behaviors, and mannerisms—all come across with certainty in a student-teacher relationship, completely independent of any stated material or instructional technique used.

Teacher preparation, then, should give some attention to helping teacher candidates become better persons and sensitive to the enduring impact they have on students, as well as mastering the traditional materials of planning for instruction, assessing student progress, and exploring new approaches.

I believe that teaching includes a spiritual dimension, one seldom openly acknowledged, but which is of enduring importance, especially in the middle

school level. There is in teaching an ethical impulse which calls for teaching to go beyond the head and touch the heart and soul. A full education has to involve heart as well as head, attitude as well as information, spirit as well as scholarship, and conscience as well as competence".

With gratitude to all who care for young adolescents,
John

Educational experiences for young adolescents must be challenging, with appropriately high expectations for each individual student. We often hear middle level educators say that the mantra of our work is that we believe in **developmental appropriateness** and **academic rigor**. These two concepts are not at all mutually exclusive, but rather completely compatible and complementary. The ability of young adolescents to grasp more complex and abstract ideas increases throughout their middle school years. Because students' intellectual capacity matures at varying rates, teachers must know students well, continually recognize them as unique individuals, and understand when and how to challenge them based on what Vygotsky calls the **zone of proximal development**, or the level at which a student can almost, but not completely, grasp a concept or perform a skill. Teachers use **scaffolding** to support student learning as they progress needing help to independently grasping a concept or performing a skill.

Middle level philosophy promotes **empowerment** of all students, or teaching the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives. "Early adolescence is a time of uncertainty with respect to self-confidence, peer relationships, and independence. To counteract this uncertainty, teachers provide students with a sense of empowerment over their own learning" (Levin & Mee, 2016). Young adolescents are exploring their independence and encountering opportunities to take responsibility for themselves. They are social beings who are learning more about themselves and others as relationships become more complex. Empowerment involves helping them learn how to "address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge" (National Middle School Association, 2010, p.13).

Carolyn Gomez, a sixth grade teacher in Stillwater, Oklahoma, believes that part of forming relationships with students involves letting students get to know us. She reveals to them her interests and family news, as well as what she enjoys about teaching and what challenges her most.

As a part of fulfilling a moral imperative, middle level philosophy insists on **equity**, or the quality of being fair and impartial. In middle level philosophy, bias does not exist; we advocate for all students and ensure their rights to learn. When the philosophy is applied, all students matter, and matter equally. We honor individuals and their potential and provide engaging instruction and support for each young adolescent.

Remember the definition of philosophy? A philosophy is a system of thought and principles that guide practice. Particular practices closely align with middle level philosophy and "put legs" on the principles, including teaming, **interdisciplinary instruction,** common planning time, exploratory courses, and advisory. We will discuss these practices and more throughout this book.

By whatever name—middle level philosophy, middle school concept, *This We Believe*—teachers dedicated to meeting the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral needs of young adolescents provide education that is developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable.

LO 1.2 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 basically 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 classes 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 recognized 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 junior highs. An early advocate for junior high wrote about what he perceived as persistent 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. 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. 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. Although it may seem out-of-date to even discuss junior high and compare its basic concepts to middle school concepts, it's still relevant to consider why middle level philosophy was developed.

FIGURE 1.1 Differences between junior high and middle school

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

An excellent resource for delving more deeply into the history of middle level education is a research study published by Research in Middle Level Education in 2016 titled *An Historical Overview of the Middle School Movement, 1963–2015* by Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon. The authors examined more than 2,000 documents, research studies, and articles chronicling the development of middle level education beginning with William Alexander's 1963 speech at Cornell University. They tell us 1963–1979 was a time of beginning the search for identity for what has become the Middle School Movement. In 1968, there were about 1,000 schools labeled as middle schools; by 1980 there were more than 5,000. This tremendous growth spurred advancement and progress in the 1980s, with some of the most important practices recognized including teaming, interdisciplinary curriculum and advisory. As middle level education became more established in the 1990s, some outside the movement began questioning and challenging beliefs and practices of those who embraced middle level philosophy, including advisory, cooperative learning, and teaming. Recognizing the need to validate the middle level philosophy as described for more than 50 years by those close to young adolescents and their education, the first decade of the 21st century saw an impressive increase in research studies, both small- and large-scale. This emphasis on research to support and inform practices both in the U.S. and internationally continues into the second decade of the century.

In 1988, a second major research study following up on Alexander's 1969 *The Emergent Middle School* 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 emeritus 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.

A ground-breaking study is underway, with results to be revealed in 2020. The study, Middle Grades Longitudinal Study of 2017–18 (MGLS:2017), is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education. It is the first nationally representative study that examines the educational experiences and outcomes of students in 6th grade as they progress through 8th grade. MGLS:2017 attempts to determine factors that predict success for students in grades 6, 7, and 8 while discovering more about student development and influences both inside and outside school. A unique feature of the study is that information will be gathered from multiple sources: students, their parents, school administrators, and mathematics and special education teachers. The study will assess students' mathematics and reading skills, socioemotional development, and executive functions such as working memory, attention, and impulse control. To learn more about this study and explore findings as they are published, simply access the NCES site and enter MGLS:2017 in the search bar.

There are more than 15,000 middle level schools in the United States, serving students ages 10-15. The most prevalent grade configuration for middle schools is 6–8, but configurations of grades 5–8 and grades 7–8 also exist (McEwin & Greene, 2011). Because

early adolescence includes ages 10–15, some schools serving grades 7–9 may also qualify as middle schools. The **Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)** continues to set high expectations for what an effective middle level school setting that is developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable should "look like."

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. However, 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.

Seventh grade focus teacher **Traci Peters** tells us that she prepared to teach elementary students, but found that her college education prepared her to cross the grade-level divide and be successful in middle school. She now loves spending her days with young adolescents and attending to their developmental and academic needs.

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.

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 education have made, and continue to impact, significant progress. Smith and McEwin (2011) published *The Legacy of Middle School Leaders: In Their Own Words*. This historical account focuses on contributions of leaders who have shaped the American middle level movement. Included are synopses of the impact of William Alexander and Donald Eichhorn, both of whom died before the legacy project, along with edited transcripts of extensive interviews with 18 influential individuals who, together, encompass the essence of middle level philosophy: John Arnold, Al Arth, James Beane, Sherrel Bergmann, Thomas Dickinson, Nancy Doda, Thomas Erb, Thomas Gatewood, Paul George, Howard Johnston, Joan Lipsitz, John Lounsbury, Ken McEwin, Chris Stevenson, John Swaim, Sue Swaim, Conrad Toepfer, and Gordon Vars. As you learn more about middle level philosophy and practices, you are sure to see these names over and over. Pay attention to what they have to say and what is said about them. They continue to guide and inspire the work of middle level educators.

LO 1.3 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 their work, 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 three 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.

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.

Used with permission from the Association for Middle Level Education www.amle.org

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.

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 invited to join and 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, with middle schools across the country identified because they meet, or are making significant progress toward meeting, specific criteria for high performance including academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and processes. Schools apply to be part of the Schools to Watch Project anticipating the multi-layered guidance and support opportunities will lead to needed improvements and, ultimately, designation as a School to Watch. A recent four-year study of the impact of implementation on school and student outcomes found that middle level schools with the highest levels of implementation of the Schools to Watch criteria achieved higher levels of success (Flowers, Begum, Carpenter, & Mulhall, 2017). For more information on Schools to Watch, see the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform website.

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. 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, as well as 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 tenets are interrelated elements that, when taken as a whole, provide a vision for teaching and learning appropriate for young adolescents.

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 significant improvement in academic achievement.

TABLE 1.1 Turning Points

Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989	
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.

Based on: *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (pp. 37–70), by Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, Washington, DC: Author.

Turning Points 2000, written by Anthony Jackson and Gayle Davis, traces the progress of middle schools, and the degrees 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 useful applications for implementing what research tells us is best practice for young adolescents. In doing so, the authors altered 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.

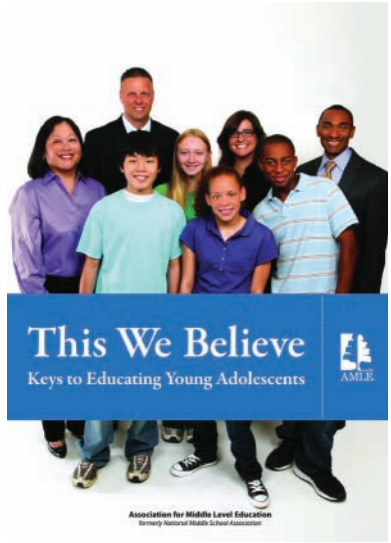
FIGURE 1.2 Turning Points 2000

***Turning Points 2000* calls for schools that**

- Base their curriculum on established standards.
- Incorporate a variety of instructional strategies that help students learn the knowledge and skills of the standards.
- Support teachers in their professional growth as they increase their skills in teaching young adolescents.
- Emphasize the importance of relationships in establishing environments that foster intellectual development.
- Encourage teachers to be involved in governance decisions, acknowledging that they know students best.
- Teach the whole child in an environment that emphasizes academic performance, dispositions of care, and the development of ethical citizens.
- Include family and community in efforts to support learning and positive development.

Based on: *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* by A.W. Jackson and G.A. Davis, 2000. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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***. First published in 1982 and then revised in 1995 and 2003, and again in 2010 as *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, the document 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, *This We Believe* 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. Sixteen general characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents are outlined, 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.

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.

FIGURE 1.3 This We Believe

National Middle School Association (now AMLE) 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.

Based on: *This We Believe* by the Association of Middle Level Education. Westerville, OH: Author.

LO 1.4 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 reconfigured and renamed national accreditation 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. 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.

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.

Based on: Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), 4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300, Westerville, OH 43081, 1-800-528-6672, www.amle.org.

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 may use them for granting initial licensure; and professional organizations may require their successful completion as part of the criteria for certification.

You may have taken Praxis I or Praxis Core in conjunction with entry requirements for your teacher education program. The exams assess 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: mathematics, science, literature and language studies, and history/social studies. 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. Success on the test requires knowledge of young adolescent development, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and maintenance of an appropriate learning environment. The Praxis series exams are not the only ones required of teacher candidates. In an increasing number of states other tests are required, like the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure and the North Carolina Test for Educator Licensure. These tests tend to be more comprehensive and difficult concerning content knowledge than the Praxis exams.

Many states now require **edTPA**, an in-depth performance-based, subject-specific assessment that measures and supports the skills and knowledge of teaching.

LO 1.5 Effective Middle Level 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. Making the teaching and learning connection is both the goal and the reality of effective teachers. 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 teachers is **Middle Web**. Dedicated to increasing achievement for all middle level students, the site features numerous articles and dozens of links to help increase teacher knowledge and skills.

Although researched and written at the end of the 20th century, a 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. Recognize the authors' names?

Now 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

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.

Based on: Arth, A., Lounsbury, J.H., McEwin, C.K., & Swaim, J.H. *Middle Level Teachers: Portraits of Excellence* (1995).

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:

- 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

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 more than 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*!

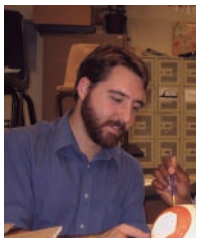
Carmen Esparza

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 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.

(*Continued*)



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.

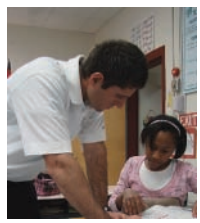
Deirdre McGrew

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.

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 by going 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 aspect(s) of your middle level school you experienced or remember.
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 the teacher.

Professional Practice

This is the first of the Professional Practice features 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 this text and from your course discussions 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 licensure/certification. Most of the scenarios involve teachers you met in this chapter and the students you will meet in Chapter 2. For some items, more than one choice may be defensible. The purpose of the items is to stimulate thought and discussion.

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 whose signs changed at the same time. 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
4. 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?

Chapter 2
Development of Middle Level Learners

Sara Davis Powell

> Young people undergo more rapid and profound personal changes between the ages of 10 and 15 than at any other time in their lives. . . . Early adolescence is also a period of tremendous variability among youngsters of the same gender and chronological age in all areas of their development.
>
> THIS WE BELIEVE, P. 5.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this chapter, you will have knowledge and skills to:

2.1 Describe aspects of physical development including varying growth rates and puberty.

2.2 Summarize characteristics of intellectual development, including variability among middle level learners.

2.3 Analyze how emotional development is manifested and interrelated to other areas of development.

2.4 Explore social development involving adult and peer relationships.

2.5 Examine young adolescent character traits and ways to enhance healthy development.

2.6 Articulate *This We Believe* goals for 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. 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 mature boy may be painfully shy. The tiny girl who looks more like a third-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!

SDP

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.

LO 2.1 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.

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. 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 tire 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? 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.

Each of these three boys is 11 years old. Although we may think the boy in the center is the most mature, his teacher tells us he is actually less emotionally mature than his two much smaller classmates.

Sara Davis Powell

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 experiencing 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 (or should become) part of a daily routine.

Sexual Maturity

With puberty comes sexual maturation. Yes, these wonderful, 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.

Sara Davis Powell

Young adolescents experience sexual maturation and begin developing more mature relationships.

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 both teachers and students. Here are some issues, along with suggestions for how we can make a difference, both as individual teachers and on school and district levels.

1. Middle level students need information on physical development. Not only do middle level students have a tough 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.
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 change, 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.
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 and administration have established.

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 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 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.

   The quality of a middle level chorus depends on vocal cord development. Some activities in home economics, home arts, and shop arts require dexterity, and some art forms require coordination and 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 and natural abilities.

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 never 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.

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 a dull pencil. 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.

7. 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.

LO 2.2 Intellectual Development

Middle level students experience a transitional state between childlike thinking and adult thinking. Childlike thinking is characterized as **concrete thinking**. 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, or cognitive, 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, according to The University of Rochester Medical Center Health Encyclopedia (2017), adult brains and teen brains function quite differently. Adults think with the **prefrontal cortex**, the brain's rational part, while teens process information with the emotional part of the brain, the **amygdala**. Research evidence now shows that some parts of the brain do not fully develop until the mid-20s. This may mean that *your* brain is still developing, that you are still becoming. Pretty exciting, right?

Although we may be able to identify and characterize stages of intellectual/cognitive growth, we must remember that the process of moving from concrete to abstract thinking is completely individual. In other words, *becoming* is **idiosyncratic**, or happening at different rates and at different times 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 variability presents to the teacher. This awareness leads us to seek ways to assist in this important growth process.

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.
2. Middle level students often have very vivid imaginations that can be linked to concepts as abstract thinking develops. Purposefully channelling 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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, 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. However, there are times when young adolescent intellectual development appears to be at the mercy of emotions.

LO 2.3 Emotional Development

Parents, teachers, and even young adolescents themselves often refer to the roller-coaster emotions that accompany the middle level years as difficult to understand and impossible to predict. Recall from the last section that teens process in the emotional part of the brain. If you have ridden a roller-coaster, you can no doubt close your eyes and recall the exhilaration of anticipation, the sheer terror of the actual descents, and brief moments of calm during levelling-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, or EQ, determines about 80 percent of a person's success in life. The work of Goleman has been continued by **Six Seconds**, a nonprofit organization that helps individuals, parents, and educators navigate emotional issues in ways that increase emotional intelligence. Goleman and others who continue to research the concept of EQ tell 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. They believe it is possible to raise the emotional intelligence of students by, among other things, being available to them with an empathetic ear.

You likely noticed that the Dan Goleman reference dates back to 1995. Even so, his theory lives on today. In 2018, Joel Garfinkle wrote about emotional intelligence and its impact on leadership in "5 Qualities of Emotionally Intelligent Leaders." Garfinkle emphasizes the benefits of leaders in all sectors being empathetic, self-aware, positive, considerate, and authentic. Emotional intelligence and related practices matter. You will be the leader of your classroom, helping motivate and form future leaders!

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 hopeful, optimistic, and excited 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-concept** is crucial but often elusive. A young adolescent's self-concept is the sum total of what he knows about himself, including gender, name, personality, physical characteristics, likes and dislikes, beliefs, and family. If asked, "Who are you?" he will use his self-concept to answer. Helping students explore their self-concepts and recognize their strengths should be a goal of every middle level teacher.

When a young adolescent senses a loss of control over the environment, as in the sheer terror roller-coaster moments, the result may a loss of **self-esteem**, or how one values or sees worth of self-concept traits. The myriad changes of the 10- to 15-year-old experience may seem overwhelming. Developing positive self-concept, 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. This helps foster young adolescents' *empowerment* as they acquire the knowledge and skills needed to take responsibility for their lives. This foundational principle of middle level philosophy should be consistently reinforced with a sense of urgency.

There's a new concept emerging that deserves some consideration. In his book, *Barking Up the Wrong Tree* (2016), Eric Barker proposes the value of **self-compassion**, basing his premise on research that looks at the keys to success. He states that the value of self-confidence and self-esteem are overrated. Self-compassion encourages us to face our flaws and our weaknesses and view ourselves realistically. Barker says that we should treat ourselves with the same kindness and understanding we show others. Hard to argue with that, right? As with most issues in middle level education, and in life as a whole, finding balance is the best idea. We want young adolescents to be confident, yet realistic. Perhaps self-compassion has a real place in our philosophy.

In this chapter's *Making the Teaching and Learning Connection*, we meet Dani Ramsey, an ELA teacher at a Title I school. She understands that the emotional stability of her students impacts every aspect of their lives. Among many strategies, she tells us about writing bio poems and how they allow her students to use self-expression to explore their lives. The bio poems are revealing in all cases and heart-wrenching in many.

Making the Teaching and Learning Connection

Dear future teachers,

My name is Dani Ramsey. I teach 6th grade English language arts (ELA) in a Title I middle school. I can't honestly say that being a teacher was my dream job in high school, or even in college. But once I entered my classroom, I was hooked! I fell in love with the possibility of changing the direction of kids' lives through my teaching.

The kids I work with five days a week mostly live in homes at or near the poverty line. But that doesn't at all define who they are or who they may become. Many lack structure at home and I provide that. I often call them Miss and Mr. I thank them for their responses. I respect them and expect respect in return. I am consistent. They can count on me to treat them the same today and tomorrow.

Every day I see my students driven by their emotions and social relationships. Sometimes they don't know how to react in certain situations and they simply withdraw. Other times they say and do things that I know they don't mean, things that can hurt others. They're finding their way.

One of my favorite activities in ELA is having students write bio poems. These special poems require them to use many of the elements of the standards: brainstorming, biography, metaphor, simile, alliteration, and more. Bio poems are not fillers or meaningless activities. They combine academic practice with an outlet for young adolescents to explore who they are. They evoke emotions. The first thing I do is show students several examples of bio poems because in order to create their own, they need to see a finished product and understand where they're heading with the task. Then I have them brainstorm answers to specific questions, without the added step of making their responses into poems. Once they have explored their responses I ask them to put their answers in poem format.

Middle level teachers need to use a variety of instructional strategies to engage learners. Give bio poems a try in your classroom!

Best wishes to you!

Dani

Sara Davis Powell

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. The alliances formed in early adolescence are often very strong.

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 growing from 4 feet 11 inches to 5 feet 4 inches 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 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 regarding 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.

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.

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.
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; what they feel at one moment may change quickly and unexpectedly. By 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.
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—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 as well. Closely linked to emotional development is social development, which, in turn, affects overall development of easily influenced and socially self-conscious young adolescents.

LO 2.4 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 may develop an exaggerated view of themselves, often thinking that everyone's attention is on them. This perception can lead to uneasiness in social settings. The emotion-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. Look for students who don't seem to fit in. They need our attention. As a 12-year-old, David McBeath's 6-foot stature puts his physical development far ahead of his emotional, social, and cognitive development.

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 adults closest to them—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.

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 or 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.

Sara Davis Powell

The alliances formed in early adolescence are often very strong.

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.

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.

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.

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. 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.

4. Teachers' social backgrounds may be different from their students' backgrounds; our realities may be unlike those of our students. This is a very common phenomenon. 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.

Social-Emotional Learning

The concept of **social-emotional learning (SEL)** has been researched, written about, and is responsible for programs and initiatives in many schools. Every day teachers witness the ways learning is intertwined with emotional and social development. While we don't need hard research by scientists to prove the relationships among emotional, social, and cognitive development, it's validating to know it exists. New understanding of the nature of biology, emotions, and intelligence and how they relate to happiness and success continue to gain attention among both social and natural scientists. In a report published in 2017, a group of 28 scientists agreed on a number of statements concerning social-emotional learning. The statements include assurances that emotional, social, and cognitive capabilities are interdependent; that emotional, social and cognitive competencies can be taught; and that teaching emotional, social, and cognitive competencies will lead to desirable results such as academic excellence, empathy, collaboration, creativity, and respect, all of which fit perfectly into middle level philosophy (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

To neglect young adolescents' emotional and social growth has negative consequences on cognitive growth. But this is not new information for middle level teachers. Addressing the needs of the whole child has always been in the forefront of effective middle level teaching and learning. Linking social and emotional development with cognitive learning weaves throughout all our major documents; pick up *This We Believe*, *Turning Points*, or *Turning Points 2000* and read all about the concept. On the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) website we read, "Successful SEL is not a standalone program or an add-on. It is central to how schools, communities, and families value and support the social, emotional, and academic development of their children." The competencies promoted by the organization include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. Could have come right out of a middle school playbook! SEL is not new, but the recent emphasis is a reminder that middle level philosophy is alive and well.

LO 2.5 Character Development

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 level schools. Time spent in school accounts for a major chunk of early adolescence. The school is an influential part of the context for character development.

Young Adolescent Character Traits

Many generalizations can be made about typical character traits of young adolescents. Here are a few to consider. Young adolescents:

- are often 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.

- sometimes 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.

- often 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.

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 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 beginning at the end of the 20th century and increasing in this century with devasting intensity and frequency.

Groups of citizens and educators often debate which character traits 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 perceived as 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 a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, coalition of organizations and individuals committed to fostering effective character education in U.S. schools, 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 actually *be* the character-building program. In a practical sense, 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.

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.
2. Students are continually faced with contradictions concerning character; we can't erase or deny them. 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.
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 teachers of young adolescents, 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.

LO 2.6 Goals of Middle Level Education

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.

***TWB* Goal 9.** Recognize, articulate, and make responsible, ethical decisions concerning his or her own health and wellness needs.

***TWB* Goal 10.** Respect and value the diverse ways people look, speak, think, and act within the immediate community and around the world.

***TWB* Goal 11.** Develop the interpersonal and social skills needed to learn, work, and play with others harmoniously and confidently.

***TWB* Goal 12.** Assume responsibility for his or her own actions and be cognizant of and ready to accept obligations for the welfare of others.

***TWB* Goal 13.** Understand local, national, and global civic responsibilities and demonstrate active citizenship through participation in endeavors that serve and benefit those larger communities.

Quite a list, isn't it? They aren't just words; in each statement we find a lens through which we should view every student in our middle level classrooms. Throughout this book these statements will appear 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 goals because you've read them before, but please resist. These desirable 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.

Executive Skills

Now that we have thought about young adolescent development, let's look at some skills that will be very valuable as young adolescents grow toward the 13 goals articulated in *This We Believe*. **Executive skills**, or **executive function** as the concept is also referred to, comprise a set of mental qualities that help us get things done. We all have many to lesser or greater degrees, with some skills perhaps still weak even for adults.

Executive skills are the same for adults and young adolescents. Adults have the advantage of thinking in the prefrontal cortex, the brain's rational part, as we've discussed, while teens process information with the emotional part of the brain, the amygdala. Researchers tell us executive skills most readily reside in the brain's rational area. This means that most of the skills, and their development to optimal levels, don't come naturally to most young adolescents. Because we know the skills are beneficial makes it important for us to present them to students as something to work toward, helping them grow the skills as rapidly as possible within their individual development.

In *Smart but Scattered Teens* (2013), the authors present 11 executive skills that are in the process of being developed during adolescence.

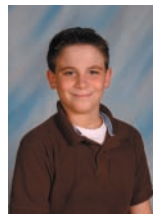
- Response inhibition
- Working memory
- Emotional control
- Flexibility
- Sustained attention
- Task initiation
- Planning/prioritizing
- Organization
- Time management
- Goal-directed persistence
- Metacognition.

Just looking at the list seems to describe young adolescents, provided we preface it with "skills that are part of the process of *becoming*." These are skills most well-adjusted adults appear to have much of the time, but that kids in middle school often lack. They are brain-based skills that come from neurosciences literature (Guare, Dawson, & Guare, 2013). Almost all the issues we've looked at in each of the five areas of development can be linked to the 11 skills. The authors of *Smart but Scattered Teens* believe that isolating the specific skills makes teaching them, and then intervening when success is elusive, easier because we can come up with strategies that actually solve problems that arise from weak or lacking skill implementation.

As you continue reading this text, look for strategies that relate to the executive skills or functions. Awareness of them will help you recognize opportunities to teach and reinforce the skills in your future classroom. Rick Wormeli (2013) cautions us to not hold a lack of executive skills against our students, as he quips that we all get there!

Meet the Students

We've established that young adolescent development is, diosyncratic 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 each chapter, 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.