A COMPARISON OF NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

ASSOCIATION CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE

IN THREE BLUE RIBBON AWARD

WINNING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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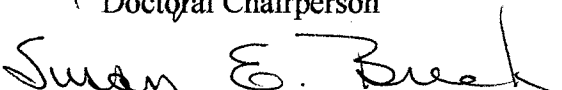Weatherford, Oklahoma
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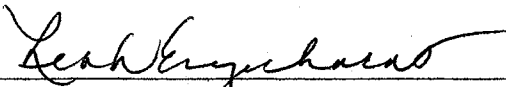
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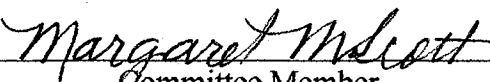
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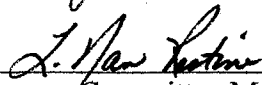Dissertation Approved:

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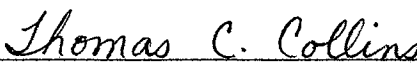Dissertation Advisor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The tears are useless, I know;
But somewhere, far back
In my mind, I cry anyway.

There is a feeling, horribly absolute,
Of unchangeable impotence.
There is love, yes. . .

One half of it, at least,
But the air is silent;
Where is the other call of the horn?

I no not know, and I almost cease to care;
My life is melancholy, terribly alone
--I need someone. . .
(Murphy, J. 1989. Cited in Turning Points:
Preparing American Youth for the 21st. Century, 1989, p. 23)

Young adolescents, as depicted in this poem written by an adolescent, are at a

crossroads in which physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially they are being

transformed from children to adults. These changes leave young adolescents in a

vulnerable position in society and often times cause conflict with others around them.

By age 15, millions of American youth are at risk of reaching adulthood unable
to meet adequately the requirements of the workplace, the commitments of
relationships in families and with peers, and the responsibilities of participation in
a multi-cultural society and of citizenship in a democracy. . . During early
adolescence, many youth enter a period of trial and error, emotional hurt and
humiliation, and of anxiety and uncertainty (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 21).

The Carnegie Council (1989) further states that we face an economic imperative

to ensure that young people are properly educated. Response to drug addiction, crime,

violence, and teenage pregnancy continues to consume national resources. Our need for literate and skilled workers is increasing, thus we cannot idly watch a new generation of potential workers slide into unproductive lives.

Wolf (1995) reported a nine year study on adolescents indicating our nation has neglected the nineteen million young adolescents to such an extent that half of them may be irrevocably damaging their chances for productive and healthy futures. The educational community has taken a commanding role in young adolescent development by revising their perspectives. Research in the last thirty years has resulted in the organization and curriculum of middle schools. Developmentally appropriate coursework in curriculum and specialization for teachers in middle grades, along with research and coursework regarding young adolescent development, have combined to produce middle school education that meets the needs of young adolescents academically, emotionally, and socially.

Some young adolescents "fall through the cracks" because of lack of support from their parents, communities, and schools. Those children tend to be drawn to gangs, drugs, and crime in order to fulfill their needs for recognition. Wolf (1995) suggests the following prescription: 1) educational institutions should become better suited to adolescents, 2) parents need to re-engage themselves with their children, 3) health professionals should increase their efforts to expand their services into the schools, and 4) media should show more responsibility by discouraging violence, sex, and drugs. Most young adolescents do come through the critical years from ten to twenty unscathed. Through supportive families, caring communities, and good schools , they grow to adulthood as committed responsible citizens.

Middle level schools have emerged as a mechanism to meet young adolescent developmental needs, thus providing a climate conducive to productive growth into an adult world. Middle level education is usually characterized by teams of faculty, staff,

and parents supporting small groups of students. Those small communities of students are provided with academic, emotional, and physical support through strong guidance programs and genuine concern from their teams. The teams meet regularly to review needs and plan for opportunities for their young adolescent communities. The middle school concept includes involvement of the communities surrounding middle level schools in the educational process of young adolescents. Even though it may now be politically incorrect, it really does take a village to raise and educate the child.

Thirty-one middle schools, studied by Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, and Austin (1997), with high implementation of middle school reforms had students who achieved at much higher levels, teachers reported far lower levels of student behavior problems, students were less fearful of being victimized at school, and students had high levels of self-esteem.

Focus of Study

Three Blue Ribbon award winning middle schools in an Oklahoma suburban school district of 16,000 students were selected to participate in this study. Characteristics of these school programs and participant perceptions were compared to criteria established by the National Middle School Association (NMSA) as indicative of excellent middle schools. Administrators, counselors, teachers, and students involved in the three middle schools were observed, interviewed, and documents analyzed to examine perspectives of their middle schools. The participants were purposefully selected through recommendations, volunteering, and parent consent for student participation. Documentation such as applications, schedules, information booklets, mission statements, and goals were gathered from principals, counselors, and teachers. Each middle school was named for letters of the alphabet (A, B, and C) to preserve their identities.

A national award for recognition of excellence in schools given by the U.S. Department of Education, the Blue Ribbon Award, was used as a means for selection of schools for the study. The purpose of the Blue Ribbon Schools Program was to identify and give public recognition annually to outstanding public and private schools across the United States. Schools were identified on the basis of their effectiveness in meeting local, State, and National Education Goals and other standards of quality applicable to schools generally. Schools must have clear evidence of effective schooling in the areas of leadership, teaching environment, curriculum and instruction, student environment, parental and community support, indicators of success, and organizational vitality to be considered for the award. The Blue Ribbon Award was intended as a means for selection of middle schools for the study, and not as a vehicle for comparison.

The vehicle of comparison between the three middle schools is the NMSA characteristics of excellent middle schools:

1. Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents.
2. A balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents.
3. A range of organizational arrangements.
4. Varied instructional strategies.
5. A full exploratory program.
6. Comprehensive advising and counseling.
7. Continuous progress for students.
8. Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescents.
9. Cooperative planning.
10. Positive school climate (NMSA, 1992).

Research Perspective

Two questions were concerned in this study: Are Schools A, B, and C excellent middle schools? Do these schools exemplify high implement middle school reform seen across the nation? To answer the questions, a qualitative study was conducted to compare the perceived characteristics of the three middle schools to nationally agreed upon NMSA criteria of excellent middle schools. Yin (1994) says descriptive case study

inquiry examines real-life contexts. In order to provide insight, participant perceptions through observations, interviews, and document analysis were used in the examination of the middle schools in this study.

Definitions

Middle School. A student centered school between the elementary and high school (grades six, seven, and eight) focused on the educational needs of adolescent students and designed to promote continuous educational progress.

Middle school organization. All aspects of middle school scheduling and planning of curriculum pertaining to students, staff, and parents.

Adolescence or transescence. The stage of development based on the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes in body chemistry that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization. (Some authors use transescent instead of adolescent; however, the term is rarely used.)

Summary

Long range studies of middle schools indicate improvement in young adolescent education. Those studies also indicate not all middle schools are effective. Commitment and dedication to middle school reform by faculty, staff, parents, and community make the difference. The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of faculty and students with documentation in each of the three middle schools and compare their programs to the characteristics established by the National Middle School Association as indicative of excellent middle schools. Are Schools A, B, and C excellent middle schools? Do these schools exemplify high implement middle school reform seen across the nation?

Each chapter begins with a continuation of the poem written by a young adolescent that began in Chapter I. Chapter II discusses literature appropriate to the understanding of the history of the middle school movement, issues pertaining to young adolescent development, and the organization of middle schools. Chapter III outlines the methodology used for the study. Chapter IV presents each middle school as a case study exploring participant perceptions of their own middle school programs, organizational structure related to appropriateness for young adolescent development, and a comparative look at guidelines set by the National Middle School Association to the three middle schools studied. Chapter V provides the analysis of the data, the conclusions, and the implications of this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

But wait! I am wrong:
I do not cease to care,
But rather transfer that care to a deeper, more
intimate place.

Somewhere far back in my mind,
The unfathomable depths,
There is a glimmer of faint hope.

Then it is gone, and again the other comes:
The wave of blackness,
Leaving me awash in despair.

My life is a balance, an equilibrium:
But one gone mad,
That chaotic dissonance prevails. . .
(Murphy, J. 1989. Cited in Turning Points:
Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, 1989, p. 23)

In this chapter, three aspects of the middle school will be examined that explain

the rationale behind the movement: 1) The history of middle school education and

changes in outlook on child development; 2)   Adolescent development on three levels -

physiological, emotional/social, and cognitive; and 3) Organization of the middle

school, using knowledge of adolescent development in the restructuring of curriculum.

History of Middle School Education

The reasons for the birth of the middle school movement are understood through

a brief history of the American educational system. The millions of immigrants who flocked to the United States during the urbanization and industrialization period increased demands from employers for better educated workers. There were concerns about the limited role schools played in Americanizing and educating workers, since one-third of the children entering public schools reached the ninth grade, and only one in ten finished high school (Messick and Reynolds, 1992).

Around 1910, educators became unhappy with the public school organizational arrangement, and the junior high school began to gain popularity. These schools were designed to bridge the gap between elementary school and high school, making the transition easier for the adolescent (Overly, Kinghorn, & Preston, 1972). Educational decision makers in the Cardinal Group began a series of meetings and investigations that led toward a consensus about the role of education in the preparation of Americans in those changing times. In 1918, the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education set the direction for thousands of school districts for the next thirty or more years. The cardinal principles included a recommendation that elementary schools include the first six years of education for students from six to twelve years of age, and secondary education take students from twelve to eighteen years of age and be divided into two sections designated as the junior and senior high.

During the decades of the thirties, forties, and fifties, many schools experimented with curricula and scheduling in attempts to meet the needs of early adolescents. Most common of all the junior high innovations was the establishment of exploratory and elective classes implemented as industrial arts and home economics. The major fault of the junior high schools was that they became a scaled-down version of the senior high school with departmentalized emphasis on mastery of subject matter (Messick & Reynolds, 1992; Overly, Kinghorn, & Preston, 1972). With a national response to the Russian launching of Sputnik in 1957, a new focus to government-funded curriculum projects aimed at updating and adding intellectual vigor to academic subjects further

reinforced departmentalization into separate subject areas. The response to Sputnik made content and the acquiring of knowledge more important than student needs, thus delaying the notion that student cognitive, physical, and emotional development were important considerations in education.

In the late, 1950s and early 1960s, elementary schools faced severe overcrowding as the "baby boomers" moved through the schools. To relieve the pressure, fifth and sixth graders were moved into separate buildings and ninth graders into the high school. Writings about educational organization by William Alexander, Donald Eichhorn, Paul George, John Lounsbury, and Gordon Vars began to speak of a new configuration of grades five or six through eight for middle level education. Theories of human growth and development by Edward Thorndike, James Cattrell, Robert Havighurst, Erik Erickson, and Jean Piaget were incorporated to produce ideas in the redesigning of junior highs to middle schools based on the characteristics and developmental tasks of the early adolescent (EcEwin, 1992; Messick & Reynolds, 1992; and Raebeck, 1992).

In 1973, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) was founded and based on the premise that development of an educational program must start by considering the needs and characteristics of youth. Lounsbury (1984) states, "The NMSA is the only national professional association devoted specifically and exclusively to the furtherance of middle level education" (p. 157). In 1977, the NMSA published a set of middle school goals in an attempt to guide local schools as they rethought intermediate schooling:

1. Every student should be well known as a person by at least one adult in the school who accepts responsibility for his/her guidance.
2. Every student should be helped to achieve optimum mastery of the skills through continued learning together with a commitment to their use and improvement.
3. Every student should have ample experiences designed to develop decision-making and problem-solving skills.
4. Every student should acquire a functional body of fundamental knowledge.
5. Every student should have opportunities to explore and develop interests in esthetic, leisure, career, and other aspects of life (Messick and Reynolds, 1992, p. 20).

While most of the national reports during the early 1980s based their recommendations for reform on minimum competency testing, standardized testing, and concentration on basic skills; middle level reform suggested:

1. Increased attention to science and foreign language, a reduction of time for mathematics, and increased participation in the performing arts and computer science.
2. Elimination of ability grouping.
3. Organization of large junior high schools into smaller subunits.
4. Utilization of core or block-time scheduling.
5. Use of more active teaching strategies.
6. Globalization of all curricula.
7. Improvement of student guidance through the establishment of a teacher-advisor program (Messick and Reynolds, 1992, p. 24).

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, in 1989, published a comprehensive report clarifying concepts by writers in middle level education:

1. Create small communities for learning.
2. Teach a core academic program.
3. Ensure success for all students.
4. Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students.
5. Staff middle grade schools with teachers expert at teaching young adolescents.
6. Re-engage families in the education of young adolescents.
7. Connect schools with communities.

The 1990s reflect inconsistencies in school policies between the traditional measures of academic progress and educational practices that are more responsive to early adolescent needs; and between a curriculum that is organized by specialized subjects and the willingness to provide skills and knowledge that connect students to themselves and their world. The early 1990s saw state initiations in middle level schooling reform, but some states legislatures are still trying to determine the difference between a junior high school and a middle school (Messick and Reynolds, 1992).

Inspite of societal demands for productive workers, economic pressures, and political agendas, middle schools with specific organizational structures have emerged to meet the physical, intellectual, and social/emotional needs of adolescent development.

After thirty years, educators and political leaders are realizing middle schools can be beneficial in the process of developing productive citizens.

Adolescent Development

The adolescent period of development is one of the most dramatic times in the human lifespan with regard to the scope of change. Dusek (1991) defines adolescence, "as a transition period between childhood and adulthood, a time when the child can acquire the social, emotional and personal skills necessary to enter the adult world of society" (p. 13). In expansion, George and Lawrence (1982) suggest the adolescent child is one who:

1. Possesses a new found intellectual prowess with the ability to deal with symbolic ideas and abstract concepts.
2. Is living under the impact of puberty and new erotic sensations.
3. Is bound by a craving for peer acceptance and approval.
4. Is faced with a new body that must be mastered all over again.
5. Needs to assert autonomy and independence, often times causing resistance to adult authority.
6. Possesses extreme idealism.
7. Struggles with turbulent emotions.
8. Needs to develop a new value system to fit his/her life in society.
9. Is constantly developing, testing, and changing perceptions of self.
10. Is living through a major transformation in relationships with the opposite sex.
11. Faces the task of sex-role identification.
12. Has rapidly multiplying but superficial interests.
13. Has a need for frequent periods of physical activity and movement alternated with periods of rest (p. 103).

Adolescent development will be discussed in three areas: physiological, cognitive, and social/emotional. It is commonly agreed that all three developmental areas affect each other. Adjustment in one area generally means a well balanced adolescent.

<u>Physiological Development</u>

Slow or rapid growth, unevenness of growth, or abnormalities of growth may affect an adolescent's total development. The early adolescent can dramatically fluctuate between a nearly hyperactive state and lethargy of fatigue as basal metabolism varies. Those physical fluctuations then influence their emotional states, which influences social interactions with peers and adults (Lounsbury, 1984; Messick & Reynolds, 1992; George & Lawrence, 1982).

The onset of puberty to full physical maturity differs in children, causing confusion among children and parents as well. Individual children differ considerably in the timing of puberty with the ages of greatest variability in maturation of girls at 11, 12, and 13; for boys the ages are 13, 14, and 15.

The sequence of adolescent physiological change follows:

<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>
Change in hormonal balance	Change in hormonal balance
The beginning of rapid skeletal growth	The beginning of skeletal growth
The beginning of breast development	The enlargement of the genitals
The appearance of straight and kinky pubic hair	The appearance of straight and kinky pubic hair
Menarche (menstruation)	Early voice changes
Maximum growth spurt	First ejaculations
The appearance of hair on forearms and underarms	Maximum growth spurt
	The appearance of downy facial hair
	The appearance of hair on the chest and underarms
	Late voice change
	Coarse facial hair
	(Dacey and Travers, 1996, p. 305).

Bodily changes, especially if sudden, affect the adolescent's body image and self-concept. Adolescent body image impacts the educational process because the focus is not on learning, but on physical sensations which are translated into emotional states and

social behavior. Cognitive development also goes through a transitional period which influences the educational process.

Cognitive Development

Early adolescence is a time of cognitive awakening, an awakening of possibilities in moving from thinking in terms of the concrete to considering relationships that are more general and abstract. Piagetan theory has been used as the justification for curriculum and instruction changes in the middle school toward more emphasis on complex intellectual tasks, creative thinking, and divergent thinking. Erikson says adolescents show a sense of "industriousness" which can be seen in their orientation to follow through on and complete tasks. It is important for middle level children to achieve mastery in one or more activities (Dacey & Travers, 1996 and Elias & Branden-Muller, 1994). Gutheinz-Pierce and Whoolery (1995) further add that the ability to think abstractly impacts young adolescents in their focus of awareness on themselves. They often times see themselves as unique individuals, which results in an overwhelming sense of aloneness.

Elkind has coined the terms adolescent egocentrism, imaginary audience, and personal fable. These behaviors seem to fit a pattern of reemergence of early childhood egocentrism. Adolescent egocentrism refers to adolescents' tendency to exaggerate the importance, uniqueness, and severity of social and emotional experiences. Imaginary audience refers to, an adolescent perception of being on center stage, and the rest of the world is constantly scrutinizing their behavior and physical appearance. Personal fable refers to adolescents' tendency to think of themselves in heroic or mythical terms, which results in the exaggeration of their own abilities and invincibility (Dacey & Travers, 1996).

The educational process is affected by adolescent cognitive development through possibilities for abstract, creative, and divergent thinking skills. Those increases in ability should affect the teaching methods used in our schools with methods that include cooperative group projects, individual research, or thematic units.

Social /Emotional Development

Adolescent friendships reflect the realization of individual differences and understanding of others' needs. Both of these are aspects of social cognition. The socialization needs of the early adolescent shift from being family-centered to including the peer group. The adolescent values adults as resources and for guidance, although they often express rejection of adult standards. Clothing, musical tastes, real and imagined relationships with the opposite sex are all tested through the peer group (Messick & Reynolds, 1992; Beane & Lipka, 1987).

Dacey and Travers (1996) have suggested that societal lines in development have blurred, causing adolescent confusion in knowing when childhood and youth have ended and adulthood has begun. Peer relations are even more important today. Good or bad, peers provide a stability that adolescents need:

1. Peer groups provide adolescents with a source of social activities and support, and an easy entry into opposite-sex friendships.
2. The biological, psychological, cognitive, and social changes of adolescence affect the teenager's peer relationships.
3. Peer groups serve to control aggressive impulses, encourage independence, improve social skills, develop reasoning abilities, and form attitudes toward sexuality.
4. Peer groups also aid in the development of self-concept and allow an adolescent to try out a new identity (p. 351).

Identity is seen not as incorporating autonomy as much as it is seen as involving self-regulation; rather than needing to achieve separation and independence, adolescents are seen as needing to incorporate into their identities values and behaviors consistent with interdependence and commitment (Elias & Branden-Muller, 1994, p. 6).

Adolescent socialization should be considered in the educational process. Socialization is a prime concern of adolescents, so why not make use of that focus in the classroom? Current middle schools provide exploratory programs in civic and school services, giving youth an opportunity to participate in community activities and a chance to give of themselves to others. Group organizations within the middle school meet socialization and educational needs.

The mistaken adult idea that youth want to be independent and be their own person has probably done more to widen the generation gap than most misconceptions. We know that adolescents are dealing with a barrage of societal pressures to grow up and develop too quickly. Middle level education, with an understanding of adolescent growth in the physical, cognitive, and social/emotional arenas, provides an avenue for the development of healthy adolescents.

Organization of the Middle School

Organization is discussed in five areas important to the success of middle schooling: curriculum, interdisciplinary teaming, advisory program, student assessment, and teachers. Each intertwines to provide adolescents needed cognitive, affective, and psychomotor school experiences. Rethinking the middle level school involves work at three points of a triangle centering on the student:

1. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be redefined.
2. Organizational structure and issues such as grade configuration, grouping patterns, and the master schedule must be addressed.
3. Staffing issues such as who actually provides learning experiences and what skills teachers will require must be solved (White, 1993, p. 9).

Curriculum

Beane (1993), James (1994), and McDonough (1991) define effective middle level curriculum as the interaction of all experiences including instructional strategies, organizational arrangements, integrated curricular content, and cultural environment during the young adolescent's school day. A common complaint of adolescents concerning their school experiences would be they learn "stuff" that has no meaning or it has nothing to do with their lives. Arnold (1991) thought Dewey resolved the issue of meaning when he said, " The disciplines must coincide with student levels of understanding and frames of reference. It must be shown that the disciplines emerge from response to human questioning through using the same sensory apparatus and thought processes that students have or are developing." In other words, what is taught or explored should be determined by questions raised by adolescents concerning their physical, emotional, psychosocial, and intellectual realms.

In 1966, Donald Eichhorn suggested a two curricula model - the "analytical" curriculum which involves language, mathematics, social studies, and science; and the "physical cultural" involving fine arts, practical arts, cultural studies and physical education. In 1968, William Alexander sketched out the middle school curriculum into three categories: Personal development, skills for continued learning, and organized knowledge. Most middle school writers and researchers now envision the middle level curriculum in three components:

1. Core program consisting of subject areas in math, science, social studies, and language arts in block time.
2. Exploratory or electives consisting of the arts, health education, recreation, foreign languages, physical education, and service opportunities.
3. Advisory program including counseling, teacher advisor in a home-based situation, and development of values.

Conversations in middle schools aimed at opening possibilities for teachers and students are needed for collaboration in creating curriculum that is significant and makes

sense. An example of an element in curriculum which is significant is the use of interdisciplinary units. Interdisciplinary units are generally used by teachers of varying content areas working together to find common themes and then coordinating the teaching of related facts, concepts, and skills. There are many middle level specialists who think interdisciplinary units should move a step further and curriculum should revolve around themes that provide practice in life skills and involve local communities and their problems, rather than in separate grade levels or content areas (Elias & Branden-Muller, 1994).

Curriculum should be geared to the recognition that most young adolescents are in transition from concrete to abstract thinking, but are most comfortable with concrete thinking. To help in this transition, educators need (1) to use lots of manipulative materials, demonstrations, and making/doing activities; (2) to engage students in community service experiences; (3) to emphasize inquiry and problem solving; (4) to offer choices in content, method, time, and mode of presentation; and (5) to provide varying degrees of structure (Arnold ,1991).

Departmentalization is an issue that does not match with middle level organization and philosophy. Middle level curriculum organization deals with broad ranges in learning needs and levels which facilitate interdisciplinary learning. Departmentalized instruction separates learning within content areas and does not facilitate learning experiences within content areas (Toepfer, 1992). Research (Elias & Branden-Muller, 1994) has shown correlation between departmentalization and learning in grades five through eight to be lower than with self-contained or. integrated learning situations.

Along with interdisciplinary units, another important element in the organization of middle schools is interdisciplinary teaming, in which small groups of teachers, counselors, administrators, and students work together to provide valuable learning experiences for middle level students.

Interdisciplinary Teaming

Beane (1992) believes interdisciplinary teaming promotes two possibilities. It decreases anonymity and inconsistencies in school experiences for young adolescents and creates connections among subject areas, thus bringing a degree of unity to learning experiences. Erb and Doda (1989) define teaming or interdisciplinary team organization "as a way of organizing teachers and students into small communities for teaching and learning" (p. 7). Teams are generally comprised of two to five teachers who represent diverse subject areas, but who share a common planning period to prepare for the teaching of a common set of students (usually not over 125 students to a team). Components of teaming comprise of a common planning time, a common set of students, a common block of time for interdisciplinary teaching, and a common space.

Interdisciplinary planning and teaching can easily be implemented with teaming of teachers, counselors, and administrators. Adaptation to the academic, social, physical, and emotional needs of their particular group of students allows for flexibility in scheduling of time and content. Gutheinz-Pierce and Whoolery (1995) suggest that academically teaming students according to their needs provides movement within a team convenient without major changes in schedules. It also fosters development of important peer connections and social skills.

Middle level experts believe teaming should include student choices of themes, theme activities should be developed by the teachers and students, the schedule should be organized around the activities rather than subject areas, and students should be involved in their communities as part of their learning experience. But teaming will not occur without the existence of schools where the administrators, supervisors, and faculty want to share in the choice and responsibilities of schoolwide decisions (Beane, 1993; Schroth, Vaughan, Dunbar, & Seaborg, 1994; Capelluti & Brazee, 1992).

Research has shown that middle schools employing interdisciplinary teams have

reduced student isolation and anonymity, enhanced teacher sense of belonging and camaraderie between teachers as well as students, and increased teacher input into school-wide decisions (Carnegie Council, 1989; George & Oldaker, 1985; Erb & Doda, 1989; Lounsbury, 1992).

Advisory programs consisting of counselors, teachers, parents, administrators, and students are yet another step in the organization of the middle school. Advisory programs, using individual and group processes, serve as avenues for personal and social development among adolescents.

Advisory Program

The function of the advisory program is to promote educational, personal, and social development through the pursuance of issues important to the students. A compilation of elements in a successful advisement program by Ziegler & Mulhall (1994) and Ayres (1994) suggest:

1. A planning period of at least six months preceding implementation with an inservice program supported by staff with skills in team building and adolescent development.
2. Advisory group meetings scheduled on a daily basis.
3. Heterogeneous groups not exceeding twenty students.
4. A variety of activities.
5. Students remaining with the same advisors until graduation.
6. Careful monitoring, frequent evaluation, and updating.

Advisory activities include personal counseling with a teacher, counselor, or administrator; group advisory period or homeroom with one teacher; tutoring opportunities with peers or teachers; and social involvement with committees and gatherings. Epstein and MacIver (1990) state, "principals in schools with well-implemented advisory programs report that they have stronger overall guidance services and lower expected dropout rates" (p. 37). Advisory programs are especially important in providing middle school students encouragement and guidance in their social and

personal concerns. They allow for a nurturing environment of caring adults who advise and lead adolescents to healthy decisions.

Student Assessment

Assessment reveals student learning, but in the middle level organization, as well as other levels, the kinds of assessment have become an issue. Many educators in all levels believe standardized testing and standard classroom objective testing does not provide adequate evaluation of student learning. Authentic assessment evaluates the process of learning as well as the content and leads educators into further areas of curriculum development. Authentic assessment includes evaluation of group projects, reports, research papers, portfolios, demonstrations, products, journals, presentations, videotapes, letters, drawing, models, student-generated tests, and teacher observations. It has been found to be more valid in the understanding of student learning when combined with standard testing methods (Capelluti & Brazee, 1992; Stevenson & Carr, 1993; McDonough, 1991).

Since the establishment of a wholesome self-concept during the adolescent period is crucial, evaluation procedures should help students discover and understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, and personalities (NMSA, 1993). The idea of authentic assessment is probably the slowest "innovation" to generate through most middle schools. Community, parental, and political pressures require accountability through traditional testing procedures, even though research points out that authentic assessment determines a more thorough understanding of student learning.

Middle Level Teachers

The teacher must become a learning leader, the individual responsible for

coordinating and facilitating a variety of resources in the middle school (White, 1993).

In the examination of various qualities of teachers, the following was produced

describing characteristics of excellent middle school teachers:

1. Personal: a positive, secure, concept of self; flexibility; respect for the dignity and worth of the individual; the ability to interact constructively with teachers and students; and a commitment to the education of adolescents.
2. Understandings: they understand the nature of the adolescent learner, of the teaching-learning process, of research and evaluation involved in middle level schooling.
3. Instructional skills: they have ability in the areas of counseling, use of multi-media approaches, alternatives in instruction, techniques of teaching values, problem-solving and independent learning, teaching communication skills, and ability to work across disciplinary lines.

In other words, middle schools require teachers who are child-centered,

understand adolescent development, and are willing to work collaboratively for the good

of adolescent education. There is a call by middle level administrators to hire teachers

who are certified in middle level education. Many states have developed certification

procedures for the middle level, insuring the chance that competent teachers are placed

in their middle schools.

Summary

The middle school movement developed because of a greater understanding of

child development and learning which called for specialization in schooling. Young

adolescent educators, especially, saw that physical, cognitive, and social/emotional

attitudes followed adolescents into adulthood. Those attitudes, then, affected society as a

whole. For the last thirty years, a growth of middle level thinking has convinced

educators in six through eight grade level schools that restructuring in curriculum

organization, instructional strategies, staff understanding, and evaluation procedures

needed to be addressed.

We are losing our young people to society's ills: child abuse, drug abuse, violence, sexual immorality, and moral decay. Middle level educators believe they can help make a difference in adolescent development by meeting middle school students' cognitive, physical, and emotional/social needs. It is crucial to be mindful that the greater goal of middle schools is to help our students be the very best they can be and help them be prepared for challenges ahead. Society, educators, and parents, as well, benefit when our young people develop into the type of citizen needed for our future.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I feel as if it is a scale,
Tipped violently by God,
Swinging back and forth:

Or a pendulum that knows no bounds,
Governing my life with its mountains and valleys;
It is orderly anarchy that rules.

I wonder sometimes,
If I judge myself too harshly:
What answer is there ever, what honest response? . . .
(Murphy, J. 1989. Cited in Turning Points:
Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, 1989, p. 23)

Middle level schools have emerged to meet adolescent developmental needs, thus

providing a climate conducive to productive growth into an adult world. The methods

and subjects of this study have been chosen to compare the perceptions of faculty and

students in three middle schools concerning characteristics of their programs to criteria

established by the NMSA as indicative of excellent middle schools. Three inquiry

elements suggested by Patton (1990) paradigm orientation, techniques and methods, and

researcher qualifications will describe this study design.

Paradigm Orientation

A qualitative or, more specifically, a case study approach was chosen for the

study because this method can create a more holistic picture of the middle school setting.

Patton (1990) states, "qualitative designs are naturalistic in that the researcher does not

attempt to manipulate the research setting. The point of using qualitative methods is to understand naturally occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states" (p. 39). The purpose of this study is to compare perceptions of faculty and students in middle schools concerning characteristics of their programs to criteria established by the NMSA.

Erickson (1986) says field work is an appropriate method if a research issue involves the consideration of participant perceptions. Field work addresses the questions "What is happening here, specifically?" and "What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" Interviews, observations, and document analysis help examine points of view by administrators, counselors, teachers, and students in this study. Their points of view will be compared to the NMSA criteria for excellent middle schools:

1. Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents.
2. A balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents.
3. A range of organizational arrangements.
4. Varied instructional strategies.
5. A full exploratory program.
6. Comprehensive advising and counseling.
7. Continuous progress for students.
8. Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescents.
9. Cooperative planning.
10. Positive school climate (NMSA, 1993).

Techniques and Methods

Techniques and methods used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings are discussed with purposeful samplings of site selection, participants, data collection, and data analysis. Patton (1990) states that the power of purposeful sampling is in the selection of information-rich cases that can deal with the central issues and questions of a study. Sites were selected according to local and national reputation for excellence, participants were selected by recommendations and willingness to participate, and data collection was in the form of observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Site Selection

A meeting with an assistant superintendent to explain the study and permission to conduct the study was granted from an Oklahoma suburban school district consisting of approximately 16,000 students. Three of their middle schools were chosen because of local reputation and national recognition of excellence through the Blue Ribbon Award sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. After the schools were selected, National Middle School Association criteria for middle school excellence was then used as a basis for comparison. The following criteria explain characteristics of Blue Ribbon Award winning schools:

1. Furthering the intellectual, social, physical, and moral growth of their students.
2. A solid foundation of skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as reasoning and problem solving.
3. High-quality instruction appropriate to age and ability in literature, history, geography, science, the arts, and foreign languages.
4. Evidence that school policies, programs, and practices foster the development of sound character, a sense of self-worth, democratic values, ethical judgment, and self-discipline.
5. Strong leadership and effective working relationships among the school, parents, agencies serving children and families, and others in the community.
6. An atmosphere that is safe, orderly, purposeful, and conducive to learning and character development.
7. Ensuring challenging curriculum and high-quality instruction and the professionalism of its teachers.
8. A strong commitment to educational excellence for all students and an outstanding record of progress in sustaining the school's best features and solving its problems (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Participants

Administrators, counselors, teachers, and students involved in the three middle schools were observed and interviewed to develop an understanding of their particular programs. Patton (1990) says qualitative sampling typically focuses on relatively small

samples purposefully chosen because they are considered information rich. Participants in each of the three schools were chosen by recommendations and willingness to participate. Seventy student consent letters were sent to parents and thirty-seven were returned to determine numbers in each focus group. A total of two male principals and one female principal; three female counselors; twenty-seven female teachers and two male teachers; and seventeen female students and twenty male students were interviewed and observed during a four week period.

<u>Data Collection</u>

Yin (1994) states that triangulation or the use of multiple sources of evidence allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues. With the use of multiple sources in a qualitative study, the evidence is often considered more compelling, which in turn, raises validity and reliability of the study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that research trustworthiness is judged through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The issue of credibility was addressed in this study by the use of triangulation which involves observations, individual and focus group interviews, and documentation analysis. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that member checks be conducted periodically throughout the study. Member checks involved the participants in the review of data. Principals, counselors, teachers, and students gave permission for interviews to be taped and often participants were asked to clarify explanations in their interviews. In determining transferability of the findings (Erickson, 1986), readers of the study take comparative perspectives and draw conclusions based on their own circumstances.

Dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative research. Since the instrument in qualitative research is the researcher, dependability relies on the study design conducted by the researcher. The schools and participants were observed in their

natural settings first; then interviews were conducted. Documents of policies, schedules, statements of missions and goals, and newsletters or booklets to parents and students were obtained to backup participant information.

Another source of dependability is a field journal. A field journal was kept to record experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arose during field work. The field journal, tape recordings of interviews and observations, and documents were the source for determining dependability in this study.

Observations. Data from observations consist of descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and organizational processes (Patton, 1990). Observations in each middle school were conducted in order to provide a context for, and give depth to, the interviews. Observations in this study were tape recorded by the researcher and then transcribed.

Interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with the principals and counselors from each school and group interviews were conducted with the teachers. All participants allowed a tape recorder to be used with each interview session; then the interviews were transcribed. In order to determine perceptions of the participants, data was drawn from the interviews concerning experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge.

Focus group interviews. Patton (1990) defines focus group interviews as open-ended interviews with homogeneous groups on specially targeted issues. The middle school students in the study were interviewed through focus groups. Their feelings and attitudes on their middle school experiences were explored.

Document analysis. Principals, counselors, and teachers from each middle school were asked for documentation concerning their organizations and curriculum. Documents gathered were time schedules, class schedules, teacher communications to parents, Blue Ribbon applications, mission statements and goals, and team meeting agendas.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a confirmability audit conducted by a third party to determined whether the findings were grounded in the data and whether the conclusions drawn from the data were logical. The dissertation committee served as the third party.

Data Analysis

Yin (1994) says that the data analysis in a qualitative study consists of examining, categorizing, and tabulating the evidence in order to address propositions of a study. The ultimate goal in case study analysis is to treat the evidence fairly, to produce analytic conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations. Data in this study was analyzed in a descriptive framework by placing evidence into predetermined categories of NMSA characteristics of excellent middle schools. Perceptions and attitudes of participants, observations, and documentation in each middle school were organized by cases A, B, and C. The following categories were used to describe the schools: demographics, participants, building and grounds, school climate, educators, curriculum, organizational arrangements, instructional strategies, exploratory programs, advisement and counseling, continuous progress, evaluation procedures, and cooperative planning.

Research Qualifications

My baccalaureate collegiate preparation started with a sociology major and psychology minor. A few years later, I earned elementary certification. The next seventeen years of teaching experience were in the third, fourth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. My M.Ed. was earned in Educational Administration and I served as an elementary/middle school principal and superintendent before starting my doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University. Some of the things that qualify me are the qualitative studies in my doctoral coursework and experiences in

early adolescent education as a supervisor, teacher, and observer/evaluator of teachers, students, and programs.

Summary

Integrity, validity, and accuracy of the study were discussed with purposeful samplings of site selection, participants, data collection, and data analysis. The qualitative methods of this study design are appropriate because the descriptions of the organization and perceptions of three middle schools in a suburban community and their characteristics compared to National Middle School Association elements of excellent middle schools answer the questions, "What is happening here?" and "What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" The methods involve a triangulation of observations, individual and group interviews, document analysis, and focus group interviews of middle school principals, counselors, teachers, and students.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

I also wonder many times,
If I am hypocritical,
If I should perhaps leap from a bridge somewhere over
some nameless river . . .

Is there an answer anywhere?
None to be found, it seems:
I am in a quandary:

A dilemma which I cannot escape.
There is always a cloud on the horizon,
Or a patch of blue;

But now I am lost,
For I cannot even see the horizon.
Would that I had eyes that saw! . . .
(Murphy, J. 1989. Cited in Turning Points:
Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, 1989, p. 23)

The three middle schools in this study were chosen because of the reception of a

national educational award for Blue Ribbon Schools and having a good reputation locally

in the Oklahoma City area. The Blue Ribbon award recognized outstanding schools

throughout the nation based on criteria developed by the U.S. Department of Education.

The Blue Ribbon award was only a means of selecting middle schools for the study, not

as a criterion process. After the schools were selected for this study, participant

perceptions were then compared to criteria of excellent middle schools developed by the

National Middle School Association.

The findings in this study are organized by cases A, B, and C. Demographics of each school are presented first; then the ten NMSA criteria are used as categories to further describe observations (see Appendix A), interviews (see Appendix B), and documentation (see Appendix C) from the three middle schools. For the outline of criteria, I chose to regroup the criteria in like categories and add introductory information instead of the listing provided by NMSA. An outline of each case is as follows: demographics, participants in study, building and grounds, school climate, educators, curriculum, organizational arrangements, instructional strategies, exploratory program, advisement and counseling, continuous progress, evaluation procedures, and cooperative planning.

School A

Mission Statement: "Success lies not in being
the best, but in doing your best. Our mission is to help
each person realize his or her full potential."

Demographics

School A is located in a rapidly expanding suburban community of 70,000 inhabitants. Even though the majority of community citizens are middle class professionals, there are other socioeconomic variations in the community. The school district serves approximately 16,000 students. School A is the largest of the three middle schools in the study serving 1175 students, ages ten to fifteen, in a three grade configuration -- sixth (400 students), seventh (385 students), and eighth (390 students). According to the school secretary, the ethnic composition reflects a Caucasian majority (92%) with 8% comprised of Native American, Asian, African American, and Hispanic.

Approximately 12% of the students qualify for assistance through a free and reduced

lunch program. The staff is comprised of a head principal, an assistant principal, 3

counselors, 39 core classroom teachers (15 sixth grade teachers in three teams, 12

seventh grade teachers in three teams, and 12 eighth grade teachers in three teams), 10

special resource teachers, 10 paraprofessionals, 4 visual arts teachers, 6 communication

arts teachers, 3 instrumental music teachers, 2 performing arts teachers, 3 physical arts

teachers, 1 library/media professional, and 20 support staff.

Participants

There were 25 participants in School A. One white male principal, with 17 years

school experience (7 years in School A) and one white female 7th grade counselor, with

15 years school experience (5 years in School A) were interviewed individually. After

parental consent, one student focus group consisting of three white females and one

white male (11 years of age), and four white females and three white males (12 years of

age) were interviewed as a group. One sixth grade team and one eighth grade team of

teachers were interviewed in separate groups.

Team configurations in School A consist of five core teachers, the grade level

counselor, a principal, and one or two resource teachers. Two teams of teachers from

school A were interviewed. Team One consisted of five sixth grade teachers, two

resource teachers, one assistant principal, and one counselor - all white females. During

the interview, it was found their school experiences ranged from 2 to 22 years. Team

Two consisted of four eighth grade teachers, one assistant principal, one counselor, and

one special resource teacher - all white females. The teachers stated their school

experiences during the interview and it was found those experiences ranged from 2 years

to 23 years. Rarely do teams change personnel from year to year unless problems arise between team members.

Building and Grounds

School A is positioned on a major thoroughfare with a shopping center on one side and eating establishments on the other side. The facility consists of one large building (built in 1986), and seven portable classrooms on approximately two acres. The main building, a multi-level structure with wide hallways, windows, skylights, and large conversation areas, has sixty classrooms arranged in pods. Visual arts rooms; a music wing; a stage opening to both the cafeteria and drama room; a competition gymnasium; athletic facilities and fields; a glass enclosed centrally located media center; and an office area housing visitor waiting, conference room, work room, staff lunch room, offices, and nursing comprise specific areas in the main building.

School Climate

School A portrayed a warm and inviting atmosphere through staff attitudes, classroom and hall decorations, and cleanliness of the facility showing staff and student respect for their school. The principal, counselor, teachers, and students observed and interviewed were open and friendly, making visits to School A very pleasant.

The principal stated, "We have an open door policy and welcome anybody into our school. We realize we are going to be a better school when we have parents and visitors in the building (students are better behaved)." Parental involvement is high in all school activities including tutoring, the volunteer program, and PTA (Parent-Teacher Association). The principal also stated that it is not uncommon to see an average of two or three visitors everyday wandering around their facilities.

Educators

The National Middle School Association believes a special type of educator is required to implement middle school curriculum. Number one on their list of educator characteristics is a genuine desire to teach young adolescents with a thorough understanding of human growth and development of 10 - 14 year olds (NMSA, 1992).

School A demonstrated a high rate of knowledge and commitment to young adolescents among the administrators, counselors, and teachers. Observations and interviews highlighted incidents throughout the school focusing on student needs and interests. In classroom observations, teachers demonstrated their concern and understanding of their students through individualized tutoring and teaching strategies such as cooperative learning. Team meetings are centered on student concerns. A sixth grade teacher stated, "We as a team can pool our knowledge of the students and jointly take responsibility for meeting their instructional needs. . ." Another teacher on the same sixth grade team said, "The students would like us to know how they feel about various issues; they want us to respect and appreciate their ideas; and they want us to know what their interests are." A teacher on an eighth grade team stated about her students, " . . . They just want to ventilate. They just want us to listen."

Counselors exert extra effort to get to know all of their "charges": The seventh grade counselor stated, "We have ways to recognize students for their accomplishments and reward students as Student of the Month. We try to honor our students. Everyone is a star in middle school . . . We try to get into all the classrooms as much as we can."

The principal tries to hire teachers in School A that would easily fit into the middle school concept: "I hire teachers who are able to teach more than one preparation and that usually means a teacher with elementary certification. We are more student-centered than Junior High."

The student focus group in School A listed characteristics of teachers they liked:

"Teachers give more information about something than what is in a book."

"Teachers give you a chance to redo tests."

"Teachers teach responsibility for getting work in."

"Teachers that let you do more hands-on projects."

"Teachers who spend extra time to help students understand their

subjects."

"Teachers who are courteous and care about others feelings."

Curriculum

A true middle school curriculum is based largely on student needs. The balance

of student needs, instructional processes, and academic necessities makes the middle

school curriculum unique (NMSA, 1992).

School A's curriculum is outlined and defined by the Priority Student Academic

Skills (P.A.S.S.), mandated by the state of Oklahoma. Educators in School A feel they

meet PASS easily and still provide a full curriculum that meets adolescent needs. The

head principal provided a curriculum schedule for each grade in school A. Each grade

followed basically the same curriculum and offered core courses in language arts, math,

science, and social studies with exploratory experiences in visual arts, musical arts,

communication arts, physical education, community service, enrichment, foreign

languages, and home arts. Special education students are mainstreamed with extra

support involving learning disabilities, mentally challenged, emotionally disturbed,

physical therapy, speech therapy, and enrichment for the gifted.

A tutoring program or TOPS reaches students needing extra help. Teachers are

available an hour everyday for tutoring and thirty minutes is set aside for homeroom or

homebase in which they meet with 20 to 30 students each day to further meet particular needs. Every three weeks, Saturday school is provided by "invitation only".

The student focus group in School A had some suggestions for a better curriculum:

"More communication skills like sign language."

"Different types of languages other than Spanish and French."

Organizational Arrangements

What we know about 10 - 14 year olds and the learning process is incompatible with departmentalized, ability-group, seven period days. Block scheduling, multi-age grouping, developmental age grouping, alternative schedules, and other ways of organizing for instruction belong in the middle school (NMSA, 1992).

The organizational arrangement in School A is highly structured. Core subjects and elective classes are set up on schedules of seven periods, forty-five minutes each. The following is an example schedule for the entire school.

8:00 - 8:50	First Hour
8:55 - 9:45	Second Hour
9:50 - 10:40	Elective/TOPS
10:45 - 11:35	Planning
11:40 - 12:05	Homebase
12:10 - 12:40	Lunch
12:45 - 1:35	Sixth Hour
1:40 - 2:30	Seventh Hour

Six lunch periods are scheduled to handle the 1175 students and that means the teams have varying schedules to accommodate those lunch periods. The periods that are set aside for electives (Elect.) are also times that TOPS occurs. Students have a choice whether to go to their elective or go to tutoring. The planning periods for the teachers are also used as elective time for the students. Each team schedule includes a special

education teacher, also. Homebase (HB) usually lasts 30 minutes for each and is used for daily opportunities for interaction with 20 students including such activities as: community service, school service, reading trade books, discussion of topics, holiday activities, competitions, mini-courses, study time, team assemblies, and playing games.

Documentation and observations confirm that scheduling in School A is not compatible to the National Middle School Association beliefs regarding block scheduling, multi-age groupings, developmental age groupings, and alternative scheduling. Interviews indicate otherwise, however. Teachers in School A believe they have freedom to adjust individual team schedules and core content to fit student and teacher needs. A teacher on the sixth grade team said, "Sometimes we have guest speakers and it's necessary to adjust our schedule to accommodate the situation. One has to be flexible in order to gain the best possible learning situations for our students." Another teacher on the same team added, "We adjust to implement interdisciplinary units, also." A teacher in the eighth grade team stated, "Each team is pretty autonomous. If they want to schedule something among themselves, they can do what they want."

The only thing that came out of the student focus group on organizational arrangements was a comment made by one boy, "We should start school later and end it earlier." The students did not have any complaints as to grade configurations, groupings, or scheduling, except for the comment on time.

Instructional Strategies

Adolescent achievement, readiness, and skill levels vary and adolescents are curious, creative, and like to experiment. Instructional strategies which take advantage of these traits, such as committee work, simulation, and independent study, are more effective in the middle school setting (NMSA, 1992).

The teachers in School A reported the use of whole group instruction, cooperative group work, computer instruction, and individualized instruction to meet academic needs of their students, but whole group instruction was the only method observed. Individualized instruction was basically used during tutoring periods. Most of the teachers observed used modeling, lecturing, and class discussions to present material to their students. Some teachers, especially in the sixth grade, were a little more innovative and used centers, project work, and demonstrations in their classrooms. Computer use was delegated to the library and computer classes were offered through electives. One student in the focus group said, "We like teachers who use hands-on methods in their teaching." The school, as a whole, regularly brings in outside sources and guest speakers for their students.

Exploratory Program

The rapid physical, social, and intellectual development which occurs during adolescent years requires the inclusion of brief but intense interest-based activities. Mini-courses, exploratory courses, service clubs, special interest activities, and independent study projects are a means to meet adolescent needs (NMSA, 1992).

School A refers to their exploratory program as "the electives". Two periods are set aside for the offering of electives for students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Mini-courses or short-term activities such as self-esteem units, study skills, community service projects, discussion of contemporary topics relevant to their school or community, career studies, or holiday activities are usually the responsibility of homebase teachers. Long-term classes (yearly or by the semester) are offered by elective teachers who provide classes in art, creative writing, orchestra, vocal music, band, speech-drama, computers, French I & II, Spanish I & II, and physical education. The

counselors provide opportunities for students to participate in service clubs that work closely with hospitals and nursing homes in the community.

The principal commented that he wished School A could offer more courses to students, but the teachers felt strongly that elective offerings were varied and met student needs. Comments made by the sixth grade team included, "Electives provide the middle school student with a variety of opportunities that allows exploration of interests in many areas. I think you need variety and the electives provide the kids with some fun things where they don't have as much stress as they would in the core classes. They contribute to the total child and the total child needs to be addressed in the middle school." Two students in the student focus group suggested the school add more foreign languages (other than French and Spanish) and sign language to the electives. Other students noted that they had plenty of choices.

Advisement and Counseling

Advisement and counseling in the middle school are important because of adolescent concerns over body development, social acceptance, adult norms, and new ideas and beliefs. The NMSA advises that an adult be available to each student who has a special responsibility for that student's academic and personal welfare (NMSA, 1992).

School A has a counselor assigned to each grade level, usually one counselor to 400 students. As students move from grade to grade, the counselors also move up with the students they started with in sixth grade. Depending on grade levels, each counselor has differing duties; scheduling, enrollment, guidance (individual and group), service club sponsor, testing coordinator, student activities coordinator, administrative assistant, or helping in the transition of students to other grade levels. The principal stated, "Counselors are a part of our administrative team that give a balance. They bring in a

perspective that administrators tend to miss, such as optimism." Frustration was noted

when the seventh grade counselor said, "My major duties are scheduling and enrollment.

We try to get into the classrooms as much as we can, but when you have four team

meetings a week and visitations with parents, there is not much time."

Each core teacher is responsible for 20 to 30 students (homebase) in which they

meet daily for 30 minutes. Activities mentioned in homebase were community service,

school service, reading trade books, discussion of topics, holiday activities, competitions,

mini-courses, study time, and team assemblies. (One teacher teaches her students cross-

stitching) A teacher on a six grade team noted, "Homebase makes every effort to provide

a time of belonging." A teacher on a eighth grade team said, " The kids need this time.

Sometimes the kids prefer to choose what goes on in homebase."

Continuous Progress

Growth irregularities are common during the adolescent period. Students should

be encouraged to progress at their own rates of learning. Middle school expectations

must be responsive to individual stages of readiness during periods of growth, plateau,

and regression (NMSA, 1992).

Teaching teams in School A are able to stay on top of student problems through

their weekly meetings. Counselors, special resource teachers, and core teachers work

together to solve individual student concerns before they become a greater problem, or

worse, not noticed. Examples of programs in School A that provide for adolescent

progress include TOPS or a tutoring program that provides special help for students with

academic problems in one-on-one situations; Saturday School every three weeks to help

those who need to "catch-up"; the homebase serves as a family unit with a caring adult

who can quickly relay observations to other teachers on the team; individual counseling

by counselors who can also relay student concerns to team teachers during team meetings; enrichment classes for accelerated students; and special education classes for students with special needs. A teacher in a sixth grade team stated, "By joining ideas you are better able to serve the student." Another teacher on the sixth grade team added, "We sometimes have to become aware of students who abuse the TOPS time because they are craving extra attention." The student focus group want their teachers to know, "We get nervous about homework and need help." and "Teachers need to spend more personal time with each student."

Evaluation Procedures

Evaluation, marking, and reporting procedures should help students discover and understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, and personalities. Evaluation procedures should minimize comparisons among students (NMSA, 1992).

School A requires at least two parent-teacher conferences a year and teams must stay in contact with parents throughout the year. Conferences include parents, administrator, counselor, and team teachers, but students are rarely invited. Some teams have developed information booklets for students and parents to help in the transition to a different grade level and format. Weekly or monthly newsletters are also sent home informing parents of events in classes and school. A sixth grade team provided their student handbook for document analysis.

School A administers a standardized achievement test (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) to the eighth grade each year for determination of strengths and weaknesses and the test is used as a comparison of their students with other eighth graders in the district. With parent permission, specialized individual tests are given to some students for diagnostic purposes. When the teachers were asked to describe the kinds of evaluation used in their

classrooms, most reported in order: daily assignments, traditional paper-pencil tests, participation, portfolios, and performanced based (oral reports, written reports, projects, and demonstrations) assessment checklists and rating scales. A teacher in a sixth grade team stated, "Students that have varied learning styles need varied evaluation procedures." The student focus group unanimously announced, " We want less homework and tests!"

<u>Cooperative Planning</u>

"Cooperative school-wide planning that involves faculty, administration, and specialists is an essential ingredient in responsive middle schools." Adolescents need to be involved in classroom planning: selecting objectives, content, learning activities, and outcome evaluation (NMSA, 1992).

School A is committed and active in teaming. As the principal stated, " We team everything; administrative teams, counselor teams, elective teacher teams, support staff teams, and teaching teams." Each team chooses a name appropriate to the theme for that year and bases their activities and decorations around that team name and theme.

Teaching teams consist of one administrator, one counselor, one or two special resource teachers, and four or five core teachers who meet formally once a week to discuss topics that include interdisciplinary unit planning, team or school events, newsletter information, counselor concerns, administrator announcements/concerns, specialist concerns, teacher concerns, parent conferences, and tutoring concerns. Informal meetings including only the teachers usually occur two or three times a week for the planning of units or activities. One teacher on a sixth grade team defined teaming as, "An instructional organization in which teachers can pool their knowledge of students and jointly take responsibility for meeting the instructional needs of the same group of

students." Another teacher on the same team stated, "Teaming provides the opportunity to share ideas, plans, student information, and classroom observations."

A special education teacher on an eighth grade team said, "Teaming helps me in my job to keep up in weekly progress reports of my students." A teacher on the eighth grade team added, "I enjoy teaming because it makes a big school small."

School B

Mission Statement: "Our mission is to
provide a cooperative climate for learning."

Demographics

School B is located in a rapidly expanding suburban community of 70,000 inhabitants. Even though the majority of community citizens are middle class professionals, there are other socioeconomic variations in the community. The school district serves approximately 16,000 students. School B serves 802 students, ages ten to fifteen, in a three grade configuration -- sixth (262 students), seventh (275 students), and eighth (265 students). The ethnic composition reflects a Caucasian majority (90%) with 10% comprised of Native American, Asian, African American, and Hispanic. According to the school secretary, approximately 15% of the students qualify for assistance through a free and reduced lunch program. The staff is comprised of a head principal, an assistant principal, 3 counselors, 32 core classroom teachers (11 sixth grade teachers in two teams, 11 seventh grade teachers in two teams, and 10 eighth grade teachers in two teams), 2 special resource teachers, 5 paraprofessionals, 1 visual arts

teacher, 5 communication arts teachers, 3 instrumental music teachers, 1 vocal music teacher, 1 performing arts teacher, 3 physical education teachers, 1 home art teacher, 1 library/media professional, and 15 support staff.

Participants

School B had 24 participants: one white male principal, with 12 years school experience (3 years in School B) and one white female 8th grade counselor, with 9 years school experience (3 years in School B) were interviewed individually. After parental consent, one student focus group consisting of one white female and one white male (13 years of age), three white females and two white males (14 years of age), and one female Asian (15 years of age) were interviewed as a group. One seventh grade team and one eighth grade team of teachers were interviewed in separate groups.

Configuration of teams in School B usually consist of five or six core teachers, the grade level counselor, a principal, and one resource teacher. Two teams of teachers from School B were interviewed. Team One members interviewed were four white female seventh grade core teachers and one white female counselor. The teachers stated their school experiences during the interview and it was found those experiences ranged from 20 years to 25 years. Team Two members interviewed were five white females and one white male eighth grade core teachers, one white female special resource teacher, one white female counselor, and one white male principal. During the interview, it was found their school experiences ranged from 6 years to 23 years. Teams do not change personnel from year to year unless problems arise among team members.

Building and Grounds

School B is positioned in a residential area surrounded by trees. The facility

consists of one large building (built in 1989) on approximately four acres. The building

is a single floor, multi-level structure with an open area in the center housing the library,

office, cafeteria, and music rooms. School B was designed as a junior high originally, so

the forty classrooms are not in pods but on first and second floors organized in hallways.

The teams are able to stay together in adjoining rooms along specific grade level

hallways. The office area comprises of visitor waiting, conference room, work room,

staff lounge, offices, and nursing. Other parts of the facility include a competition

gymnasium, athletic facilities, and fields. One notable feature of the whole structure is

the lack of windows and unpainted cement walls.

School Climate

Few visitors and parent volunteers were observed in School B. A feeling of

welcome and warmth was not portrayed, mainly because of office staff and windowless,

unpainted cement walls. First impressions were softened after meeting the friendly head

principal, eighth grade counselor, and two teams of teachers. Students and teachers tried

to soften the stark feeling of cement walls with team decorations and examples of

projects in the hallways.

Educators

The National Middle School Association believes a special type of educator is

required to implement middle school curriculum. Number one on their list of educator

characteristics is a genuine desire to teach adolescents with a thorough understanding of

human growth and development of 10 - 14 year olds (NMSA, 1992).

School B started out as junior high, but after two years changed to the middle school format. Those participants who were interviewed and observed demonstrated a high rate of knowledge and commitment to adolescents. Observations, interviews, and documentation indicated faculty awareness of adolescent concerns and needs. In classroom observations, teachers demonstrated their concern and understanding of their students through individualized tutoring and teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and integrated studies.

Team meetings are centered on student concerns. A teacher on the eighth grade team stated, "We as a team coordinate and work together. This closeness helps to understand our children better." Another teacher on the eighth grade team added, "We teach kids, not subjects." A teacher on the seventh grade team stated, "Our students are individuals and are maturing at their own rates. They have pressures from peers." Another teacher on the seventh grade team added, "We have consistent expectations for the students which makes it easier on the students and the parents."

The eighth grade counselor stressed the importance of getting to know as many students as possible, "I enjoy getting into the classrooms and try to do whole class guidance activities once a month. I try to tie my activities in with the homebase topic. . . . Getting into the classrooms helps the kids to get to know me well enough that they feel like they can come to me . . ."

The head principal quoted many sources for his knowledge on middle schools such as *Turning Points* . . . by the Carnegie Council and *This We Believe* by the National Middle School Association. He also produced their school goals for the 1994-1995 school year: (1) A coordinated plan to add computer and technology to our school to ensure access to every teacher and student along with appropriate in-service training, (2) The media center should be a district funding priority to meet state requirements, (3) Use more internal resources (teachers) to share experiences within disciplines, (4) Teachers need to take more responsibility for problems that can be handled in the classroom so

that administrators can act quickly on serious situations, (5) Allow time to plan inter-disciplinary units during in-service days with input from elective teachers, (6) Teachers need updated lists of parent committees and resource people(s) available to them, (7) Reschedule homebase for the first period of the day and include all school faculty and administrators, (8) Each team and activity sponsor should attempt to submit articles for publication in the local newspaper, (9) Students will demonstrate knowledge of Service Learning by defining, identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating the programs, and (10) By spring of 1995, at least one new student activity should be offered.

The principal's enthusiasm toward the middle school format was contagious. School B's teachers, as a whole, exemplified the same commitment. He did mention the transition from School B's junior high orientation to the middle school format, "Many of our teachers have adjusted very well to the new format; those who couldn't moved to other schools."

The student focus group in School B listed characteristics of teachers they liked:

"Teachers who know how we think."

"Teachers who make learning fun such as hands-on learning and applying what we learn to our life."

Curriculum

A true middle school curriculum is based largely on student needs. The balance of student needs, instructional processes, and academic necessities makes the middle school curriculum unique (NMSA, 1992).

School B's curriculum is outlined and defined by the Priority Student Academic Skills (P.A.S.S.), mandated by the state of Oklahoma. Educators at School B feel they meet PASS easily and still provide a full curriculum that meets adolescent needs. The head principal provided a curriculum schedule indicating core courses in language arts,

math, science, and social studies with exploratory experiences in visual arts, music arts, communication arts, physical education, community service, enrichment, foreign languages, and home arts. Special education students are mainstreamed with extra support involving learning disabilities, mentally challenged, emotionally disturbed, physical therapy, speech therapy, and enrichment for the gifted.

A tutoring program or TOPS reaches students needing extra help. Teachers are available forty minutes everyday for tutoring and twenty minutes is set aside for homeroom or homebase in which they meet with 15 to 20 students each day to further meet particular needs. Every three weeks, Saturday school is provided by "invitation only".

Organizational Arrangements

What we know about 10 - 14 year olds and the learning process is incompatible with departmentalized, ability-grouped, seven period days. Block scheduling, multi-age grouping, developmental age grouping, alternative schedules, and other ways of organizing for instruction belong in the middle school (NMSA, 1992).

The organizational arrangement in School B is highly structured. Core subjects and elective classes are set up on schedules of seven periods, forty-five minutes each. The following schedule for an eighth team is an example of scheduling for the entire school.

8:00	- 8:50	Elective/Planning
8:55	- 9:45	Elective/TOPS
9:50	- 10:45	Third Hour
10:50	- 11:10	Homebase
11:10	- 12:05	Fourth Hour
12:10	- 12:40	Lunch
12:45	- 1:35	Fifth Hour
1:40	- 2:30	Sixth Hour

Periods that are set aside for electives are also times that team meetings, teacher planning, and TOPS occur. Students have a choice whether to go to their elective or go to tutoring. Homebase usually lasts 20 minutes and is used for daily opportunities for interaction with 15 to 20 students including such activities as: community service, school service, reading trade books, discussion of topics, holiday activities, competitions, mini-courses, study time, team assemblies, and playing games.

Documentation and observations confirm that School B does not conform to National Middle School Association beliefs relating to block scheduling, multi-age groupings, developmental age groupings, and alternative scheduling. Interviews suggest otherwise, however: The principal stated, "It is easier to schedule classes for flexibility in the middle school setting." Teachers in School B believe they have freedom to adjust individual team schedules to fit student and teacher needs. A teacher on the eighth grade team stated, " We have the flexibility to change our schedules to fit needs or special events or testing." A teacher on the seventh grade team commented, "In previous years, we have done block scheduling; it is modified now and we have a great deal of flexibility within our teams for schedule adjustments." Comments made in the student focus group included, "We should start later in the day." and "We should have longer days and take off on Fridays."

Instructional Strategies

Adolescent achievement, readiness, and skill levels vary and adolescents are curious, creative, and like to experiment. Instructional strategies which take advantage of these traits, such as committee work, simulation, and independent study, are more effective in the middle school setting (NMSA, 1992).

The teachers in School B use whole group instruction, cooperative group work, computer instruction, and individualized instruction to meet academic needs of their students, but whole group instruction seems to be the dominate method observed. Individualized instruction was basically used during tutoring periods. Most of the observed teachers used modeling, lecturing, and class discussion to present material to their students. Some teams were conscious that integrated unit instruction was important, but it was used sparingly. Computer use was delegated to the library and computer classes were offered through electives.

A student in the student focus group stated, "We like teachers who use hands-on methods in their teaching." Another student added, "Some teachers make learning apply to our lives."

Exploratory Program

The rapid physical, social, and intellectual development which occurs during adolescent years requires the inclusion of brief but intense interest-based activities. Mini-courses, exploratory courses, service clubs, special interest activities, and independent study projects are a means to meet adolescent needs (NMSA, 1992).

School B refers to their exploratory program as "the electives". Two periods are set aside for the offering of electives for students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Mini-courses or short-term activities such as self-esteem units, study skills, community service projects, discussion of contemporary topics relevant to their school or community, career studies, or holiday activities are usually the responsibility of homebase teachers. Long-term classes (yearly or by the semester) are offered by elective teachers who provide classes in art, creative writing, orchestra, vocal music, band,

speech-drama, computers, French I & II, Spanish I & II, home economics, and physical education.

The principal, counselor, and teachers during their interviews indicated their satisfaction of the kinds of electives offered to their students. One teacher on the seventh grade team mentioned, "Sometimes conflict occurs between the core and elective teachers when schedules have to be adjusted, but it doesn't happen often." Two students in the focus group said, "We want Drivers Education and Engineering added to the list of electives". The other six students did not have any suggestions.

Advisement and Counseling

Advisement and counseling in the middle school is important because of adolescent concerns over body development, social acceptance, adult norms, and new ideas and beliefs. The National Middle School Association advises that an adult be available to each student who has a special responsibility for that student's academic and personal welfare (NMSA, 1992).

School B has a counselor assigned to each grade level, usually one counselor for every 200 students. As students move from grade to grade, the counselors also move up with the students they started with in sixth grade. Depending on grade levels, each counselor has differing duties; scheduling, enrollment, guidance (individual and group), testing coordinator, student activities coordinator, administrative assistant, or helping in the transition of students to other grade levels. The eighth grade counselor said, "Most of my time is shuffling papers and attending team meetings four days a week. . . I would like to get into the classrooms more."

Each core teacher is responsible for 15 to 20 students (homebase) in which they meet daily for 20 minutes. Activities mentioned in homebase were community service,

school service, reading trade books, discussion of topics, holiday activities, competitions, mini-courses, study time, and team assemblies. Each teacher had an opportunity to know these students well and when occasions arose, they could relate to the other team teachers problems they may need to be aware of.

Continuous Progress

Growth irregularities - physical, emotional/social, and intellectual - are common during the adolescent period. Students should be encouraged to progress at their own rate of learning. Middle school expectations must be responsive to individual stages of readiness during periods of growth, plateau, and regression (NMSA, 1992).

Teaching teams in School B are able to stay on top of student problems through their weekly meetings. Counselors, special resource teachers, and core teachers work together to solve individual student concerns before they become a greater problem, or worse, not noticed. Examples of programs in School B that provide for adolescent progress include TOPS or a tutoring program that provides special help for students with academic problems in one-on-one situations; Saturday School every three weeks to help those who need to "catch-up"; homebase serves as a family unit with a caring adult who can quickly relay observations to other teachers on the team; individual counseling by counselors who can also relay student concerns to team teachers during team meetings; enrichment classes for accelerated students; and special education classes for students with special needs. The student focus group wanted their teachers to know, "We make mistakes but we want to be treated with respect. We want our teachers to understand how we think and how we feel."

Evaluation Procedures

Evaluation, marking, and reporting procedures should help students discover and understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, and personalities. Evaluation procedures should minimize comparisons among students (NMSA, 1992).

School B requires at least two parent-teacher conferences a year and teams must stay in contact with parents throughout the year. Conferences include parents, administrator, counselor, and team teachers; but students are rarely invited. Some teams have developed information booklets for students and parents to help in the transition to a different grade level and format, also weekly or monthly newsletters are sent home informing parents of events in classes and school.

School B administers a standardized achievement test (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) to the eighth grade each year for determination of strengths and weaknesses and the test is used as a comparison of their students with other eighth graders in the district. With parent permission, specialized individual tests are given to some students for diagnostic purposes. When the teachers were asked to describe the kinds of evaluation used in their classrooms, most reported in order: daily assignments, traditional paper-pencil tests, participation, portfolios, and performanced based (oral reports, written reports, projects, and demonstrations) assessment checklists and rating scales.

Cooperative Planning

"Cooperative school-wide planning that involves faculty, administration, and specialists is an essential ingredient in responsive middle schools." Adolescents need to be involved in classroom planning; selecting objectives, content, learning activities, and outcome evaluation (NMSA, 1992).

School B is committed and active in teaming. Each team chooses a name appropriate to the theme for that year and bases their activities and decorations around that team name and theme. Teaching teams consist of one administrator, one counselor, one special resource teacher, and five or six core teachers who meet formally once a week to discuss topics that include interdisciplinary unit planning, team or school events, newsletter information, counselor concerns, administrator announcements/concerns, specialist concerns, teacher concerns, parent conferences, and tutoring concerns. Informal meetings including only the teachers sometimes occur two or three times a week for specific planning. A teacher on a seventh grade team said, "If a student is having problems with a particular team, we are free to move him/her to another team." Another teacher on the seventh grade team stated, "Teaming generates a family or community spirit among ourselves and the students." A teacher on an eighth grade team commented, "The group of kids we deal with are small enough in number to really get to know and understand."

<div align="center">School C</div>

<div align="center">Mission Statement: "Everybody is somebody."</div>

<u>Demographics</u>

School C is located in a rapidly expanding suburban community of 70,000 inhabitants. Even though the majority of community citizens are middle class professionals, there are other socioeconomic variations in the community. The school district serves approximately 16,000 students. According to the school secretary, School C serves 888 students, ages ten to fifteen, in a three grade configuration -- sixth (321

students), seventh (287 students), and eighth (280 students). The ethnic composition

reflects a Caucasian majority (92%) with 8 % comprised of Native American, Asian,

African American, and Hispanic. Approximately 8% of the students qualify for

assistance through a free and reduced lunch program. The staff is comprised of a head

principal, an assistant principal, 3 counselors, 33 core classroom teachers (12 sixth grade

teachers in three teams,10 seventh grade teachers in three teams, and 10 eighth grade

teachers in three teams), 7 special resource teachers, 8 paraprofessionals, 1 visual arts

teacher, 4 communication arts teachers, 5 music arts teachers, 1 performing arts teacher,

2 Physical Education teachers, 1 library/media professional, and 17 support

staff.

Participants

There were 27 participants in School C. One white female principal, with 16

years school experience (3 years in School C) and one white female seventh grade

counselor, with 15 years school experience (3 years in School C) were interviewed

individually. After parental consent, one student focus group consisting of three white

males (12 years of age), five white females and ten white males (13 years of age) were

interviewed as a group. Two seventh grade teams of teachers were interviewed in

separate groups.

Team configurations in School C consists of three or four core teachers, the grade

level counselor, a principal, and one special resource teachers. Two teams of teachers

from School C were interviewed. One team of seventh grade teachers consisted of two

white female teachers and one white male teacher. The teachers stated their school

experiences during the interview and it was found they ranged from 2 years to 5 years of teaching experience. The other seventh grade team consisted of three white female teachers and one white male teacher. During the interview, it was found their school experiences ranged from 3 years to 30 years teaching experience.

Building and Grounds

School C is located on the far edge of the community closest to the newest residential area. The facility consists of one large building (built in 1991) on approximately three acres. The main building is a single floor, multi-level structure with few windows and unpainted cement walls. The fifty classrooms are arranged around the outer edges of the building on the top level. The office area and library share the same level with the classrooms. The lower level houses the gymnasium, cafeteria with a stage, a music/performing arts wing, visual arts area, and a home arts area. The office area comprises of visitor waiting, conference room, work room, staff lounge, offices, and nursing. The design is much like School B with variations.

School Climate

School C portrayed a warm and inviting atmosphere through staff attitudes, classroom and hall decorations, and cleanliness of the facility. The principal, counselor, teachers, and students observed and interviewed were open and friendly. The unpainted cement walls were not inviting, but again teacher and student hall decorations helped soften the effect. The seventh grade counselor said, "Our school is used as a model by other schools; we are very proud of our facility." An indication of warmth in the school

is the level of parental involvement. The principal commented, "We have a high rate of parental involvement in our school everyday. We have parent assisted learning (PALS) who work as volunteers in the school and a very active Parent-Teacher Association."

Educators

The National Middle School Association believes a special type of educator is required to implement middle school curriculum. Number one on their list of educator characteristics is a genuine desire to teach adolescents with a thorough understanding of human growth and development of 10 - 14 year olds (NMSA, 1992).

Educators in School C demonstrated a high rate of knowledge and commitment to adolescents among the administrators, counselors, and teachers. Observations and interviews highlighted incidents throughout the school focusing on student needs and interests. In classroom observations, teachers demonstrated their concern and understanding of their students through individualized tutoring and teaching strategies such as cooperative learning. Team meetings are centered on student concerns. A seventh grade teacher on team one stated, "We as a team get to know the strengths and weaknesses of our students real quick. . . We can work together to help those students." A seventh grade teacher on team two said, " Our students want us to know they don't like homework." The student focus group believes teachers should, "Have good leadership, give more free time, and have hands-on activities" to be good teachers.

Counselors exert extra effort to be there for the students. The seventh grade counselor stated, "I am an advocate for the kids. . . if kids have problems I'm there." She also stated, " When new kids come into our school, they join the 'New Kids Club' where we try to orient them to our school."

The principal tries to hire teachers in School C that would easily fit into the middle school concept, "I try to hire as many elementary certified teachers I can, because

we encourage the hands-on learning." She also added, " Elementary certified teachers are child-centered, creative, and enjoy working with people."

Curriculum

A true middle school curriculum is based largely on student needs. The balance of student needs, instructional processes, and academic necessities make the middle school curriculum unique (NMSA, 1992).

School C's curriculum is outlined and defined by the Priority Student Academic Skills (P.A.S.S.), mandated by the state of Oklahoma. Educators in School C feel they meet PASS easily and still provide a full curriculum that meet adolescent needs. The head principal provided a curriculum schedule for each grade in School C. Each grade followed basically the same curriculum and offered core courses in language arts, math, science, and social studies with exploratory experiences in visual arts, musical arts, communication arts, physical education, community service, enrichment, foreign languages, and home arts. Special education students are mainstreamed with extra support involving learning disabilities, mentally challenged, emotionally disturbed, physical therapy, speech, therapy, and enrichment for the gifted.

A tutoring program or TOPS reaches students needing extra academic support. Teachers are available forty-five minutes everyday for tutoring and twenty minutes for homeroom or homebase in which they meet with 15 to 20 students each day to further meet particular needs. Every three weeks, Saturday school is provided by "invitation only".

Organizational Arrangements

What we know about 10 - 14 year olds and the learning process is incompatible

with departmentalized, ability-grouped, seven period days. Block scheduling, multi-age

grouping, developmental age grouping, alternative schedules, and other ways of

organizing for instruction belong in the middle school (NMSA, 1992).

The organizational arrangement in School C is highly structured. Core subjects

(fifty-five minute periods) and elective classes (forty-five minute periods) are arranged in

seven period days. The following schedule for the seventh grade is an example of

scheduling for the entire school.

8:30 - 8:40	Homebase
8:40 - 9:35	1st Period
9:35 - 10:25	2nd Period
10:25 - 11:15	3rd Period
11:15 - 11:30	Group 1 Lunch
11:50 - 12:30	Group 1 Study Skills
11:30 - 11:45	Group 2 Lunch
12:05 - 12:30	Group 2 Study Skills
12:35 - 1:30	5th Period
1:35 - 2:10	Elective (TOPS)
2:15 - 3:00	Elective (planning)
3:05 - 3:15	Homebase

The periods that are set aside for electives are also times that TOPS and teacher

planning occur. Students have a choice whether to go to their elective or go to tutoring.

Homebase usually lasts 20 minutes and is used for daily opportunities for interaction with

15 to 20 students including such activities as: community service, school service, reading

trade books, discussion of topics, holiday activities, competitions, mini-courses, study

time, team assemblies, and playing games.

Documentation and observation point to the fact that School C does not comply

with National Middle School Association beliefs related to block scheduling, multi-age

groupings, developmental age groupings, and alternative scheduling. Interviews say

otherwise, though. A teacher on seventh grade team one stated, "We can easily get

together and rearrange our schedules for special events or activities." Another teacher on

team one adds, "We are supposed to do one interdisciplinary unit per nine weeks but we

end up doing more than that." A teacher on seventh grade team two said, " We can adjust our schedules as needed within the team." Another teacher on team two added, "Remedial reading classes should be added to our schedule and an alternative school for problem students." The student focus group suggested longer passing time between classes and block scheduling.

Instructional Strategies

Adolescent achievement, readiness, and skill levels vary and adolescents are curious, creative, and like to experiment. Instructional strategies which take advantage of these traits, such as committee work, simulation, and independent study, are more effective in the middle school setting (NMSA, 1992).

The teachers in School C use integrative themed units within their teams, whole group instruction, cooperative group work, computer instruction, and individualized instruction to meet academic needs of their students, but whole group instruction seems to be the dominate method observed. Individualized instruction was basically used during tutoring periods. Most of the observed teachers used modeling, lecturing, and class discussions to present material to their students. Computer use was delegated to the library and computer classes were offered through electives. A teacher on seventh grade team one stated, "We are required to use one integrated unit every nine weeks, but we end up doing more than that."

Exploratory Program

The rapid physical, social, and intellectual development which occurs during adolescent years requires the inclusion of brief but intense interest-based activities. Mini-courses, exploratory courses, service clubs, special interest activities, and

independent study projects are a means to meet adolescent needs (NMSA, 1992).

School C refers to their exploratory program as "the electives". Two periods are set aside for the offering of electives for students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Mini-courses or short-term activities such as self-esteem units, drug units, community service projects, discussion of contemporary topics relevant to their school or community, career studies, or holiday activities are usually the responsibility of homebase teachers. Long-term classes (yearly or by the semester) are offered by elective teachers who provide classes in art, creative writing, orchestra, vocal music, band, speech-drama, computers, French I & II, Spanish I & II, and physical education. A seventh grade teacher on team two stated, "We have a good variety of electives. . . we have more than enough." Another teacher on team two added, "The students can choose what electives they want until classes fill up then they must choose another." One student in the student focus group suggested, "They should add electronics to our choices."

Advisement and Counseling

Advisement and counseling in the middle school is important because of adolescent concerns over body development, social acceptance, adult norms, and new ideas and beliefs. The National Middle School Association advises that an adult be available to each student who has a special responsibility for that student's academic and personal welfare (NMSA, 1992).

School C has a counselor assigned to each grade level, usually one counselor to 300 students. As students move from grade to grade, the counselors also move up with the students they started with in sixth grade. Depending on grade levels, each counselor has differing duties; scheduling, enrollment, guidance (individual and group), service

club sponsor, testing coordinator, student activities coordinator, administrative assistant, or helping in the transition of students to other grade levels. The seventh grade counselor allowed a view of her frustration by stating, "Enrollment takes a lot of time. . . I would love to do more small group and one-on-one activities with my students."

Each core teacher is responsible for 15 to 20 students (homebase) in which they meet daily for 20 minutes. Activities mentioned in homebase were community service, school service, reading trade books, discussion of topics, holiday activities, competitions, mini-courses, study time, and team assemblies. A seventh grade teacher on team one said, "My homebase is a little freer than the other teachers'. The kids choose what they want to do."

Continuous Progress

Growth irregularities are common during the adolescent period. Students should be encouraged to progress at his/her own rate of learning. Middle school expectations must be responsive to individual stages of readiness during periods of growth, plateau, and regression (NMSA, 1992).

Teaching teams in School C are able to stay on top of student problems through their weekly meetings. Counselors, special resource teachers, and core teachers work together to solve individual student concerns before they become a greater problem, or worse, not noticed. Examples of programs in School C that provide for adolescent progress include TOPS or a tutoring program that provides special help for students with academic problems in one-on-one situations; Saturday School every three weeks to help those who need to "catch-up"; homebase serves as a family unit with a caring adult who can quickly relay observations to other teachers on the team; individual counseling by counselors who can also relay student concerns to team teachers during team meetings;

enrichment classes for accelerated students; and special education classes for students with special needs. A seventh grade teacher on team two confirmed, "We all have the same students, therefore we can discuss problems and get insight as to how we can help the students." When the student focus group was asked what they want their teachers to know, answers included:

"Don't tell us to stop acting like children."

"Don't punish us with work."

"We can't learn everything in one day. . . We need to spend more time on certain things that we do."

Evaluation Procedures

Evaluation, marking, and reporting procedures should help students discover and understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, and personalities. Evaluation procedures should minimize comparisons among students (NMSA, 1992).

School C policy requires at least two parent-teacher conferences a year and teams must stay in contact with parents throughout the year. Conferences include parents, administrator, counselor, and team teachers; but students are rarely invited. Weekly or monthly newsletter are sent home informing parents of events in classes and school.

School C educators administer a standardized achievement test (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) to the eighth grade each year for determination of strengths and weaknesses and the test is used as a comparison of their students with other eighth graders in the district. With parent permission, specialized individual tests are given to some students for diagnostic purposes. When the teachers were asked to describe the kinds of evaluation used in their classrooms, most reported in order: daily assignments, traditional paper-pencil tests, participation, portfolios, and performanced based (oral reports, written reports, projects, and demonstrations) assessment checklists and rating scales.

<u>Cooperative Planning</u>

"Cooperative school-wide planning that involves faculty, administration, and specialists is an essential ingredient in responsive middle schools." Adolescents need to be involved in classroom planning: selecting objectives, content, learning activities, and outcome evaluation (NMSA, 1992).

School C educators are committed and active in teaming. Each team chooses a name appropriate to the theme for that year and bases their activities and decorations around that team name and theme. Teaching teams consist of one administrator, one counselor, one special resource teacher, and three or four core teachers who meet formally once a week to discuss topics that include interdisciplinary unit planning, team or school events, newsletter information, counselor concerns, administrator announcements/concerns, specialist concerns, teacher concerns, parent conferences, and tutoring concerns. Informal meetings including only the teachers usually occur two or three times a week for the planning of unit or activities. A seventh grade teacher on team one stated, "As a result of meeting on a weekly basis, sometimes needs produce interdisciplinary units. . . Students feel like the information they are receiving in one class isn't just valuable for that one class but it carries over into other classes, also." A seventh grade teacher on team two said, "It's less work to be on a team. . . responsibilities are shared."

Summary

The three schools in the study were similar in population, building architecture, curriculum, organizational arrangement, and programs. An assistant superintendent

in the school district explained that they work hard to maintain consistency between their building sites. The principals in Schools A, B, and C meet regularly to exchange information pertaining to their schools. Differences between the schools are basically caused by leadership, faculty, and staff attitudes towards visitors.

Schools A, B, and C have student populations consisting of a white middle class majority (90%) and a minority (10%) mix of Native Americans, Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics. The majority of faculty and staff in the three middle schools are Caucasian with middle class backgrounds.

The actual building structures in the three schools are very similar; wide halls, unpainted cement walls, few windows, offices accommodating staff, libraries, music and speech facilities, gymnasiums, and cafeterias. Teachers and students tried to soften the affect of unpainted cement walls with hall decorations. School climate differs slightly in the schools depending on welcoming office staff. Most of the students, administrators, counselors, and teachers in the three schools were friendly and open.

Curriculum in Schools A, B, and C are identical because the whole district uses the Priority Student Academic Skills (PASS), mandated by the state of Oklahoma, to drive their curriculum. Core courses in language arts, math, science, and social studies along with electives in the visual arts, musical arts, communication arts, physical education, foreign languages, and home arts are offered to the students.

Organizational arrangements in the three middle schools are similar. Classes are organized into seven period days and scheduling varies little from school to school. The principals and teachers feel they have flexibility, though, to arrange their team schedules and content according to need. Classes and teaching teams are based on grade levels (six, seven, and eight) and little interaction between grades occur. Each grade level is organized into teams of teachers consisting of four or five core teachers and support teachers who are responsible for the guidance and teaching of 120 to 150 students. Modeling, lecturing, and class discussions are the general mode of instruction in the

schools. Sometimes a sprinkling of cooperative group learning techniques, individualized instruction, and computer instruction is used. School C educators were more committed to interdisciplinary unit teaching than educators in Schools A and B.

Programs in Schools A, B, and C include advisement and counseling, exploratory experiences (electives), and tutoring (TOPS). Advisement and counseling are provided by a counselor for each grade level and core teachers who act as homebase advisors. Electives are offered for all students in a wide range of activities (music, drama, foreign languages, art, athletics, computers, community service, and home arts). TOPS is a tutoring program for students who need extra academic help. Core teachers are scheduled each day to work with these students. Saturday school, enrichment opportunities, and special education classes are provided for students with relevant needs.

Documentation comprising of schedules from each school, teacher communication from one team, a Blue Ribbon Award application (School A), mission statements from each school, and School B goals served as confirmation to information obtained from observations and interviews, but did not add to the data already received. Puzzled looks often accompanied requests for written information about their particular schools and programs.

Schools A, B, and C were basically formed from the same mold. Populations, building structures, curriculum, organizational arrangements, and programs varied little between the three middle schools because of close communication and district policy. The biggest difference between the schools was in school climate determined by faculty, staff, and leadership attitudes towards visitors.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

I am blinded by that basest of emotions,
My nose turned toward a dark alley by some hand of
Fate,
I step blindly, timidly, uncertainly forward.

At the end of that alley,
I may find a rainbow and a pot of gold:
Or, as the darkness disappears, perhaps just another
busy highway.

I don't know.
(Murphy J. 1989. Cited in Turning Points:
Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,1989, p. 23)

Middle level educators have a considerable responsibility serving as lanterns for

the direction of adolescents through their dark alleys. Not only must their number one

priority be the students, but they must also consider the parents, community, and state

legislation. Schools A, B, and C have moved in the direction of the rainbow. The

district-wide commitment toward excellence in education is demonstrated by the three

middle schools in this study. Their concern for a collaborative student centered

environment is exemplified in their philosophies, team spirit, curriculum, and programs.

They are striving for the best educational opportunities possible for their students which

is why they were chosen as Blue Ribbon Schools.

Discussion

This study compares perceptions of three middle schools in a suburban district in Oklahoma. These perceptions and observations were gathered through principals, counselors, teachers, and students and compared to the National Middle School Association's (NMSA) characteristics of excellent middle schools. Because the three middle schools in the study are so similar, Schools A, B, and C are discussed together according to the ten NMSA criteria.

Educators Knowledgeable About and Committed to Young Adolescents

The majority of educators in the three schools understood growth and development of adolescents. All three principals stated positive effects of the middle school philosophy, "The middle school is student centered not content driven." The principal from School B provided a written copy of their school goals and mentioned the publication, This We Believe, to be very helpful in the development of the goals. The counselors seemed to have a realistic picture of adolescent concerns, "We visit with fifth graders before they come to our middle schools, so their fears and worries might be lessened." Most of the teachers believed the students needed support and recognition, "Students want teachers to take a personal interest in their activities and recognize their unique talents." As a whole, observations of the principals, counselors, and teachers as they were dealing with students did demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of adolescents. However, a couple of students made comments such as, "Some teachers need to spend more personal time with each student," gave the impression that some educators did not concern themselves with getting to know their students.

A Balanced Curriculum Based on the Needs of Young Adolescents

Curriculum in the three schools showed a strong balance of core offerings and
varied elective activities. The curriculum, though, was driven by Oklahoma learning
outcomes (P.A.S.S.) and state guidelines. The educators and students had very little
input into the kind of curriculum in their schools. All seemed to be content with
their curriculum, since none verbalized a concern in this matter.

A Range of Organizational Arrangements

Organizational arrangements in all three schools had the look and feel of a
traditional junior high: seven period days and grade level groupings. Multi-age groupings
did not occur except for special events or activities. Principals and teachers, though,
mentioned many times that they had the flexibility to adjust their team schedules,
"Because of special units and speakers, it is necessary to adjust our schedules to
accommodate learner needs. One has to be flexible in order to gain the best possible
learning situations for our students." Some of the educators were aware of possible
middle school organizational arrangements but seemed to be content with their own
arrangement, since no concerns were voiced. Principals from each school provided
schedules for each grade displaying names of teachers, subjects/electives offered, and
times of classes. The three school's schedules looked almost identical indicating close
communication among the schools.

Varied Instructional Strategies

The teachers in each school said they used varied instructional strategies in their classrooms and students commented on liking teachers who used hands-on methods, but observations usually found lecturing and whole class discussion the majority of the time. Individualized instruction was used in the tutoring programs, computers were available in the media center, and cooperative group work was used in some classrooms. Educators in School C were more verbal in their commitment to interdisciplinary unit instruction, "We are supposed to do one interdisciplinary unit per nine weeks, but we have done a lot more than that." The principal also stated, "I encourage hands-on learning and using sources outside the textbooks."

A Full Exploratory Program

Educators in Schools A, B, and C called their exploratory activities, the "electives." The electives included varied classes and activities and did an excellent job in meeting all student interests. Some students expressed their want of added courses (engineering and drivers education), but those courses mentioned were not practical in the middle level. The only negative comment concerning electives was made by a core teacher. "I sometimes think we offer too many electives, remedial classes are needed instead." This researcher believes that the electives or exploratory programs in all three schools was one of the strongest points in their curriculum. Schools A, B, and C had well equipped facilities that could easily accommodate the varied electives offered.

Comprehensive Advising and Counseling

Schools A, B, and C demonstrated strong advisement and counseling programs. The counselors were committed to their adolescent charges, but were frustrated by the lack of time spent with students, "We don't have time to do classroom guidance every month because of the many directions we must go," or "We are advocates for the kids, if they need us, we are there."   All the educators believed homebase to be very effective in developing a family feeling within their teams. The teachers felt free to use homebase for any purpose needed at the time, such as discussions of issues concerning the students, silent reading, making up tests, catching up on homework, planning activities with their students, participation in mini-units, hall decorating, or parties.

Continuous Progress for Students

The three schools stressed young adolescent continuous progress through various programs including: tutoring enrichment, Saturday School, electives, special education, community service projects, homebase, and parent-school groups.

Evaluation Procedures Compatible with the Nature of Young Adolescents

Standardized testing (norm-referenced) and teacher developed tests (criterion-referenced) were the basis for evaluation in Schools A, B, and C. Some teachers mentioned using alternative methods such as observation checklists or criteria checklists for performanced-based assessments. It is interesting to note that during the period of interviewing teachers, standardized testing (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) was

taking place. None of the teachers mentioned these tests as a concern or problem.

Cooperative Planning

Educators in Schools A, B, and C had strong beliefs in cooperative planning. Only one negative comment was expressed by a teacher on cooperative planning, "Teachers have varied work habits and all team members must strive to be more flexible and compatible with each other as well as students. Sometimes that is hard to do." The educators saw positive results in teacher, student, and parent attitudes toward school. One principal indicated, "Parents have a strong voice in our schools. Some programs were developed because of parent input. Sometimes those programs do not follow middle school philosophy."

Positive School Climate

The climates of the schools were conveyed through their philosophies of student centerness and parental involvement. Visitors were basically welcome and staff in the three schools generated a feeling of warmth. There were one or two exceptions of office staff being somewhat cold, but the overall effect in the schools was warmth and acceptance. Architecture of the three building sites were very similar; modern, unpainted cement walls, and almost windowless. The staff and students tried to lessen the effects of a prison like atmosphere with wall decorations, which helped.

Conclusion

Generally, the three middle schools conveyed and demonstrated qualities of excellent middle schools. One principal stated, "Our schools are very sensitive to parent and community concerns. We develop our programs so that students as well as parents are served." Are schools A, B, and C excellent middle schools? According to the NMSA criteria, they have not quite reached that goal. According to their particular community needs, they have met the goal. Their goals were developed to meet their own unique kind of student and community needs with the general attitude of service.

Lounsbury (1991) says restructuring of our schools is needed to meet young adolescent concerns, but it must be the restructuring of attitudes and assumptions not just the organizational aspects of the middle school. The schools in this study have the knowledge, curriculum, programs, and attitude to provide an excellent educational foundation for their middle level students. They do not follow, to the letter, what most middle level writers/theorists recommend, but they have found what works for their community, parents, and students. Stevenson (1991) contends, "There is no single framework, no universal design that will be valid and appropriate for the diverse school contexts that exist (p. 14)."

Recommendations for Future Study

Additional studies are recommended to answer questions raised by this study. Following are some suggestions:

1. The three schools in this study were on the same economic level. Schools of varying economic levels should be compared.

2. Three schools were used in this study. Increase the number of schools in the study to increase varied responses.

3. Instead of choosing schools from the same school district, use schools in different districts.

4. The schools in this study were from a suburban community. Choose schools from rural, small city, and large city areas.

5. Principals, counselors, teachers, and students were the participants in this study. Interview parents, board members, and community members, also.

6. The study should expand into non-Blue Ribbon schools.

7. An expanded study concerning politics of the community and its affect on the middle school might be beneficial.

Summary

Are Schools A, B, and C excellent middle schools? The NMSA criteria for excellent middle schools only serve as an organizational guide in the development of middle level schools. Schools A, B, and C follow the guideline pertaining to their student and community needs. Focus of importance should remain in the hands of individual schools. Each district must decide how they can provide physical, emotional, intellectual, and social needs for their unique adolescents. Too many times, we look to educational theorists and writers who sit in their cubicles to tell us how to educate our own young people. Local communities and school districts must take up the responsibility and sincerely decide what is best for their children. White (1993) believes educators have too long focused education on curriculum or organization, "We forget that

it is the student, not our feelings about the politics of knowledge, that we must focus on." Effective middle level education generates from attitudes. The three schools in this study have attained the attitude.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS

School A

March 27	Principal	7:30AM
May 4	7th Counselor	10:00AM
April 20	Teacher Team 6th	1:00PM
April 27	Teacher Team 8th	1:00PM
May 4	Student Focus	1:45PM

School B

March 27	Principal	1:45PM
May 4	8th Counselor	9:00AM
May 10	Student Focus	1:00PM
May 11	Teacher Team 8th	9:00AM
May 17	Teacher Team 7th	10:00AM

School C

March 28	Principal	2:00PM
May 11	7th Counselor	11:00AM
May 15	Teacher Team 7th	1:00PM
May 17	Student focus	8:00AM
May 17	Teacher Team 7th	1:00PM

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATIONS

School A

March 27	9:00 - 10:00AM
April 5	8:00 - 10:00AM
April 20	10:00 - 11:00AM
April 27	8:00 - 10:00AM
May 4	10:00 - 12:00AM

School B

April 27	10:30 - 12:00AM
May 4	1:00 - 2:00PM
May 10	11:00 - 12:00AM
May 11	1:00 - 2:00PM
May 12	9:00 - 11:00AM

School C

April 7	9:00 - 11:00AM
April 20	8:00 - 9:30AM
April 28	1:00 - 2:00PM
May 12	1:00 - 2:30PM
May 15	10:00 - 12:00AM

APPENDIX C

DOCUMENTATION UTILIZED

School A

Blue Ribbon Schools Application

Grade level schedules

6th grade team information booklet

Mission Statement

Parental Consent Letters

School B

Grade level schedules

Goals

Mission Statement

Parental consent Letters

School C

Grade level schedules

Mission Statement

Parental Consent Letters

APPENDIX D

APPLICATION FOR REVIEW OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH
(PURSUANT TO 45 CFR 46)
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Title of project (please type): **MIDDLE SCHOOLS FOR THE**
21ST CENTURY: A CASE STUDY

Please attach copy of project thesis or dissertation proposal.

I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are properly protected. Additions to or changes in procedures affecting the subjects after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S): SUSAN BRECK
(if student, list advisor's   Typed Name(DISS. ADV)Signature
name first)
                               CAROLYN BAUER
                               Typed Name   Signature

                               CYNTHIA WEIBLING
                               Typed Name   Signature

CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION   **EDUCATION**
Department   College

301 GUNDERSON   744-7125
Faculty Member's Campus Address Campus Phone Number

221 S. LINCOLN STILLWATER   337-2357
Student's Address   Phone Number

TYPE OF REVIEW REQUESTED:

   [X] **EXEMPT**   [ ] **EXPEDITED**   [ ] **FULL BOARD**

2

VITA

Cynthia Weibling

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: A COMPARISON OF NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE IN THREE
BLUE RIBBON AWARD WINNING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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