MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION: THE STRENGTH OF TIES

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CHAPTER ONE

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Transition is recognized as a vital element in educational program planning affecting the student's successful passage throughout all levels of schooling (Carpenter & Gardener, 1984). Beginning kindergarten, moving into middle school or junior high, and starting high school are major transitions in the school experiences of the youth. These are times when it is most critical to bond students to the school level where they will spend the next few years (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). The National Middle School Association (1982), in its report *This We Believe*, stated "'transescents' already highly sensitive and vulnerable because of the many changes they are experiencing personally, are especially likely to be upset by a shift from one school to another and should receive special consideration at the transition points" (p. 13). Smith (1997) supported the beliefs of the NMSA in her research stating, "public school students who had full transition programs available to them in their middle school were less likely to drop out of high school and performed better academically than did students who had either a partial program or none at all" (p. 150). The dual bridge function played by middle school is even more important due to the increasing concerns for making K-12 schooling a continuous process with the least amount of disruption, while still providing appropriate educational opportunities (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996).

Middle school transition is one of the most significant, sometimes stressful, life events for early adolescents (Smith, 1997; McEwin. Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996; Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1996; Combs, 1993; Odegaard & Heath, 1993; Irvin, 1992).

Most children move from a small, more personalized and task-focused elementary to a

larger departmentalized and achievement-oriented middle or junior high school (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998: Midgley & Urdan, 1992). In the new school, they encounter changes in student-teacher relationships, grading practices, teacher expectations, and student responsibility (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998).

For many young adolescents, the transition from elementary to middle school is difficult. Changes in motivation, that occur in conjunction with middle school transition, have led researchers to suggest that school transition at this period of life may have especially negative consequences for some early adolescents (Eccles, Midgley, Adler, 1984: Harters, 1981). Conventional wisdom supports the notion that maturational changes make this stage in the adolescent's life a more difficult time, and therefore a decline in motivation and performance is to be expected. The research of Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) challenged this idea, demonstrating that differences in the learning environment before and after transition contributed to a significant decline in student attitudes toward mathematics. Other studies suggest that middle level transition is often associated with increased psychological distress and poor academic performance (Chung et. al., 1998; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). In a longitudinal study of middle level transition involving gender, girls were found to have suffered a decline in self-esteem after transition, whereas boys did not (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). In yet another study, declines in class preparation, grade point average, as well as selfesteem, were found to be similar for both boys and girls, after transition (Siedman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994).

For some students the transitional experience does not appear to pose any difficulties for them at all. According to Gardener and Carpenter (1984) many students

respond positively to such challenges. Bowerman and Dobash (1974) found that adolescents with older-aged siblings exhibited better ability in adapting to changes in their environment.

STATEMENT of the PROBLEM

Transition is recognized as a vital element affecting the student's successful passage throughout all levels of schooling (Carpenter & Gardner, 1984). The importance of and need for well-planned transition activities at the middle school level have a long history of support by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Council on Middle Level Education (1985) and the National Middle School Association (1982). More recently, Alexander and McEwin (1989) again supported the necessity for the middle school transition program. "Because of its unique function as the bridging school in education below the college level, the middle school must be especially concerned with identifying and employing the best means possible to connect the schools that precede and follow" (Alexander & McEwin, 1989, p. 9).

The most recent "best means" have been identified by the John Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS: Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and supported by the National Middle School Association (NMSA, Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). These include the following 10 practices:

- 1. Elementary school students visit for an assembly.
- 2. Middle and elementary administrators meet together on articulation and programs.
- 3. Middle grade counselors meet with elementary counselors or staff.
- 4. Parents visit for orientation in the fall after their children have entered the middle school
- 5. Middle and elementary teachers meet to discuss courses and requirements.
- Spring parent orientation meetings are held before the students enter the middle school.
- 7. Middle school students present information at the elementary school.
- 8. Elementary school students attend regular classes at the middle school.

- 9. Summer meetings are held at the middle school for parents and students.
- 10. Buddy program pair's new students with an older student on their entry.

Despite awareness of the necessity of middle school transition programs for student success and clearly detailed practices which should be included in those programs, transition to middle school poses problems for most students (Alspaugh, 1998; Smith, 1997; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996; Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1996; Combs, 1993; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Irvin, 1992). This anomaly exists, in all likelihood, for a variety of reasons. Inappropriate implementation of transition programs and the lack of supporting social linkages among middle school students top this list.

Additionally, Perpetuation Theory, as developed by Braddock (1980) and McPartland and Braddock (1981), states "that segregation is perpetuated across generations when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life" (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). It was determined that the formal ties or networks, characterized by relationships with family and friends anchored traditional views, while informal ties or networks, characterized by acquaintances or friends, strengthened new views and social ideas including integration across races.

Granovetter (1986) argues that "weak ties play a crucial role in structural cohesion because our acquaintances are less likely to know one another and more likely to know strangers to us than our close friends. They are thus our bridges to social circles different from our own. This implies that insofar as various social circles are connected, it is precisely through weak ties" (p. 87).

PURPOSE of the STUDY

Using the lenses of transition implementation and Perpetuation Theory's social networks, the purpose of this study is:

- To describe the transition implementation experienced by middle school students;
- 2. To describe the "ties" (Granovetter, 1973) that exist among these same middle school students;
- 3. Analyze transition implementation through the lens of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS; Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990);
- 4. Analyze the ties through the lenses of Network Analysis (Granovetter, 1973, 1976, 1995) and Perpetuation Theory (Wells & Crain, 1994);
- 5. Report other realities that may be revealed; and
- 6. Assess the usefulness of these lenses for explaining these perspectives.

ORIENTING FRAMEWORK

Theoretical or conceptual frameworks impact our traditional understanding by questioning the ideological categories we use and the goals we think we want to achieve (Liston & Zeichner, 1990). When "examining teaching and the social context of schools through various conceptual frameworks, one begins to see new issues, reformulate old issues, question one's accepted image of society and the social order, and look at oneself in a new light" (Liston & Zeichner, 1990, p. 135). It is through this lens that Perpetuation Theory (Braddock, 1980; Granovetter, 1983; McPartland & Braddock, 1981, Wells & Crain, 1994), Network Analysis (Granovetter, 1973, 1976, 1995) and the National Middle School Association (NMSA, 1990) suggested transition practices will be the frameworks which guide and inform this study.

Perpetuation Theory and Network Analysis

Perpetuation Theory, based on the research of Braddock (1980) and McPartland and Braddock (1981), maintains that segregation tends to repeat itself "across the stages of the life cycle and across institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences

in desegregated settings earlier in life" (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). According to Braddock (1980), these segregated minority students will continue to make choices that perpetuate physical segregation as adults, because they have not been provided with opportunities to test their racial beliefs. Hoelter (1982), in his study, supported the findings of Braddock (1980) when he concluded, "black-white status inequality is perpetuated when blacks remain segregated from the knowledge concerning educational and occupational opportunities and methods of attaining specific goals" (p. 7). On the other hand, African American students from desegregated high schools are more inclined to continue their education in predominantly white settings (Braddock, 1980). Wells and Crain (1994) in their study reported that "desegregated black students set their occupational aspirations higher than do segregated blacks, and these career goals are more realistically related to their educational aspirations and attainment than those of segregated blacks" (p. 539). Most of the research reviewed supports the theory that "interracial contact in elementary or secondary school can help blacks overcome perpetual segregation" (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 549).

Wells and Crain (1994) expanded Braddock's Perpetuation Theory by including the concept of network analysis: that being, "segregation is perpetuated across generations because minorities lack access to informal networks that provide information about, and entrance to, desegregated institutions and employment" (p. 533). In conjunction with Perpetuation Theory, they incorporate Granovetter's (1973) work, which analyzes "strong ties," as well as, the strong impact of "weak ties". As stated by Granovetter (1973), "the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the

emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (p. 1361).

Strong ties include close relationships between individuals with similar thoughts and beliefs, i.e., family members and close friends. Homan's (1950) believes "the more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be" (p. 133) and the more similar they are, the stronger the tie connecting them.

Weak ties, according to Granovetter (1983), are "less formal interpersonal networks—that is acquaintances or friends of friends" (p. 533). They are avenues through which information and mobility opportunities are obtained. "Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be more concentrated within particular groups" (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376). Weak ties play a critical role, because according to Granovetter (1986), they are a bridge to social cliques different from our own, while Karweit (1979) suggests "the key to successful desegregation may, in fact, lie in the stimulation of weak rather than strong interracial ties-promising, if true, because the former are easier to stimulate than the latter" (p. 20). Weak ties, in the social structure, travel a greater distance and reach a more diverse and larger group of people (Granovetter, 1973). School desegregation studies (McPartland & Braddock, 1981; Crain & Weisman, 1972) "frequently show that cross-racial ties formed are not very strong. But even such weak ties may significantly affect later economic success. Because employees at all levels of work prefer to recruit by word-of-mouth, typically using recommendations of current employees, segregation of friendship and

acquaintance means that workplaces that start out all white will remain so" (Granovetter, 1986, p. 102-103).

Transition Implementation

Transition activities as recommended by the NMSA (1991), as well as the transition process, indirectly support the notion of strong ties. Students from the many different elementary schools, attending middle school for the first time, traditionally seek the companionship and comfort of a familiar face during the transition. This may include a best friend, neighbor, former classmate or someone they know through extra-curricular activities. Arowosafe and Irvin (1992) in their study, found that peers and siblings had a significant impact on the transescent student's perception of middle school.

The notion of weak ties is supported as well. The curious and exploratory nature of students during transition results in the development of friendships and the formation of peer groups (Thornburg, 1990). In Berndt and Hawkins' study (1985), "students reported fewer close friendships after the transition than before, but that the quality of their friendship increased after the transition" (p. 13). Those students who see themselves as having made a "good start" most frequently attributed their success to the presence of old friends and the making of new friends (Mittman & Packer, 1982).

Summary

The connection between network analysis and school desegregation suggests the need to include "Braddock's micro-level acknowledgement..., as well as, the micro-macro connections inherent in the flow of information and opportunities through interpersonal networks" (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 534). This study will examine middle school transition on a micro-level as well as a micro-macro level. The micro level of

transition includes parents and student ideology of middle school. The macro-level refers to the belief system of teachers, counselors and administrators in the transition schools. Strong ties would most likely be pervasive at the micro level since student beliefs are firmly established before the transescents enter the middle school. Arowosafe and Irvin (1992) found, "through an examination of writing samples it was evident that prior to entering sixth grade, students had developed impressions of what middle school would be like" (p. 15).

PROCEDURES

The following section will provide information about the researcher's background and beliefs. Also, information pertinent to the research, such as: the qualitative method of study that will be used to conduct the research; who and what type of data sources are being used; and lastly, how, where and when the data collected will be reported. The analysis of the data will be discussed in this section in regards to findings and researcher bias.

Researcher

I, the researcher, have been a public school educator for 21 years. I have taught mathematics at the secondary level for five years and middle school for sixteen years. When I first entered the realm of middle school education it was from a purely secondary perspective. I believed the children I was teaching were miniature versions of the junior and high senior high school students I had just left, hence everything I did in the classroom was based on this viewpoint. I firmly believed I was there to teach mathematics, not children. I was implementing a teaching philosophy I had been taught with, had observed during my student teaching experience, and was the pervasive

educational beliefs of my colleagues. The nurturing, child-centered philosophy of middle school education did not exist within this school. It was a middle school in "name" only. Elementary students, entering the surroundings for the first time, were thrust into an environment that did little to ease their fears or meet their diverse needs. They were expected to adapt and conform to the rules and regulations of middle school, even if they weren't prepared for what was ahead of them.

As I evolved as a middle school educator, I became more cognizant of my educational beliefs and their conflicting relationship to the philosophy of middle school education. Through research, professional growth and self-reflection I began the process of change; how I perceived the middle school child, as well as how I taught them.

Data Needs

Case studies are "the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 1). The explanatory case study method (Yin, 1994) will be used to examine student ties, transition implementation and the resulting perspectives which emerge. It is "an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (Merriam, 1988, p. 2). Thick, rich description of the phenomenon under study will offer insights and enhance the knowledge base that expands its readers' experiences (Merriam, 1988).

Data Sources

Purposive sampling will be used to select the participants in this study. Processes that will provide rich detail about it must guide the search for data. "Purposive sampling

is governed by emerging insights about what is relevant to the study and purposively seeks both the typical and the divergent data that these insights suggest (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 33). In purposive sampling, the researcher must select whom and what will fit the basic purpose of the study. Quality and information richness, rather than quantity are the deciding factors. Individuals will be selected on the basis of what they can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988).

This study will involve a single case study. The site will be a middle school located in the north central section of a Midwestern state. Fifth grade students, entering middle school in the 1999-2000 school year will be selected as participants in the study, based upon the recommendations of teachers, counselors and administrators. These students will be selected on the basis of their willingness to openly discuss their concerns and feelings regarding middle school transition.

Data Collection

The purpose of this case study is to find out from the respondents those things that can not be readily observed, (i.e. insights, beliefs, thoughts and feelings). The long interview method will be the primary source used for collecting data. The "main purpose of an interview is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective; to obtain a special kind of information, and to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (Merriam, 1988, p. 72). This method will enable in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study. Through the interview, I will be able to continuously assess and evaluate data collected, enabling review and redirection of the line of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Since the purpose of the interview is "not to put things in someone else's mind but rather to assess the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1980, p. 196), a less structured, open-ended format, allowing for dialogue and interaction, will be used. A series of questions will be structured to allow the respondents to reflect and analyze the situation around them.

The primary instrument for data collection and analysis will be me as the researcher. It is through my analysis and interpretations of what occurs during this study, that the reader will become acquainted with the respondents' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Merriam, 1988).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously allowing for the development of a database that is both relevant and parsimonious. Merriam (1988) maintains that in a qualitative design, one does not know whom to interview, what to ask, or where to look next without analyzing data, as they are collected. "Hunches, working hypothesis, and educated guesses direct the investigator's attention to certain data and then to refining and/or verifying one's hunches" (p. 123).

Data analysis will seek to provide information on Granovetter's (1973) four characteristics regarding strong and weak ties that exist during the transition implementation of fifth grade students entering middle school: 1) amount of time; 2) emotional intensity; 3) intimacy; and 4) reciprocal services. Strong ties are those which have high emotional intensity and a mutual commitment to the continuation (time) of the relationship. These ties indicate a shared common knowledge (intimacy) and will continue if the interaction is rewarding to both partners (reciprocity). Weak ties, on the

other hand, lack these features. There would be low emotional intensity and commitment to the relationship and the individuals would lack a common knowledge base.

The interview process will enable the researcher to determine the strength of the ties that impact the success of fifth grade students during transition. Other perspectives or realities will be reported as surfaces during the analysis of the data.

SIGNIFICANCE of the STUDY

The findings of this study may yield new understandings to the areas of theory, research and practice.

Theory

Theoretically, this study will explore the usefulness of Perpetuation Theory through Granovetter's (1986) strong and weak ties and their link to student transition into middle school. Individuals with similar backgrounds and experiences would more readily establish strong ties within their elementary school, while individuals with dissimilar backgrounds would develop weak ties. Because individuals are largely a reflection of the environment from which they come from, outside variables such as school and extra curricular activities contribute to the presence and strength of ties. It will also confirm or reject the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS) criteria for transition. This research will also alter or augment Perpetuation Theory and network analysis notions for use in contemporary educational settings.

Research

This study will add information to a limited knowledge base on middle school transition. According to Epstein & Mac Iver (1990) "the research that has been conducted is limited in the location and nature of the sample of schools and students, as

well as the breadth and depth of information on middle grade practices" (p. 1). Although educators are increasingly aware of the recommendations concerning middle school, the implementation of these practices in middle grades today is in question (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990).

This study will also add to the research of Braddock (1980) on Perpetuation Theory, and Granovetter's (1973, 1976, 1995) research on network analysis, incorporating the use of "strong" and "weak" ties.

Practice

This study will enhance the practice of education by providing administrators, teachers, counselors, and parent's insights into the factors effecting middle school transition. Webb (1991) stated that a change in school levels is one of the major transition points in life. "Schools across the country can attest to the fact that students making these transitions from one level to another experience a range of emotions from mild uncertainty and frustration to major anxiety and academic failure" (Ferguson & Bulach, 1994, p. 7). "Youths today are often lost in a sea of anonymity as they struggle through the confusion of new buildings, faces, teachers, lockers, buses, rules, schedules, and administrators. The tone for experience in the middle level program is often set by students' experiences during the transition program" (Combs, 1993, p. 13). As we learn more about the transition of students to middle school and what fosters their success, we can begin the process of implementing programs to ease their transition from one level to the next.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to examine middle school transition implementation in terms of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle School and Perpetuation Theory's strength of strong and weak ties. The resulting perspectives will be described and analyzed to assess the usefulness of each lens for exploring the realities revealed. Qualitative methods will allow for a thick description of the emerging perspectives reflected in the understandings and beliefs of middle school students.

REPORTING

Chapter Two will include a review of the literature. Chapter Three will present the data collected. Analysis and interpretation of the data will comprise Chapter Four.

Chapter Five will include the summary, implications, conclusions and discussion.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review will encompass a variety of topics including middle level education, its purpose, and the history of transescents development. An in depth examination of transition practices will be examined along with Braddock's Perpetuation Theory and Granovetter's Network Analysis.

PERPETUATION THEORY

Perpetuation Theory emerged from the work of Braddock (1980) to explain the continued segregation of black Americans. He found "that minority students who have not regularly experienced the realities of desegregation may overestimate the degree of overt hostility they will encounter or underestimate their skill at coping with strains in interracial situations" (p.181). "These segregated students make choices that maintain physical segregation when they become adults because they have never tested their racial beliefs" (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 3).

McPartland and Braddock (1981) discovered a relationship between, the willingness of black Americans to live and work in desegregated settings, their age when they first experienced desegregation, and the length of the desegregation experience. They found that segregation tends to perpetuate itself "across the stages of the life cycle and across institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life" (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). While sustained experiences in segregated settings tended to perpetuate segregation, sustained experiences in desegregated settings resulted in higher educational and occupational aspirations of minority students. These students, as a result of their familiarity to the

desegregated setting, were more likely to attend predominantly white colleges (Braddock, 1980).

Using Granovetter's (1973, 1983, 1986) "strong ties" and "weak ties", this event can be explained by the fact that students who remain in segregated environments maintain primarily "strong ties" within their cultural environment. Students exposed to desegregation, however, established "weak ties" with non-minority students allowing them to bridge the cultural boundaries of segregation.

MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION

The purpose of middle level education is to be developmentally responsive to the special needs of the early adolescent learner (Clark & Clark, 1994; Lounsbury, 1991; Lounsbury & Clark, 1990; NASSP, 1985). "Middle level schools must 1) be comprised of a unique, autonomous unit separate from the elementary and high school, 2) contain programs that are developmentally appropriate including interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories, and 3) provide a content that connects with the everyday lives of the students and instruction that actively involves them in the learning process" (Clark & Clark, 1994, p. 4).

In 1888 Charles Eliot of Harvard University, along with other prominent academicians, supported the idea of adding two years (grades 7 and 8) to secondary education. The original intention of this reorganization was premised upon the belief that success at the University level would be enhanced through earlier and better college preparatory work (Clark & Clark, 1994). Now, the 8-4 plan, which had been instituted by Horace Mann, reflected the views of the Committee of Ten, resulting in a new 6-6 organizational structure. The Committee of Ten, comprised mainly of college presidents

and headed by Eliot, and the Committee of Fifteen, comprised mostly of school administrators suggested for their own purpose a realignment of the grades from an 8-4 organization to a 6-6 plan. Although not originally advocated, separating the now six years of secondary education into junior and senior units, soon gained favor as a practical and sound theoretical step (Irvin, 1992).

The reorganization of secondary schools evolved slowly, with the initial impetus on solving major problems that existed within the current school framework rather than the creation of a new organization. Hansen and Hern (1971, p. 6) suggest that:

The history of the first middle school, the junior high school, indicates that it was conceived not as a movement to introduce something new into American education but as an expedient endeavor to ease several supposed deficiencies.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The junior high was instituted within a child-centered philosophy that emphasized bridging the gap between elementary and secondary education. This intermediate school seemed the perfect solution to the disparaging results being herald at this time. Van Til, Vars, and Lounsbury (1961) reported, "About one third of the school children in the early twentieth century were left back some time during the few years they spent in school. About one out of every six children in any grade was a repeater in that grade" (p. 15). American educators, recognizing the fact that left-backs too often become dropouts, became very critical of the present situation. They believed we could do better in democratic America, and when the new proposal for a junior high school was advanced, many educators jumped on the bandwagon (Clark & Clark, 1994).

The junior high school was to be based on the characteristics of young adolescents and concerned with all aspects of growth and development (George, Stevenson,

Thomason, & Beane, 1992). It was established as a school whose design was twofold: 1) continue to provide for the furthering of skill development, and more importantly, 2) bring added depth to the curriculum (Wavering, 1995).

From its earliest inception, the junior high school was being indirectly influenced by the prominent voices of post-secondary education. The influx of students attending college again brought a major push for better preparatory work. The preparation for preparation syndrome had begun and in many school districts the junior high school had begun to take on the characteristics and components of the high school (George et. al., 1992; Irvin, 1992). Emphasis on content and mastery, along with departmentalization and pre-established schedules, prepared students for the rigorous academic demands of high school but failed to help children move from the nurturing and secure environment of the self-contained classroom to complete departmentalization (Clark & Clark, 1993).

The new junior high, seen as a downward extension of secondary education, began operation with virtually no appropriate standards, regulations, or policies to guide its development (Irvin, 1992). It was furthered hampered by the facilities in which it operated and the lack of specially trained teachers (Irvin, 1992). Sputnik, the Civil Rights Movement and a population shift at the elementary level resulted in another push for school reorganization. As a miniature version of the high school trying to accomplish goals and objectives that were not attainable in the present circumstances, the junior high was not fulfilling its functions or meeting the unique needs of its students (Wavering, 1995).

The inability of the junior high to fulfill its intended functions first brought considerable criticism in the 1940's and 1950's (George & Alexander, 1993; George et.

al., 1992; Irvin, 1992). The Florida Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development stated in an ASCD publication:

The prevailing type of junior high program organization is a departmentalized one.... This type of organization provides too abrupt a change from the self-contained classroom of the elementary school, too little relationship between the subjects and the interests and needs of young adolescents, and too little time for any teacher to carry out the varied type of program needed by young adolescents (ASCD, 1954, p. 47).

The same organizational changes that the early promoters of the junior high schools believed would meet the special needs of early adolescents were now being challenged as being inappropriate (Clark & Clark, 1993). Amid the barrage of criticism, there were a number of efforts initiated to resurrect the now floundering framework of the junior high school, but conditions and attitudes were not conducive to its success (Irvin, 1992). Past failures have historically taught educators, that it is "easier to create a new institution than to change a well-established one" (Irvin, 1992, p. 10). Hence, a seemingly fresh and new idea was now on the horizon and the idea of a school in the middle gave credence to the formation of middle school.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

According to Clark and Clark (1994, p. 6) a middle school can be defined as:

A separate school designed to meet the special needs of young adolescents in an organizational structure that encompasses any combination of grades five through nine, wherein developmentally appropriate curriculum and programs are used to create learning experiences that are both relevant and interactive.

The middle school movement, according to Donald Eichhorn (1968, p. 2), "erupted as a protest against the program, not against the concept of the junior high school". Wavering (1995) stated "the criticisms were leveled not so much at the grade organization as they were at the programs so prevalent in our schools for students in their middle grade years"

(p. 38). By 1965, William Alexander and others were calling for a new school in the middle, one that would utilize a different organizational pattern to achieve the purposes of middle level education.

The middle school, during the first two decades of its existence, suffered from a similar burden as that of its predecessor. Many of the first schools were opened for reasons having very little to do with the characteristics and needs of young adolescents. In district after district, central office administrators discovered that the reorganization of their present system to a middle school format would significantly increase compliance in school desegregation (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). The resulting effect was the expedient formation of hundreds of middle schools without any carefully planned, long-term programmatic changes. There appeared to be great similarity between the pedagogical vision of the floundering junior high and the newly adopted middle school (George et. al., 1992). Grade levels within the new framework had changed, as well as the label on the school, but the programs and actual practices remained exactly the same. According to Irvin (1992, p. 11), "many middle schools were simply junior editions of the junior high school with departmentalization moved down one more grade". The council authors found "the available research indicates a significant gap between the main tenets of the theoretical middle school concept proposed by leading middle school authorities and educational practices in most middle schools" (ASCD, 1975, p. 3).

The inability of the middle school initially to implement reform did not slow down its success or deter the interest of educators. Many influential professional organizations, National Middle School Association (NMSA), the National Association of Secondary

School Principals (NASSP), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development (ASCD), and the National Association of Elementary Principals (NAEP)

became strong advocates for the movement providing resources, leadership, and support

(Wavering, 1995; Clark & Clark, 1994; Mac Iver & Epstein, 1993; Irvin, 1992).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s these associations helped to mold the development of

middle level schools. At the same time educators were unifying their efforts to bring

about a better understanding of middle level schools, others were renewing their efforts to

understand the workings of early adolescent development.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Some of the most significant changes in life are experienced during early adolescence (McEwin & Thomason, 1989). Except for infancy, adolescence represents the time of greatest human growth (Whisler, 1990). "For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life, while for many other, it represents their last chance to avoid a diminished future" (Turning Points, 1989, p. 8). It is during this time that "one begins to catch a glimpse of the emerging adult side by side with the child, when leadership begins to make itself visible, and when the capacity for abstract thought begins to develop" (Benson, Williams, & Johnson, 1987, p.4).

Change and growth for young adolescents can be grouped into four areas: physical, intellectual, emotional and social. The development of these four areas does not take place in isolation, but are interconnected. The pace of the changes differs, but yet there is still overlap.

Physical Characteristics

Early adolescence is characterized by periods of pronounced and accelerated growth. The development of the primary and secondary sexual characteristics, along with the growth spurt, represent the most significant physical event of this age group (Irvin, 1992). The pace of the physical changes taking place is different for each child and for each sex. Girls generally reach sexual maturity, on the average, two years before boys: "but the sequential order in which development occurs is relatively consistent within each sex" (McEwin & Thomason, 1989, p. 3). The age of greatest variability in physical size and physiological development is approximately 13 (McEwin & Thomason, 1989; Whisler, 1990; Irvin, 1992).

This transitional period involves not only visible external physical changes, but internal changes as well. Hormonal fluctuation may cause mood swings, while rapid physical development brings increased nutritional demands (George & Alexander, 1993). "No other period brings about such potential for social, emotional, and intellectual changes and the positive and negative results that frequently accompany them" (McEwin & Thomason, 1989, p. 3).

Intellectual Development

The intellectual changes that occur during adolescence are not as easy to observe as the physical changes. As with physical changes, the cognitive maturation of early adolescents is highly variable among individuals. During early adolescence the majority of students are operating within Piaget's concrete and formal operational stages, yet other studies "indicate that great numbers of students remain in the stage of concrete operations throughout their tenure in middle school" (George & Alexander, 1993 p. 7). Most

learners are basically egocentric and have difficulty reasoning from points of view or experiences outside their own (Mallea, 1984).

Emotional Development

In response to the turbulent changes experienced in physical and intellectual development early adolescents experience dramatic changes in self-concept (Whisler, 1989). The ages of 10 to 14 are a period of growing, changing, and general instability. "Perceptions of self at this time often guide decisions about social situations, cognitive activities, and a general feeling of self-worth" (Rice, 1990, p. 128). Young adolescents believe those personal problems; experiences and feelings are unique to themselves. They are moody, restless, sensitive to criticism, and "psychologically at-risk; at no other point in human development is an individual likely to encounter so much diversity in relation to oneself and others" (Superintendent's Task Force, 1987, p. 146).

Social Development

A developmental need for socialization is particularly strong for middle level students. It is during this stage of development that feelings about parents, teachers, peers and others begin to undergo significant changes (McEwin & Thomason, 1989). This new perspective includes the gradual movement away from parental dependence to peers and other significant adults. Early adolescents (Whisler, 1989; Clark & Clark, 1993) often experience traumatic conflicts due to conflicting loyalties to peer groups and families. Although peer groups are important, early adolescents still want the love and acceptance of their parents and teachers.

Learning to accept and be accepted by others is a vital task in early adolescence (McEwin & Thomason, 1989). Peer groups are important, and friends are selected on the

basis of similarity to one's self (Milgram, 1992). Peers are standards and models for behavior with their influence being the strongest between ages 11 to 17 (Irvin, 1992; Clark & Clark, 1993).

MIDDLE LEVEL TRANSITION

"Transition is the movement of students into and out of the middle level school and the planned programs that help to make this process effective" (Roth, 1991, p. 48). The original function of the junior high and now the middle school is "to provide a gradual transition from pre-adolescent education to an educational program suited to the needs and interests of adolescent boys and girls" (McEwin, 1996, p. 26). Because of increasing concerns for making K-12 schooling a continuous system of movement with the least possible disruptions, and yet provide appropriate educational opportunities that meet the needs of all students, the dual bridge function (transition from elementary to middle school to high school) is becoming even more important (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

Middle school transition is a significant, sometimes stressful, life event for early adolescents (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Yet, data indicates that more than 88% of the public school students in the United States enter a new school as they make the transition to the middle grades (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Weldy (1991) reported, "schools across the country can attest to the fact that students making these transitions from one level of schooling to another experience a range of emotions from mild uncertainty to major anxiety and academic failure" (p. 1). "Middle grade students experience many changes simultaneously; they enter puberty, they change schools, revise peer and friendship groups, begin new interactions with parents, and begin to expand

their social boundaries and participation in the community" (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990, p. 44). All of these, according to Epstein and Mac Iver (1990), lead to "transitions that are both difficult and exciting as they mark points of opportunity for student development" (p. 44). While some studies find that most students make most changes in their lives successfully (Offer, Ostrov, Howard, & Atkinson, 1988), some studies suggest that students have serious problems making multiple, simultaneous, transitions (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979).

Studies have shown that middle school transition is often associated with increased psychological distress (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenburg, & Ebata, 1989), a decline in academic performance (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Paredes, 1990; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Alspaugh, 1998), decreased motivation (Harter, 1981), and lowered self-esteem (Simmons, Blyth, VanCleave, & Bush, 1979; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991; Seidman, Allen, Arber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994).

In a three year study, Paredes (1990) reported that "scores on achievement tests were affected by the transition to middle school regardless of the year of transition" (p. 1). "Differential changes in academic achievement were found among boys and girls following transition: while boys showed a significant decline in academic achievement, there was no significant change in academic achievement among girls" (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998, p. 97). Alspaugh (1998) and Alspaugh & Harting (1995) established that "there is a consistent student achievement loss associated with the transition from self-contained elementary schools to intermediate-level schools" (p. 20). "Students involved in a pyramid transition of multiple elementary schools into a single middle

school experienced a greater achievement loss than did the students in a linear transition of a single elementary school to a middle school" (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 24).

The experience of making a previous transition did not lessen the student's academic loss during transition to high school. The students attending middle schools experienced a greater achievement loss in the transition to high school than did the students making the transition from a K-8 elementary school (Alspaugh, 1998). In a similar study Crockett reported that "making two closely spaced school changes is indeed more debilitating than making a single transition prior to seventh grade" (Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989, p. 201). These findings strengthen the study by Siedman et al. (1994) that students face double jeopardy if they make a transition from elementary school to middle school and then experience a second transition to high school.

Ability levels, students' perceived and actual ability level, are also impacted during the transition years. Wigfield and others (1991) found "contrary to what might be expected, the mathematics self-concept of high ability adolescents declined across the transition to junior high school, whereas the math self-concept of lower ability students increased somewhat" (p. 562). This pattern of shifts in self-concept of ability was stronger for students who went from heterogeneously ability-grouped classrooms in elementary school to homogeneously grouped classrooms in middle school. Midgley and her colleagues (1989a, 1989b) found that lower achieving students were affected across transition by both positive and negative changes in the learning environment. Anderman and Midgley (1996) reported "for all groups of students, there was a striking lack of stability in both math and english efficacy across the transition" (p. 10). There was also

a mean decline in end of year grades; female students decreased between grades 6 and 7 with an actual increase across the middle school transition, while male students declined across all three grades (Anderman & Midgley, 1996).

Within the same study, Anderman and Midgley (1996) reported significant changes in adolescent adjustment following middle school transition. Both boys and girls showed an increase in psychological distress with girls being significantly higher. "Girls showed more psychological distress, as assessed by physical symptoms associated with stress, than did boys. This finding suggests greater vulnerability among girls during transition" (p. 97).

The transition to middle school is an important developmental event that has been shown to have significant long-term effect on adjustment and motivation among adolescents. Studies have shown that "motivation, self-concept of ability, and positive attitudes toward school decrease, particularly during grades six and seven" (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, p. 288). A number of researchers reported that competence and expectencies for success are higher during the elementary years than during secondary school (Stipek, 1984; Marsh, 1989; Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer, 1993). Changes in motivation occurring in conjunction with middle school transition suggest that "school transition at this period of life may have especially negative consequences for at least some early adolescents" (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 555). These authors go on to say "that something unique may be going on during adolescence and that it interacts with the nature of school transition in affecting the motivation of early adolescents" (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 556). Simmons and her colleagues suggest that "declines in motivation result from the fact that adolescents making the transition to

middle school must cope with two major transitions: pubertal change and school change" (Simmons et al., 1987 p. 520). Different theorists believe these changes can have a significant impact on student's self-perception and self-esteem (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Rosenburg, 1986).

Anderman and Midgley (1996), found "the nature of the learning environment changes in a negative way during early adolescence" (p. 12). Many young adolescents become more negative about school and themselves after the transition to middle level school (Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). In Simmons' longitudinal study, girls who made the transition from sixth grade in elementary school to seventh grade in junior high school suffered a decline in self-esteem, whereas boys did not (Simmons, Blyth, VanCleave, & Bush, 1979). However, in another study conducted by Siedman, declines in self-esteem, and academic performance were similar for both boys and girls after the transition (Siedman, et. al, 1994). Anderman and his colleagues examined changes in self-concept; present and possible selves. Their results "indicate that present and possible "good student" selves decrease over the transition, although the decline is greater for males than females. Also, academically at-risk students have lower present and possible self-concepts than not at risk students (Anderman, Hicks, & Maehr, 1994, p. 8).

Middle level education is often described as the bridge between the elementary school and the high school. However, according to Roth (1991) "it is becoming more apparent that middle level schools must establish a separate identity- neither elementary nor high school- that is founded on a well-defined mission statement. Middle level education is more than a bridge. Schools in the middle must provide an educational

program appropriate for the early adolescent, one that is based on their unique needs and characteristics" (p. 48).

When students move from elementary schools to middle level schools, and from middle level schools to high schools, change is imminent (Roth, 1991). This time of transition can be a time of question, worry or anticipation for these adolescents. "Youth today are often lost in a sea of anonymity as they struggle through the confusion of new buildings, faces, teachers, lockers, buses, rules, schedules, and administrators (Siehl & Gentry, 1990, p. 20). Students to be successful must be able to cope with the adjustments, but they can not do it alone. The tone for the experience in the middle level program is set through the students' experiences during the transition process (Combs, 1993).

The first opportunity that middle schools have to begin building positive relationships with students and parents is during the transition from elementary to middle school. In response to research and the continued support of professional organizations (NMSA, NASSP), many middle level schools have developed school transition programs (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). The importance of and need for well-planned transition activities have been stated by the NASSP Council on Middle Level Education and the National Middle School Association. The NMSA, in its report, *This We Believe* (1982), emphasizes the need for well-planned transition programs.

Discontinuities in learning are especially evident when students transfer from one educational setting to another, such as elementary to middle school or middle school to high school. Therefore curriculum, guidance programs, social activities, and other aspects of education should be carefully articulated K-12. Transescents, already highly sensitive and vulnerable because of the many changes they are experiencing personally, are especially likely to be upset by a shift from one school to another and should receive special consideration

at the transition points.

According to Epstein and Mac Iver (1990, p. 44) the Center for Research on Elementary & Middle Schools (CREMS), there are several purposes for articulation activities to ease transitions to and from the middle grades:

- To assure that children and families are better informed about the school programs,
 requirements, procedures, opportunities, and about students' and parents' responsibilities at the new level of schooling.
- To assure that children are better prepared for the curricular and social demands at the new level of schooling.
- To assure that middle grades educators are better informed of the connection between their programs and those of the elementary schools that their children come from, and those of the high schools that their students will attend; and to help elementary and high school educators understand their connections with the middle grades.
- To assure that middle grades educators are better prepared to help students adjust to and succeed in a new school environment.

In 1988, the John Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS) conducted a national survey of principals in middle grades schools. With this data they were able to document and analyze the diversity of educational approaches, as well as, the effects of different practices on school programs and student progress (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Their data showed the three most common transition activities implemented by middle school were having elementary school students visit the middle grades schools, having middle grades and elementary administrators meet together on articulation and programs, and having middle grades counselors meet with elementary counselors. Other activities, deemed to be beneficial, were difficult to implement and therefore infrequently used (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1990).

According to the authors "there is evidence that an extensive articulation program may be beneficial. The standardized regression indicates that principals in schools using numerous and diverse articulation activities are more likely to report that their articulation program is meeting student needs. Further, an extensive articulation program slightly- but significantly- increases the likelihood that students will succeed in their first year in the new school" (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1990, p. 17). Principals who delayed transition activities until the fall considered their programs weak. "Well-implemented articulation practices to ease the transition of students from elementary to middle grade schools reduced the number of students who are retained to repeat the grade of transition" (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990, p. 68). Pamperien, on the other hand, found the opposite to be true. He reported "that the implementation of middle school practices had little influence on student achievement scores" (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 24).

SUMMARY

"Will middle grades schools be more successful if they adopt supportive structures, practices, and services that leading educators in the middle-school movement often recommend as being especially responsive to the needs of early adolescents? Are there measurable benefits to students if schools establish group advisory periods, interdisciplinary teams, provide remedial activities, and conduct extensive articulation practices?" (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991, p. 610)

Educators in some schools attribute declining motivation and performance to the multiple changes adolescents are experiencing. Eccles, Midgley and their colleagues have challenged this view. In a longitudinal study, they found a direct link between changes in the classroom environment and changes in students' beliefs and behaviors in mathematics. Negative changes in motivation and performance at early adolescence are

not inevitable, but appear to be related to the quality of the learning environment experienced by children at this stage of life (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989a; Mac Iver & Reumann, 1988).

Other schools have developed transition programs to help children adjust to the size and complexity of the middle school organization. Many of the programs though worthwhile, according to the authors "are not sufficient to change the pattern of declining motivation and performance at early adolescence" (Midgley & Urdan, 1992, p. 10).

Other approaches, such as those designated by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Education in *Turning Point*, include: setting up teacher teams or small houses so that students can stay with the same group of teachers and peers across the school day, and the establishment of an advisory program to facilitate personal attention and interaction with a caring adult. Common planning periods, interdisciplinary teaching and site-based management are other strategies being implemented. These changes are important and make it possible to provide a developmentally appropriate learning environment for young adolescents, but will not guarantee that will happen (Midgley & Urdan, 1992, p. 9).

Many middle schools, to help students who are struggling academically, have instituted remedial programs. There is little evidence that programs such as these improve the motivation and performance of underachieving students. Allington and Johnston (1989) reported that it is often difficult to coordinate remedial instruction with the instruction students receive in the regular classroom resulting in the student getting further and further behind academically.

The transition from elementary to middle level schools is difficult. Many students feel less positive about their academic potential and the value of schooling, they give up more quickly and put forth less effort, and their grades decline (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). For some of these children this is the beginning of a downward spiral that leads to school failure and dropping out (Midgley & Urdan, 1992). Why does this happen? Research has shown us, as was discussed previously, that the recommended policies and practices are working, but not effectively for every child. Physiological changes associated with puberty, the size and complexity of the middle school, and programs implemented to deal with this problem all impact the transition process, but are not, in and of themselves the answer to the question: "Why are some students able to make the transition successfully and others are not?"

CHAPTER THREE

DATA PRESENTATION

Using the lenses of transition implementation and Perpetuation Theory's social networks, the purpose of this study was to describe the transition implementation experienced by middle school students.

This study involved a single case study. An explanatory case study method of inquiry was used to research the problem (Yin, 1984). The site was a middle school located in the north central section of a Midwestern state. Sixth grade students, based upon the recommendations of teachers and counselors were selected as participants in the study.

Case Study Procedure

The case study included interviewing 12 sixth grade students attending Martindale Middle School at the present time: one boy and one girl from each of the district's six participating elementary schools. The interviews were designed to examine the impact of transition implementation and the "ties" that exist among middle school students.

Students to be interviewed were selected solely on the basis of their willingness to talk about their middle school experiences.

Respondents

The Martindale Public School system requires that those interested in conducting research submit, to the Assistant Superintendent of State and Federal Programs, a written research request/proposal, detailing the purpose of the study, objectives, research design and utilization of results. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the

Superintendent of the district, as well as, the Principal of Martindale Middle School. On August 31, 1999 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Oklahoma State University granted permission for the study to be conducted as well.

The parents of each respondent were contacted by telephone to obtain permission for their child to be interviewed. The overwhelming response from both the parent and child was positive and all were willing to participate. Written permission was obtained from the parents, along with an assent form from the child.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. The names of the participants from Martindale Middle School will begin with the letter M.

Interviews

I interviewed participants of the study at a time and place that was convenient for the parent and the child. Most participants opted to visit in the Martindale Middle School, while others chose the comfort of their home or the parent's place of employment. Each discussion began with an informal gathering of background information to ease the child into the formal interview. All of the participants were extremely nervous in the beginning, but gradually began to relax as we progressed through the interview. Interview questions centered on student beliefs about middle school, influences of those beliefs and the impact of transition implementation.

Observations

Informal observations were conducted during lunch and classroom changes to confirm the data gathered in the interviews. The students were observed for social interaction and behavior. Classroom observations of some students were conducted, but not all.

Reporting

The middle school concept section will define and discuss the essential components of an effective middle school. According to George and Alexander, (1989) "Establishing and maintaining high quality middle schools depends, in several ways, on the recognition of the special qualities of these learners and the willingness to tailor programs to those needs" (p. 70). Also discussed in detail will be the components of transition. Transition implementation is the programs/activities developed and implemented by middle schools to ease the transition from elementary to middle school.

Middle School Concept

In American terminology, a middle school is a school in the middle of the school ladder (kindergarten through high school). The idea of a school in the middle was conceived in part as bridges from elementary to secondary education, from the childhood level served by elementary school to the older adolescent level served by the high school (George & Alexander, 1993). These new schools were intended to balance more effectively the subject-centeredness of the secondary school and the child-centered focus of the elementary school. According to George and Alexander (1993), "the middle school was developed to provide a more deft balance between teacher subject specialization (the hallmark of high school) and supportive interpersonal structure (the heart of the elementary program) for students who need both to learn effectively" (p. 42). An effective middle school, according to Irvin (1992), "must not only build upon the program of earlier childhood and anticipate the program of secondary education to follow, but it must be directly concerned with the here-and-now problems and interests of its own students. The

middle school should not be envisioned as a passive link in the chain of education below college and university, but as a dynamic force in improving education" (p. 103).

Components of Middle School Education

The components of middle school education can be characterized by two significant terms: unique and transitional (Wavering, 1995; George & Alexander, 1993; Irvin, 1992). All program components must be different from what the student receives in either elementary school or the high school, specifically tailored to the unique needs of the adolescent at the middle level. Each component should link the elementary and high schools together "so that the process of education from kindergarten to high school is a smooth passage, a more seamless transition, than what students might have otherwise experienced. The middle school concept unifies the whole educational experience while providing a special learning opportunity for early adolescents that is uniquely tailored to their needs" (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 47).

The first component a middle school must implement is a teacher-based advisory program. Young adolescents, faced with dilemmas and external pressures on a daily basis, need positive role models and relationships in their lives. According to Alexander & George (1981), "Every student needs to have a relationship with at least one adult in school which is characterized by warmth, concern, openness, and understanding. Good middle schools cannot be places where teachers and students pass by each other without recognition or attachment, like the stereotypical ships in the night" (p. 90). Successful schools are built on the basis of students and teachers becoming partners in the learning process (Irvin, 1992).

Another effective middle school component that must be implemented within the middle school concept is interdisciplinary team organization. Interdisciplinary teaming is defined as the organization of two or more teachers from different disciplines who share the same group of students and share the curriculum, instruction, and evaluation of those students (Alexander & George, 1981). According to Epstein and Mac Iver (1990), "the aim is to minimize the number of students who feel that no teacher knows them, that the teachers do not know how they are doing in other classes, or that no student knows them well enough to accept them as friends" (p. 34). "Teaming has the potential to create an environment conducive to learning by reducing the stress of anonymity and isolation" (Arhar, Johnson, & Markle, 1988, 1989, p. 25).

The curriculum of the middle school, a third component of an effective school in the middle, has its own unique but transitional element. "The middle school curriculum builds on and extends the skills imparted by the elementary school, introduces the world of knowledge students will encounter in depth at the high school, and bathes it all in an exploratory, interdisciplinary light" (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 47-48). Young adolescents need time to explore; theirs is an age of endless discovery. Providing adequate exploratory programs that introduce them to a variety of topics, skills, and content fields, without requiring mastery, is a necessary component of their schooling experience.

A fourth component, essential to the growth and development of the middle level child, is diversity in instruction. Adolescents learn best when they can see how facts, skills and concepts relate to the issues in their lives. Successful middle school teachers relate what they try to teach, to student experience and the information taught in other

content areas (Irvin, 1992). "Middle level school program effectiveness is reflected in how realistically the curriculum answers the following question: To what degree does the school's program meet the developmental characteristics and learning needs of students in that school?" (Irvin, 1992, p. 213). "Instead of trying to force the masses of early adolescents to higher-level thinking, ready or not, perhaps we should help each student become the best thinker she or he can be at the rate and pace that her or his capacities and developmental readiness will allow" (Toepfer, Arth, Bergman, Johnston, & Lounsbury, 1989, p. 42).

Another component deemed, as an effective middle school practice is school-within-a-school (SWS). "The SWS permits students to enter the middle school from an elementary school and, depending on their developmental maturity, experience a range of options from self-contained classrooms to grade level teams" (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 323). In the years to follow students, within the same house or family, gradually move to a more advanced interdisciplinary experience, which prepares them for the first year of high school.

The middle school plays a critical role in the physical, emotional, moral, social, and psychological development of early adolescents. Understanding what makes them tick, how they function best, and where they are developmentally is the key to middle school. Knowing and remembering the various characteristics, needs, and stages of development allows educators to implement the elements and components needed to meet the diverse needs of adolescents.

Components of Transition.

The process of transition from one school to the next can be a time of questions, anxiety and anticipation for many adolescents. "Youths today are often lost in a sea of anonymity as they struggle through the confusion of new buildings, faces, lockers, buses, rules, schedules, and administrators" (Siehl & Gentry, 1990, p. 20). This insecurity is heightened by the inherent characteristics of the change from elementary school to middle school and from childhood to adolescence.

The tone for the experience in the middle level program is often set by students' experiences during articulation (Combs, 1993). An effective transition program will not only familiarize the transitioning student with the academic and social expectations of the new school, but also alleviate many of their unwarranted fears.

Two common transitions in early adolescence come when children move from elementary to middle grades and from middle grades to high school. There are several purposes for articulation activities to ease transitions to and from the middle grades:

- To assure that children and families are <u>better informed</u> about the school programs, requirements, procedures, opportunities, and about students' and parents' responsibilities at the new level of schooling
- To assure that children are <u>better prepared</u> for the curricular and social demands at the new level of schooling.
- To assure that middle grades educators are <u>better informed</u> of the connections between their programs and those of the elementary schools that their children come from, and those of the high schools that their students will attend; and to help elementary and high school educators understand their connections with the middle school.
- To assure that middle grades educators are <u>better prepared</u> to help students adjust to and succeed in a new school environment. (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990,

p. 44-45).

The work of Mac Iver and Epstein (1991) support the idea that middle grade schools will be more successful if they adopt supportive structures, practices and services that are responsive to the needs of early adolescents. "A school that uses the average number of articulation/transition practices is predicted to raise the percentage of students who succeed in their first year at the new school by approximately 1 percent over the promotion rates observed in otherwise similar schools that provide no special articulation/transition activities" (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991, p. 610). Principals in schools using numerous and diverse articulation activities were more likely to report that their transition program was meeting student needs.

Principals reported on ten practices they use with students, parents, teachers, and other staff to ease the transition of students to the middle grades. The three most common activities (used by over 40 per cent of the principals) were "having elementary students visit the middle-grades school, having middle-grades and elementary administrators meet together on articulation and programs, and having middle-grades counselors meet with elementary counselors or staff" (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991, 1990).

Some additional practices that are also worthwhile, but are more time consuming, difficult to arrange or costly were less frequently used. "For example only 20 percent or fewer of the principals indicated use of the following practices: having elementary school students attend regular classes at the middle school, having summer meetings at the middle-grades school, and having a buddy program that pairs new students with older ones on entry to the school (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990).

Martindale Community

The following section provides a description of the Community of Martindale, along with its demographics. The school system and how it has evolved through the years, along with a description of the six elementary schools from the study is also included.

Demographics

The community of Martindale is centrally located between two of the states largest metropolitan cities. With a population of approximately 38,000, the median age of this community is 22.4 years of age, while 55 percent of the residents are between the ages of 18 to 34. Five ethnic groups were represented. Eighty-seven percent of the population was white, 4 percent American Indian, and the remaining 9 percent were African American, Asian, and Hispanic.

The City of Martindale is a modern growing community with all the amenitiesquiet neighborhoods with a mix of metropolitan, suburban, and rural lifestyles, quality
schools, excellent municipal services, and abundant recreational and cultural activities
(Martindale Chamber of Commerce, 1999). According to its residents Martindale is
more than just a place—it's a community that strives for excellence in all aspects of its
existence, especially education.

Martindale is known as "The Education Community of the State." Students consistently out score other districts in the state on standardized tests. Residents are highly educated with 45 percent having completed sixteen years or more of formal education (Martindale Chamber of Commerce, 1999).

Martindale School System

Martindale Public Schools is one of the state's outstanding school districts. The accomplishments of students, professionalism of the faculty and staff, and the pride of the community are all marks of an excellent school system. Test scores, consistently above the national average, as well as the many academic awards and honors received by Martindale students, reflect the quality and excellence of the schools. Eighty-four percent of Martindale High School (MHS) students complete college bound curriculum compared to the state average of 66 percent. Seventy-three percent of MHS students took the ACT (state average is 57 percent) and attained an average score of 22.5 (state average is 20.5). The dropout rate is 1.1 percent compared to the state average of 5.4 percent.

Martindale Public School system is comprised of six elementary and four secondary schools with an estimated total enrollment of 5,510 students. Due to steady growth in the district's student population from 1981 through 1999, and the enactment of legislation mandating class-size requirements, the school district has maintained a yearly construction program to provide adequate classroom space each school year.

"The mission of the Martindale Public School District is to provide a learning environment that respects the individual needs of its students and helps them to reach their full potential". To enable them to accomplish this goal Martindale Public Schools have a highly qualified professional staff dedicated to the students and their academic progress. This certified staff includes 367 F.T.E. teachers, nine principals, and five assistant principals. Forty-nine percent of the Martindale staff has a Masters or Doctorate and 51 percent a bachelors.

Martindale Elementary Schools

Martindale elementary students receive their academic instruction at one of six elementary schools. Each elementary school houses grades K-5. The basic elementary curriculum consists of reading, math, social studies, science and language arts. Fine arts, health, physical education and library are offered on a scheduled or integrated basis.

The following is a description of each of the elementary schools participating in the study:

Southland Elementary prides itself on being a "school committed to excellence in education". It houses approximately 400 students and is located on the Southeast side of the city. The fifth grade students are in self-contained classrooms, but are frequently combined together for integrated activities.

Southpark Elementary, established in 1950, is a school rich in tradition. Located in the northwest section of the City of Martindale, there are approximately 410 students that attend school there. The fifth grade students, as in Southland, are also taught within self-contained classrooms. Southpark sponsors two programs for fourth and fifth grade students, which provide them with the opportunity to learn service, communication, and leadership skills.

Southside Elementary was established in 1980, with a new wing addition completed in 1994. It is located in the southwest area of Martindale and house 475 students in a unique blend of instructional settings; classrooms that open into the "hub" of the building, traditional self-contained classrooms in the new wing, and an outdoor facility that included trails, a pond and amphitheater.

Sunshine Elementary, located in the northeast section of Martindale and adjacent to the junior high school, was established in 1970. There are approximately 450 students housed there. The "community" includes students who live within walking distance to the school as well as those who travel by bus to rural areas. They have an outdoor classroom and amphitheater with seating for one hundred. The primary goal of Sunshine Elementary is "the development of a high quality educational enterprise that will prepare students for life in a rapidly-changing and complex world" (Martindale Public Schools Annual Report, 1999, p. 14).

Sweetwater Elementary, located on the west side of the city, has an enrollment of approximately 500 students. The student population consists of 67 percent Caucasian, 13 percent African American, 10 percent Asian, 6 percent Native American and 4 percent Hispanic. With the diversity in student population, Sweetwater is the only elementary school in Martindale that offers English as a Second Language (ESL). They also have their fifth grade students switch classes for one of the subjects in the core curriculum.

Swift Elementary houses 350 students and was built in 1990. As did Sweetwater, the fifth grade students at Swift switched classes for two of their academic areas. "We changed like to math and to language and science. Actually our homebase was math and social studies and our other teachers were science and language" (Mary, 9-9-99, 7). Sweetwater located in the very north part of Martindale celebrates a unique history with the state. The school location is set where the state began what was known as the Land Run.

Martindale Middle School

Martindale Middle School, the focus of this study, was newly constructed in 1987.

The two-story facility, located on the southwest side of the City of Martindale had 40 classrooms at its inception. In 1995, to accommodate the increase in student population, a 12-classroom single story addition was added to the back of the existing building.

At Martindale Middle School there was a total of 52 certified staff members, three counselors, one media specialist and two administrators serving approximately 850 students. Sixty percent of Marindale Middle School's students were classified as white, 38 percent were American Indian, one percent were Hispanic, and one percent were African American. Martindale was an interdisciplinary-teamed school with six academic teams (three sixth and three seventh), an elective team and a special needs team. The average number of students per team is 130.

Twelve sixth grade students from Martindale Middle School were interviewed for the study. Twelve to 15 recommendations were provided by each of the two sixth grade teams. One male and one female student, from each of the elementary schools in the district, were selected on the basis of their conversability and willingness to talk. The students selected were as diverse as the elementary schools they came from. Their ability levels ranged from gifted to learning disabilities and everything in between. Two of the respondents were twins and two of the respondents were new to Stillwater in the fifth grade. Four of the respondents each attended 2 different elementary schools in the Martindale school district. They came from two-parent homes, single-parent homes, and homes where one or both parents had recently remarried. Some of them were involved in many extra-curricular activities while others felt more comfortable with their hobbies.

For most respondents, the activities they were involved in outside of school enabled them to broaden their horizon of friends from middle school, beyond that of their neighborhood and elementary school (Madison, Martin, Mary, Matt, Mindy, & Mitch). "I knew some of the kids from softball. Like some of them were on my team, so I knew them. I knew Wendy, she's from Southside and I played her softball team." (Mary, 9-9-99, 4) "I have some kids that I was on the softball team with, some kids from my school and some kids from Church." (Mindy, 9-8-99, 3) "I knew some. Mostly from baseball cause I knew a lot of seventh graders cause I played up, but there were a few fifth graders that I knew really well too." (Martin, 9-16-99, 4)

The participants were as follows: Molly and Mike were from Southside Elementary, Mary and Mitch were from Swift Elementary, Misty and Matt were from Southpark Elementary, Monica and Martin were from Sweetwater Elementary, Mindy and Mark were from Southland Elementary, and lastly Madison and Monte were from Sunshine Elementary. The following descriptions give general information about each of the respondents from this site:

Mindy was a petite brunette with a beautiful smile. Though nervous at first, she was very cooperative and willing to answer my questions. She loves the middle school, loves God, and loves her family. She likes being challenged and performs every task to the best of her ability. When asked to describe herself she said, "I don't give up. I try hard and you gotta do that in sixth grade." (Mindy, 9-8-99, 9)

Mark was an adorable little blonde whose eyes sparkled with mischief. He was enthusiastic and ready to assist me with my study. As all others, he came in very tentative, but relaxed as we progressed through the interview. He loves the middle school and his

favorite class is science. When asked what was the best thing about middle school, he replied "A la Carte and the food, cause here you actually get to have ice cream instead of sherbet." (Mark, 10-6-99, 6)

Misty was an eleven-year-old brunette that was full of personality. She enjoys cheerleading, tap and jazz. She was extremely nervous during the interview and continued to be throughout. Most of her responses were single statements followed by a nervous giggle. She enjoys middle school, wants to be here and thinks, "it's pretty fun." (Misty, 9-17-99, 7)

Matt was an energetic, pint-sized little boy with blonde hair and brown eyes. He was very talkative and easygoing all throughout the interview. He was cooperative and more than willing to share his middle school experience with me. As does the other respondents, Matt loves the middle school. He believes he will have a great year and do well in all of his classes, especially science. When asked what excited him the most about coming to middle school, he fervently replied "the lockers." (Matt, 9-14-99, 3)

Monica was a beautiful, tall and lanky, sandy blonde with dark brown eyes. She takes tap, jazz, and ballet. She loves to cheerlead and watch football. She likes school and really likes middle school. Monica had two older siblings that attended school at Martindale and yet her concerns about the transition remained high. When asked how she felt about coming to middle school, she replied, "I was really scared. I didn't really want to come. Uh, I thought everybody would laugh at me if I didn't know the question or something. So, I wasn't too happy about it." (Monica, 10-4-99, 3)

Martin was a good-looking young man full of fun and mischief. He loves sports and the Internet. Though he was extremely nervous during the interview, rocking back and

forth throughout, he performed beautifully. All questions were answered with much thought and depth. He sees his year at Martindale as fun; gaining many new friendships, along with a wealth of knowledge. Martin is funny and definitely has a sense of humor. When asked what would have made him more comfortable on his first day at middle school, he replied, "a chair would have been nice, like a padded chair." (Martin, 9-16-99, 3)

Mary was a very vibrant and energetic young lady. She was slender and tall with blonde hair and brown eyes. She likes gymnastics, softball, twirling, and the color yellow. She has a twin sister and two brothers. She sees herself as nice, funny, and someone who is willing to stand up for herself and her friends. She thinks middle school is "cool and like totally awesome". When asked what excited her about coming to middle school, she replied, "the lockers and the lunch. There's like ala Carte. But, like at my elementary, we had ala Carte, but here it's like, OK, this is cool." (Mary, 9-9-99, 3)

Mitch was a tall good-looking young man with sandy blonde hair and brown eyes. He likes to talk, draw and play sports. He was very comfortable during the interview and did not appear to be nervous at all. He answered all questions thoughtfully and without any hesitation. His demeanor toward middle school appeared to be one of calm and acceptance. When asked the question what do you think your year will be like, he replied, "I think it will probably get really tough and frustrating at times and hard. The one thing we can do about that is probably pray about it, you know and uh see what God can help us do. Other than that just hope for the best." (Mitch, 9-9-99, 5)

Molly was a very pretty brunette who appeared to be noticeably uncomfortable throughout the entire interview. She was cooperative and willing to answer the questions,

but reserved with her responses. The interview was conducted at one of the major banks in Martindale. I drove Molly to the bank and we talked about anything and everything all the way there. Once there her demeanor changed and she became noticeably uncomfortable. Her attitude toward middle school is a mixture of apprehension, along with a desire to be there. When asked what do you expect your year to be like she answered in a very unsure voice, "pretty good, because I know what I'm supposed to do." (Molly, 9-13-99, 4)

Mike was a very tall and subdued young man with a quiet and soft-spoken voice. He too, as does Mary, has a twin brother. He was extremely cooperative and willing to talk to me, but was at a definite disadvantage compared to the other respondents. This was only Mike's second year in the Martindale School district, being new to the system as a fifth grader. He talked, a little, about the difficulty of making the transition to a new school district one-year and then a new school the next. His knowledge base of middle school was limited due to the short amount of time in the system and the lack of access to information the other respondents had opportunity to learn.

Madison was a very petite young lady with dark brown hair and dark eyes. She likes to twirl, cheerlead and talk on the Internet. She came into the interview with a smile radiating her face and remained bubbly throughout the time we talked. She enjoys the middle school and having the opportunity to meet new people. When asked what concerned her about coming to middle school, she replied, "would there be any people that didn't like me and stuff like that." (Madison, 9-10-99, 4)

Monte was a very congenial young man who loved being part of my study. He has short, curly brown hair and dark brown eyes. He was very serious during the course of the

interview and did not appear to be nervous at all. He enjoys pokemon cards and being with his friends. He "sees the middle school as fun and different." (Monte, 9-17-99, 4)

History of Martindale Middle School

Martindale Middle School has gradually evolved in the last two decades to where it is today. The original building that housed the school was located in the downtown district of Martindale. It was an old, rambling, two-story building that had been passed down from organizational level to organizational level; high school to junior high, to middle school. The building itself was rather unique in that there were three separate second stories and you could not travel from any one of them to the others without going back down and around. The band and orchestra were not located in the main building, but at another location 2 blocks away. The building, as does today, housed two grades; sixth and seventh. The school was departmentalized and the location of the classrooms was by subject matter. Teams, an advisory period, interdisciplinary teaching and common planning periods were not part of the school's organization. There was no coordination from grade level to grade level or even between the same grade level departments. A secondary mentality pervaded the climate of the school and autonomy was the operative word of that time.

Students moved throughout the entire building and from location to location, to change classes. With a passing period of five minutes and classes scattered all over, they didn't have much time to waste. The schedule was very regimented and there was not a lot of leeway.

The image of Martindale at this time was not positive. It was perceived as cold, harsh and uncaring; totally opposite of "the true middle school concept". The nurturing,

child-centered environment of the elementary school had been replaced with the subjectcentered environment of the high school, at an even earlier age. Martindale was operating as a middle school in name only. Everything about its existence exacerbated who they were as a middle school and what they believed.

In 1987, a bond issue was passed and a new middle school was built. It was relocated on its present site on the southwest side of Martindale. It was a state of the art building that would serve the school district and community well. There would be new classrooms, new furniture and hopefully a new image. As was in the old building though, Martindale continued to operate as a middle school "in name only". Nothing had changed. Students still traveled all over the building when moving from class to class, getting lost in the anonymity of their middle school experience.

Transition was nonexistent for those entering the middle school for the first time. Students from the surrounding elementary schools that would attend Martindale Middle School were not prepared for this new experience. The only exposure they had to "life in the middle" was a cursory tour of the building and it did nothing to dispel the negative rumors. For some students their middle school experience was fun and exciting, but for others it was all they could do to cope.

Martindale Middle School Today

Not long after the beginning of the new decade, Martindale Middle School began to implement critical and much needed changes. Slowly and gradually, they began movement towards the image of a "true middle school". While the location of each teacher's classroom was still by departments, the concept of teams was implemented. Even though the student body still traveled throughout the building when changing

classes, there was now a team of teachers that shared the same group of students. Any team meetings that were conducted would be held after school and at critical times during the 9 week period; statements of concern, report cards, or if there was a problem with a child. Though limited in its depth, this organizational style provided some continuity for the students.

A few years later, the most controversial change of all was set in motion; geographical location of the teachers by teams. Students would now, only travel outside their academic area and their team of teachers for their elective. Unity and cohesiveness were being formulated among not only the teachers, but the students as well.

Next, on the road to becoming a "true middle school" came common planning periods, advisory/homeroom, interdisciplinary units and an exploratory curriculum. The last two years have seen numerous changes in the course offerings at the school as well. In an attempt to better meet the needs of the students, with the expertise that was already in the building, creative scheduling enabled Martindale the opportunity to offer more in the way of elective choices.

The purpose of Martindale Middle School had made a major swing, at this point in time, from being a miniature version of the high school to a more nurturing and child-centered environment. Much had been learned regarding the transition from where they had been and the direction they were moving towards. They, the faculty and staff, were no longer teaching a subject matter to children, but were teaching children first.

Transition Implementation

Problems in making transitions, from one level to another are inherent in the academic and social structure of any school system, yet it continues to be a vital part of the

mission and operation of middle schools and is a major factor in determining success levels of those schools (McEwin, 1996). With this in mind, Martindale began to look at transition implementation and what they could do to help alleviate some of the concerns of parents and incoming fifth grade students. What they were doing at the present was not effective, for easing the transition into or out of the building. The middle school was still being perceived as "the school from hell" by parents and the community.

In 1994, the faculty implemented a visitation program enabling each fifth grade child the opportunity to attend class at the middle school with a sixth grade buddy. The child and their buddy attended one class, had lunch and then spent their remaining time together at recess. The balance of their time at the middle school was spent with the counselors: discussing curriculum, electives, and dealing with questions from the students. The overall attitude by the elementary teachers, parents, and fifth grade students towards the program, was very positive (Mary, Monica, Misty, Molly, Matt, Mark, & Martin). "We visited the middle school, this little thing and we got to have partners. We got to see the lockers and we got to know the different classes and teachers and stuff like that. After I went to the middle school to check it out, I wasn't scared at all. It wasn't a big deal to me." (Mary, 9-9-99, 5) "I enjoyed the day especially since I got somebody from Southpark. It was just kind of a neat day." (Misty, 9-17-99, 7)

Other articulation programs implemented by Martindale were 1) transition meetings between fifth and sixth grade teachers, and 2) evening parent meetings conducted by the counselors. All three transition programs were implemented late in the spring before the fifth grade students arrival in the fall.

Middle School Preparation

The purpose of transition implementation is to ease the transition of the student's passage throughout all levels of schooling (i.e. prepare them for middle school). "I was not prepared because all these people were telling me different things about it and so I was just kind of juggling around in my mind. It was really strange for me because I didn't know which person to listen, like it's bad or good and I just really didn't know anything."

(Martin, 9-16-99, 6)

According to Siehl and Gentry (1990), "Orientation programs need to encompass more than a one day quick tour and presentation of rules and regulations. It is a long-term process that begins well before the student reaches the building and continues long after he is safely within its walls" (p.20). Different activities should be conducted that give students several chances to interact with the new environment before they are thrust into it. "Well on that fifth grade day, where all the fifth graders came, they should of like gone to middle school for like a whole day and like go through every class with the sixth graders that they had." (Misty, 9-17-99, 7) Molly also would have liked to experience a full day at Martindale. She believed, "like visiting the so many different classes and like what you do in each class" would have better prepared her for the transition she would soon be making. (9-13-99, 5) Monica reiterated the same sentiment as the other two respondents. She believed after spending the whole day at middle school and attending "each class to see how they are going to be treated and see how much homework they're going to have", they could "then prepare themselves from what they saw that day." (10-4-99, 5)

Martin, on the other hand, believes making the transition to middle school would have been easier if there had been an earlier opportunity to meet and get to know the students and teachers from his team. "I think at the sign in like they should have a "Blue" team sign in.

Like the "Blue" team sign up for middle school, and the "Amber" team and "Star" team at a different time. All the teachers tell you who they are. They introduce themselves at the sign in, a few weeks before school, so you can kinda have an idea what your teachers are going to be like and stuff." (9-16-99, 7)

Mitch stated that to better prepare kids for middle school "they should have an assembly or something that was kind of neat, like a magic type show or something they think everybody would like. Maybe like a few classroom teachers do like some kinda like games, or something that they could do to get to know each other." (9-9-99, 6) Matt, in his response to what should be done differently to prepare kids for middle school, stated, "I think that they should meet the teachers before. The kids should go meet their teachers when they come." (Matt, 9-14-99, 5)

Basic Beliefs about Middle School

"Students make many transitions during their years of schooling: from home to school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to college or work. These transitions are usually major events in the lives of students and parents" (Schumacher, 1998, p. 2). In a study by Arowosafe & Irvin (1992), they found, "it was evident that prior to entering sixth grade, students had developed impressions of what sixth grade would be like" (p. 15). What students know and hear about middle school, before they come, will affect/influence their transition (Martin, Mary, Misty, Molly, & Monica). "Um, I was a little scared and um in a way I was really excited, but in a way I was really scared." (Misty, 9-17-99, 3) "I was kind of excited and kind of scared at the same time, because I kinda knew what it would be like and I kinda didn't know what it

would be like." (Molly, 9-13-99, 2) "Well I was really, really nervous because those people had told me stuff. I really felt just kind of scared." (Martin, 9-16-99, 2) "I was really scared. I didn't want to come. I was like, I'm scared." (Monica, 10-4-99, 3) "I thought it was going to be really bad. I mean, I thought it was going to be REALLY bad, cause people told me it was going to be really bad. So, I was like ok, I don't think I want to go." (Mary, 9-9-99, 2)

Concerns During Transition

Students, in a study, when asked about their concerns in facing a school transition, mentioned the following worries: 1) getting to class on time, 2) finding lockers, 3) keeping up with "materials", 4) finding lunchrooms and bathrooms, 5) getting on the right bus to go home, 6) getting through the crowded halls, and 7) remembering which class to go to next (Weldy, 1991). Many of the respondents interviewed alluded to some of the same concerns as those in the study by Weldy. Table 1 summarizes the concerns each of the respondents had during the transition to middle school.

The time allotted between classes is never quite long enough in the eyes of a sixth grade child. Going to the locker before for the next class, taking care of restroom needs and socializing with friends leaves little time for anything else, creating added stress for the students (Mark, Martin, Mary, Matt, Mindy, Misty, Mitch, Molly, & Monica). "Um, I heard that it was tough getting from class to class within the short time. I heard that there was a 2-minute in between and so that kind of freaked me out." (Matt, 99-14-99, 1) "I was worried about like making it from World Cultures class to my locker, from there down to PE, and from PE back to my locker in time to get all of my stuff for math class." (Mitch, 9-9-99, 4)

The number of students attending Martindale Middle School, along with the size of the building overwhelmed many of the respondents. The fear of getting lost in the shuffle, while moving from one class to the next was a real concern for these students (Madison, Mark, Matt, Misty, Monica, & Monte). "I was kind of scared about getting lost, not finding which classroom is which and stuff." (Mark, 10-6-99, 8) "Getting lost. I was so scared I would get lost and it was unreal." (Matt, 9-14-99, 4)

Adjusting to new people, as well as, the size of the building are not the only changes middle school students' experience in their transition. As students make the move from the family-like atmosphere of elementary school to the larger middle school, some experience feelings of insecurities and anxieties about many things, including lockers and combination locks (Madison, Mark, Martin, Mike, Mindy, Misty, Mitch, Monica, & Monte). "The first few weeks and the day that I was with my partner, I couldn't get it open. I kept trying and trying and I was like one of the only ones in math, that I couldn't get my thing open. This bothers me because sometimes, like my friends they wouldn't help me get my locker open cause they had to get to class and stuff. So, I got worried that I would be late to class." (Misty, 9-17-99, 8) "I thought I would never get it open, which I usually can't. It's ok though, cause the kid beside me, if I don't get it undone, he usually always can." (Mark, 10-6-99, 4) For other students, having their own locker was either something they looked forward to (Mary and Matt) or about which they had no concern (Molly). Both, Mary and Matt when asked what excited them about coming to middle school replied without any hesitation, the lockers "You have the privacy of your own locker and you don't have to carry a backpack around everywhere you go and I like that."

(Matt, 9-14-99, 3) "The lockers were, cause I wanted to decorate my locker but I just haven't had the time." (Mary, 9-9-99, 3)

"Effective completion of homework is a skill that must be taught as part of the classroom and team routine" (Odegaard & Heath, 1992, p. 24). But, homework needs to be used appropriately and have meaning for the student. Allowing for diversity in the classroom, in style of teaching, as well as with homework will lessen student anxiety. Homework is a concern for most students (Mark, Mary, Mindy, Misty, Mitch, Molly, Monica & Monte), but for others, it adds to the challenge of middle school (Martin, Matt, & Mike). "When I came here I was real worried about the homework and stuff, keepin up with all six different classes and stuff." (Mindy, 9-8-99, 2) "I was worried that I might not get my homework done. I might have too much and I would have to rush through it every night." (Monica, 10-4-99, 4) For some of the respondents, having too much homework or not being able to complete it in a timely manner, was not a concern. These students felt the homework in elementary school was too easy and wanted the challenge of something more difficult (Martin, Matt, & Mike). "I actually wanted homework. In elementary the homework didn't seem hard enough. Here it's like seven books or two books or three books and four papers in each book. But it's really cool here." (Martin, 9-16-99, 4)

"Moving from an elementary school to a middle level school provokes a myriad of emotions, behaviors, and concerns for young adolescents" (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992, p. 15). Most of these are concerns are heightened by rumors or false information obtained by students before they arrive. A study by Arowosafe and Irvin (1992) found that siblings and peers had a significant impact on student perceptions about middle school and often the message being consistently voiced reinforced the negative of middle school. Most of

the respondents in the study expressed these same concerns to me (Madison, Martin, Mary, Matt, Mitch and Monica). "I heard that people shove you in your locker and lock you in. I heard that some of the teachers are really nice and some of the teachers are really mean. I heard that we have lots of homework. I heard people in the seventh grade boss you around and I heard some people get really nervous in class and they just like shut down and stuff." (Monica, 10-4-99, 3) "Well I've heard that if you weren't sitting up straight that they'd put yardsticks in your T-shirt and that would make you sit up straight. I heard that Mr. Herman he was so bad and stuff. He would put people in detention for walking in the hallway. And that next year something was gonna go weird and wrong. It was gonna be like a nuclear power transplant or something in here and everybody was going to turn green." (Martin, 9-16-99, 7) "I heard certain teachers were nice, certain teachers were mean. Um, I heard that Mr. Herman was mean. I heard that it was tough getting from class to class within the 2-minutes in between." (Matt, 9-14-99, 1) "Um, I heard that all the teachers are really nice. Um that recess is really fun, which it really is and that's about it." (Mark, 10-6-99, 1)

The majority of students attending Martindale Middle School, due to its location in the city, either rides the bus to school or is brought by parents. Most of the buses that pick up students after school are early buses and leave the middle school within 7 minutes of school being let out. From an adult perspective the time frame is adequate, but for the middle school child it passes too quickly and often they have been left behind (Mark, Mary & Mindy). "Yep, I already missed it once this year. My dad came and picked me up. He was in town, good thing." (Mary, 9-9-99, 8) "I was buying a pop. When I got out

there all the buses already took off. I was like wondering where they went." (Mark, 10-6-99)

Evidence suggests that the movement into adolescence is one toward greater independence from adult authority, turning increasingly to the peer group for approval. Young adolescents have a powerful drive to form relationships with peers and find a niche in the group (Lipka, 1989). Most of the respondents in the study expressed major concerns regarding transition to the middle school and peer relationships (Madison, Martin, Mary, Mike, Misty, Mitch, Molly, & Monica). Their concerns regarding who would be in their classes, would they be able to make friends, and what would they do if they do not know anyone in their classes, were issues continually voiced throughout the interviews. "I really didn't think I would know anybody because I knew a few people from my school that were going and I didn't know if they were going to be in my class. Cause that's one thing I was really worried, that I wouldn't know anybody." (Martin, 9-16-99, 4) "Yes, it's kind of hard to meet, first meet new people in fifth grade then your going to meet more new people. Kind of makes you nervous. Sure makes me nervous." (Mike, 10-5-99, 2) "In half of my classes I knew one person, and that was kind of scary cause I didn't know anybody else and I'm shy." (Molly, 9-13-99, 3) "I would have felt better about it if my friend was in some of my classes, more of my classes and if more people I knew were in my classes." (Misty, 9-17-99, 4)

Table 1 summarizes the concerns, each of the respondents had during the transition to middle school. Many of these concerns were pertinent to all of the respondents indicating problem areas that need more attention during the process of middle school transition.

Table 1 Concerns during Transition

Student	Getting Lost	Homework	Lockers	Late to Class	Rumors	Isolated	Buses
Madison	X		X	X	X	X	
Mark	X	X	X	X			X
Martin			X	X	X	X	
Mary		X		X	X	X	X
Matt	X		X	X	X		
Mike	X		X	X		X	
Mindy		X	X	X	X		X
Misty	X	X	X	X		X	
Mitch		X	X	X	X	X	
Molly		X	X	X	X	X	
Monica	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Monte	X	X	X	X		X	

Peer Relationships

One of the most significant factors in adjustment to middle level schools is the formation of friendships (Arowosafe and Irvin, 1992). "Those students who see themselves as having made a good start most frequently attribute their success to the presence of old friends and the making of new friends" (Mittman & Packer, 1982, 325). The respondents in the study were looking forward to expanding their circle of friends (Madison, Martin, Mary, Mike, Mindy, Misty, Molly, Monica, and Monte). With all the concerns middle school brought, the excitement of meeting new people and establishing new relationships was more important. "In my 1st hour there are like one or two people that I know, but it doesn't really matter because I've made a lot more friends. So now my friends are in every one of my different hours." (Misty, 9-17-99, 4) "New Friends. I have a lot of new friends. I don't really see uhm my old friends so much, cause they have new friends too." (Mary, 9-9-99, 6) "I have a lot of new friends. It's like they don't know anybody and I don't know anybody, so we just kind of talk and just get to know each other; kind of pushed together the same way." (Martin, 9-16-99, 5)

Middle School Informants

Orientation programs are intended to perform the important role of informing students about what is to be expected at the middle school, as well as, addressing student concerns, but this is not always the case (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992). Before making the transition to sixth grade, most students hear information/rumors from peers and siblings (Madison, Mark, Martin, Mary, Matt, Mike, Mindy, Misty, Mitch, Molly, Monica, & Monte), parents (Misty & Mitch) and teachers (Madison, Mark, Martin, Mary, Matt, Mike, Mindy, Misty, Mitch, & Molly).

Siblings and Peers. The curious and exploratory nature of adolescents results in the development of friendships and the formation of peer groups (Thornburg, 1990). Peer groups are important and friends are selected on the basis of similarity to one's self becoming standards and models for adolescent behavior (Milgram, 1992). Interpersonal relationships take on a new perspective as the peer group gains in importance and the adult-child relationship begins to wane.

Arowosafe & Irvin (1992) reported, "Another group of informants with significant impact on the students' perception of middle school were siblings and peers" (p. 17).

What each of the respondents learned, regarding middle school came from either older siblings who had attended the school or friends who were there at the present. "My brother and sister told me mostly. But people in fifth grade, they told me stuff, but probably they heard from like their brothers and sisters." (Misty, 9-17-99, 3) "My sister! My sister tells me EVERYTHING." (Madison, 9-10-99, 2) "I have friends, some friends that have like older sisters and brothers and stuff and my stepbrother told me about it." (Molly, 9-13-99,

1) "Well, my brothers Mitchell and Samuel told me all about it. I found out about the Amber team, from John Paul, cause he was on it last year." (Mark, 10-6-99, 2)

Parents. A few students reported that their parents had discussed transition into middle school with them. According to research though, most expectations communicated tended to be warnings rather than positive information (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992). Baker & Stevenson (1986) found that parents could not only help their children academically, but also through positive communication, help them move more effectively through the organization of schooling. "I found out from my parents. They kind of asked around from my friend's parents that experienced the sixth grade or what they've heard from other parents, what they know or like that." (Mitch, 9-9-99, 2)

Teachers. Teachers at both fifth and sixth grade play an important part in easing the transition to the middle school (Siehl & Gentry, 1990). Elementary teachers can serve as active informants for critical information that is of interest to the exiting fifth grade student, while sixth grade teachers play a crucial role in the ongoing of the orientation process (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992). As the middle grade child moves through adolescence they begin to look toward other significant adults to supplement guidance given by parents (Clark & Clark, 1994).

The information provided, by the teachers of the respondents, varied from school to school and teacher to teacher. Some of the information was positive and geared toward alleviating fears and concerns, (Martin, Mary, Mike, Mindy, & Molly) while others issued words of warning. (Mark, Matt, Mitch, & Monte) "My fifth grade teacher said that it was going to be hard and tough and that you didn't get breaks at all and it's unlike anything you've ever experienced." (Matt, 9-14-99, 5) "She said, we are trying to prepare you for

the sixth grade and it is going to be a lot tougher. You need to keep up with your stuff more, cause you're not going to be able to go back and get it until after school." (Mitch, 9-9-99, 7) On a more positive note, the teachers also made these remarks. "She told us that it was going to be a big change, you're going to have different teachers, and you're going to meet new friends." (Mindy, 9-8-99, 7) "She said that you're gonna have fun here and the teachers really aren't as bad as they are." (Martin, 9-16-99, 6)

Excitement of Transition

The transition to middle school is a time of fear and anxiety, but it is also a time of anticipation and excitement. Even though the middle level child is foraging new and unknown paths there is still a part of them that wants to be there. New friends, different classes, lockers, and being allowed to choose what they eat are aspects of middle school that was exciting for these students. Table 2 summarizes the respondent's beliefs regarding elements of middle school that they were looking forward to experiencing.

Mindy was excited about coming to middle school because she has a "tie" in the building. "Well I like that my aunt is here and that I can go to her. I know a lot of the teachers from my mom and just the things that you get to do in elementary, like six different classes and stuff like that and your with different kids." (9-8-99, 5)

"Different teachers for different subjects is one of the markers young people use to separate elementary school from middle school" (Odegaard & Heath, 1992, p. 22). The majority of respondents were very positive and excited about having 6 different teachers for the 6 different subjects they would be taking. (Madison, Martin, Mary, Mike, Mindy, Molly, & Monte) I was excited about "stuff like all the teachers and all the new people I'd meet and stuff like that." (Madison, 9-10-99, 4) It was exciting to me "because we got to

pick our own food and we got like new teachers and everybody in Martindale, in all the elementary schools were going to go to that one school." (Molly, 9-13-99, 4) I was excited about going to middle school because, "I wanted to have a locker and I wanted to change classes. In elementary school, we only got to change classes once and I thought that was fun just for one and so I was really excited about that. One thing, I wanted to know all my teachers and I wanted homework." (Martin, 9-16-99, 4)

Students are excited about having a choice of what they will have for lunch. The opportunity for choices and decisions are another hallmark that separates elementary school from middle school. I was excited about coming to the middle school because "you get to choose your lunch. You get to have the A la Carte and like pizza and stuff like that instead of just having to have what the schools lunch is or what your parents make you." (Mark, 10-6-99, 4) What excited me most about the middle school was "the lockers. The lunch, there's like A la Carte. But, at Swift we had A la Carte, but here it's like Ok, this is cool. The student store, that was cool, and the people, friends and teachers." (Mary, 9-9-99, 3) "I like the food. That excited me that we had A la Carte because elementary food was awful." (Monica, 10-4-99, 4)

There are other areas and aspects of the transition process, which also excite elementary school students moving into the middle school. The following list is not all inclusive, but representative of not only the respondents of this study but a study by Odegaard & Heath (1992), as well.

- Having their own lockers.
- 2. Changing classes.
- 3. The opportunity to make new friends.
- 4. Homework

- 5. Being in middle school now instead of elementary
- 6. Challenges

Misty was excited about the idea of coming to middle school as well. She replied, "I won't be in elementary school anymore. I don't know, it just sounded different to now be in middle school." (9-17-99, 5) "There was going to be kids here that I knew and just to see what it would be like, what kind of challenges and stuff there would be." (Mitch, 9-9-99, 4)

Table 2
Excitement of Transition

Student	Lunch	New People	Lockers	Homework	New Teachers	Middle School	Change Classes
Madison		X			X		
Mark	X	X			X	X	
Martin		X	X	X	X		X
Mary	X	X	X		X	X	
Matt			X	X			X
Mike				X	X		X
Mindy		X			X	X	X
Misty						X	
Mitch	X					X	
Molly	X	X		X	X	X	X
Monica	X	X			X	X	X
Monte	X	X			X		X

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the transition implementation experienced by middle school students at Martindale Middle School. The school, located on the southwest side of the city, houses approximately 850 students. Demographics and school history provide a description of the school and explain the process of change that was implemented.

For the purposes of the study, 12 sixth grade students were interviewed. They responded to questions concerning their belief, fear and excitement regarding transition to

middle school. Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the concerns and excitement of their middle school transition.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data presented in Chapter Three were analyzed through the lens of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS: Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and through the lenses of Network Analysis (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Wells & Crain, 1994). During analysis of the data the following perspectives were considered: 1) transition implementation, and 2) the social networks that impact the basic beliefs of students during transition.

The interview questions, the basis for data collection and analysis, were designed in relation to Granovetter's (1973) four characteristics of ties: 1) amount of time; 2) emotional intensity; 3) intimacy; and 4) reciprocity. As the data were collected and analyzed new insights would emerge fostering the refinement of the interview process to include the new findings. Data collection and analysis became an interactive process that occurred simultaneously. "Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypothesis direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one's questions, and so on. It is an interactive process throughout which the investigator is concerned with producing believable and trustworthy findings" (Meriam, 1988, 119-120).

Transition Implementation

The focus of transition programs is on creating a smooth change of schools for the young adolescent. "Eighty-eight percent of public school students begin the middle grades in a new school, a transition which may overwhelm the coping skills of some

students and have devastating effects on their psychological adjustment, self-esteem, and motivation to learn" (Mac Iver, 1990, p. 460).

Leading educators in the middle school movement have recommended that middle grades schools adopt practices that are responsive to the needs of early adolescents (Alexander, 1977; Alexander & George, 1981; Lounsbury, 1984). These practices include the use of transition/articulation activities with students, parents and school staff to ease students' transitions from one level of schooling to the next.

In the spring of 1988, the John Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS) conducted a national survey of principals in middle grades schools. Principals in schools that contain grade 7 reported on ten practices they use with students, parents, teachers, and other school staff to ease the transition of students to the middle grades and to help students move on to high school. Table 3 summarizes the list of 10 practices and the percent they are practiced by the CREMS respondents.

Table 3 **Transition Practices**

Elementary school students visit for an assembly.	53%
Middle and elementary administrators meet together on articulation	
and programs.	46%
Middle grade counselors meet with elementary counselors or staff.	44%
Parents visit for orientation in the fall after their children have entered	
the middle school.	39%
Middle and elementary teachers meet to discuss courses and requirements.	37%
Spring parent orientation meetings are held before the students enter the	
middle school.	34%
Middle school students present information at the elementary school.	30%
Elementary school students attend regular classes at the middle school.	20%
Summer meetings are held at the middle school for parents and students.	16%
Buddy program pairs new students with an older student on their entry.	9%

Social Networks

A social network is the "set of personal contacts through which an individual maintains his social identity and receives emotional support, mutual aid, service information, and new social contacts" (Walker, McBride, & Vachon, 1977, p. 35).

These networks are used to describe the relationships of the ties that exist between the significant players in a social system. According to Granovetter (1973), there exist two types of ties, strong ties and weak ties.

Strong ties. Strong ties exist between individuals who have established close relationships and reflect similar thoughts, beliefs and interests. These ties would most typically occur between family members and close friends. "The more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be" (Homans, 1950, p. 133), therefore creating a strong tie.

Weak ties. A weak tie exists between acquaintances or friends of friends, through an individual's less formal interpersonal networks. "Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups..." (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376), providing access to different information. Weak ties provide a bridge to new, socially distant ideas.

Granovetter (1973) stated that "the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. Each of these is somewhat dependent on the other though the set is obviously highly intracorrelated" (p. 1361).

Martindale Middle School

The transition practices implemented and the impact of strong and weak ties on the basic beliefs of students during transition were analyzed.

Transition Implementation

There has been much consternation regarding the negative effect school transition can have on early adolescents (Blyth et al., 1983; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). In response to this concern, many middle level schools have developed school transition programs (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990; Siehl & Gentry, 1990) and the National Middle School Association (NMSA) has begun officially recommending the use of such programs ("Resolutions", 1990).

Martindale Middle School (MMS) has a transition program in place that encompasses only 3 of the 10 practices deemed effective by Epstein and Mac Iver (1990). These programs have been implemented every year since the beginning of the decade and they are as follows:

<u>Practice 1.</u> Middle grades and elementary teachers' meet together to discuss curriculum and expectations.

Although it is expected that students will be prepared for the course work at the next level of schooling, too often little coordination of curricula will occur between the elementary, middle grades and high school (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Teachers are involved with other teachers from other levels of schooling in only about one third of the middle schools (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). With the rapport and trust that has been developed between the fifth grade teacher and their student, elementary teachers can play a significant role in easing the transition.

Late in the spring semester, fifth and sixth grade teachers of Martindale, under the leadership of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, met. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a fluid curriculum that flows smoothly from elementary to middle school. The agenda of the meeting (easing the transition of fifth graders into middle school and alleviating some of their concerns regarding the difficulties of middle school, homework, and tests) discussed elementary and middle school expectations and ways to bring the two entities together.

To better understand what elementary schools do to prepare their students for middle school, a follow-up question examining what information fifth grade teachers relay to their students, was asked of the respondents. The responses varied. One of the respondents remembered her talking to them, but did not remember what she said, while the other answered the question from the perspective of what she had told them before their middle school visitation day.

Of the others that responded, six of them were told it would be a <u>big change</u> for them, but they would enjoy it and were going to have fun. These teachers attempted to accentuate the positive of middle school in all areas of the transition, even those of greatest concern to the incoming sixth grader. They discussed lockers, combination locks, and homework with their students, along with ways to make these aspects of middle school a more positive experience.

Homework: The respondents were informed they would have some homework, but not a lot. Even with having six different classes, time would be allotted by each teacher, providing assistance and enabling completion of work. They were reassured the

quantity of work would not be overwhelming and that assistance was as close as their teacher was.

Much of what was discussed and reinforced was to no avail; anxiety and fear of the unknown was still as prevalent as before. The teachers, in an attempt to alleviate homework concerns of the respondents, were not totally successful. In the beginning of the year Mary, Mindy, Molly and Monica remained apprehensive about being able to "keep up" with six different classes.

Martin and Mike, both newcomers to Martindale in the fifth grade, were looking forward to homework in the middle school and the additional challenges it might bring.

Their excitement for middle school was not hindered by pre-existing beliefs about middle level schools. They came in with an open mind and an eagerness to learn.

Lockers: The anticipation of being issued a locker creates anxiety, fear, concern, and excitement, all at the same time for the sixth grade child. Whether it is a top locker or bottom locker; easy combination to open or difficult; easily accessible or hard to get to; are all prevalent fears of every middle school child. Fear of forgetting their combination, losing their lock, or being unable to open the lock were the pervasive concerns of all the respondents. To alleviate some of their fears, the teachers of these respondents discussed the how of combination locks and things to do to avoid losing their lock or combination. They were also told to not worry if they could not get it open, because someone would always be there to assist them.

Being allowed to practice a combination lock during their visitation day, as well as discussing tips and ideas for making the process easier did not lessen the fears, concern and stress of being issued a locker, on the first day of school. All of these respondents

but one (Mary), still expressed lockers as a major concern for them. This is also a concern for parents, as well. The guidance office provides for incoming sixth grade parents a document entitled: Answers to Questions Most Often Asked by Teachers,

Parents, and Students about the Middle School. One of the questions deals with lockers and combination locks. It is apparent, even with everything being done; lockers are a problem that continues to be a challenge for both students and parents.

Late to Class: One of the issues that have risen in conjunction with lockers is being late for class, and all of the respondents were concerned with this matter. The slightest difficulty (not being able to get through the crowd to open the locker or being unable to unlock the combination) throws the students into a state of panic, often times only exacerbating the problem. The two concerns appear to be related. Therefore is it the lockers creating the real concern for the students, or is it a fear of being tardy to class, which is masked by the lockers?

The fifth grade teachers of Mark, Matt, Mitch, and Monte warned the boys of the challenges ahead of them. They were told middle school was going to be much tougher, "would be unlike anything they've ever experienced" (Matt, 9-14-99), and they better be ready. These teachers alluded to the fact that once they got to middle school, things would be different. Making sure they had their homework, textbook, and supplies for every class, would now be their responsibility. They would no longer get any breaks and would not be allowed to go back to their locker when they forgot something.

The fears and concerns associated with transition to middle school, of Mark, Matt,

Mitch, and Monte were no greater than the fears and concerns of those respondents

whose teachers' spoke in a more positive light toward middle school. They (the boys), as

the others, were all concerned about lockers and being late for class. Homework, the difficulty of it and being able to keep up with the different classes, was an issue for these boys as well.

Arowosafe & Irvin (1992) believe fifth grade teachers can play a significant role in easing the transition to middle school, because of the rapport and trust developed between teacher and student by year's end. The information related to the respondents, by their fifth grade teacher did not positively or negatively affect either group. Both groups voiced the same concerns for the same issues. All efforts by the fifth grade teachers, of dispelling middle school misconceptions, as well as abating fears and anxieties were not always successful. The practical hints and ideas, along with positive reinforcement, did little to crack the giant enigma known as the middle school.

<u>Practice 2.</u> Parents visit the middle grades school for an evening orientation program while their child is still in elementary school.

"A parent orientation meeting should not only provide information about the school, curriculum, co-curricular opportunities, and "housekeeping" details, but should address effective communication between students and parents" (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992, p. 18). Helping parents understand their child's new environment and school should help more students to adjust to their new location (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Research has shown, "schools that involve parents in elementary-to-middle grades articulation activities are more likely than other schools to maintain strong partnerships with parents, including parents more often as volunteers at school, in governance and decision-making roles, and in learning activities at home (Mac Iver, 1990, p. 460)

Martindale Middle School has an orientation meeting for fifth grade parents, late in the spring, before their child's arrival in the fall. The purpose of this meeting is to

alleviate parent concerns regarding their child's transition to middle school. The organization of the building is discussed, along with curricular issues, teams, and electives. The remainder of the evening is spent answering questions and easing fears.

Only 2 of the 12 respondents mentioned that an adult member of the family discussed middle school and addressed any concerns they might have. Mitch's parents were one of those. He is their first child to enter middle school; therefore they began to elicit information and advice about teachers, teams, etc. After hearing the concerns and warnings, placement was requested and granted for Mitch. When Mitch was asked to tell me everything he knew or had heard about middle school before he came, his reply was "Well, my mom heard that it's kind of like a horror story." (9-9-99, 1) Their discussions with him, regarding middle school expectations, were directed more at how he should behave and not necessarily the positive of what was ahead of him. This coincides with the study by Arowosafe and Irvin (1992). They found, "students interviewed noted that their parents communicated their expectations about the middle school to them, but that these tended to be warnings rather than positive information" (p. 18).

None of the other respondents interviewed mentioned parents as informants, but there was not a direct question asked of them pertaining to that. I believe the results would have reflected a stronger parental involvement if there were. Arowosafe & Irvin, in a follow-up study, interviewed six students in November 1990. The previous study, as well as the follow-up, centered around four questions: 1) informants about school, 2) stress, 3) safety, and 4) student's perception of school. Two-thirds of the students interviewed noted that their parents had discussed transition into middle school with them.

<u>Practice 3.</u> Elementary school students attend regular classes at middle grades school.

"Attending classes at the next level of schooling is a strong transitional practice as it enables elementary students to feel like middle grades students and to see that they will be able to do what students who came before them are doing" (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990, p. 46). This visit not only allows the student to view the school in regular session, "but it also gives them an opportunity to see teachers in action, observe behavior, note homework assignments, and witness something of the school's social structure" (Siehl & Gentry, 1990, p. 21).

For many years Martindale Middle School, according to the CREMS Report, implemented a transition activity that is practiced more than any other activity. Fifty-three percent of those surveyed stated "elementary school students visit middle grades for an assembly" (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990, p. 45). Along with the assembly, the students were taken on a tour of the building. The tour was conducted when the classes were in session; therefore most teachers had their doors closed. Empty halls with lockers, was the impression of middle school, ingrained into the minds of those fifth grade students.

Approximately six years ago the faculty of MMS revised and developed a visitation program that would enhance the orientation process in effect, and better promote the image of the school. The original intent of the program was to bring elementary school students to the middle school and each one buddy/shadow a student for the day. The logistics of the situation, along with buses, prevented the plan from being enacted as was originally intended, and modifications had to be made.

The visitation plan is accomplished within a 3-day period, with two schools attending each day. All fifth grade students are buddies with a sixth grade child. The

role of the buddy is to mentor, answer questions, show their partner around, work the combination lock, introduce them to their teachers, take them to their 3rd hour class and take them to lunch and recess. For the last hour the fifth graders are in the building, they are presented general information about electives and other pertinent information.

In order to assess the effects of this transition practice on the beliefs of the respondents, they were asked what could have been done differently to prepare kids for middle school. Most of those interviewed believed the fifth grade visitation day was a good experience. This is evidenced by the fact, without any prompting from me, they were able to recall what they did, the class they attended, and who their partner was.

Two of the respondents had no idea of what could have been done differently. As one of them said, "Me not being afraid as much and I'm clueless." (Madison, 9-10-99)

Two other respondents, Mary and Mindy, believed that "knowing what it's going to be like, pretty much and actually knowing that everything is not going to go wrong" would have better prepared them for middle school. They were not as concerned with the ins and outs of middle school, but that everything would just be ok. This air of uncertainty was reflected throughout the interview with Mindy and through her interactions in the halls. She enjoys middle school, thinks its fun and wants to be there, but desires those things from elementary school that gave her security. She would feel more comfortable in the middle school if she had a homeroom teacher. She likes having six different teachers, but she wants "just that one teacher you can trust and count on." (9-8-99, 6)

On the other side, Mary was the total opposite. She exudes self-confidence as was evidenced throughout the interview and her interactions in the hall and classroom. As all the respondents, she was scared at first, but now thinks middle school is "totally

awesome" (9-9-99, 6). Her circle of friends has shifted from those she knew in elementary school to the new friends she has now. "I have a lot of new friends. I don't really see my old friends so much, cause they have new friends too" (9-9-99, 6)

Two-thirds of the elementary schools in the Martindale school district are self-contained classrooms. They are with their homeroom teacher all day except for music, PE, library, and computer. The other two schools (Sweetwater & Swift Elementary) switch classes for either one or two subjects. Mindy's fifth grade classroom was self-contained, while Mary attended school at Swift Elementary. "We changed like to math and to language and to science. Actually our homebase was math and social studies and our other teachers were science and language arts. We just switched around like that." (Mary, 9-9-99,7) Students who move into middle grades schools from elementary grades that rotate students between classes at least part of the day reported feeling better prepared to enter a middle level school (Waggoner, 1994).

Martin and Mitch believe there needs to be a program, at the beginning of the school year, enabling students to meet the teachers and other students on their team.

Both of these respondents, as with many of the others, desire the security in knowing there will be someone on their team they know. The insecurity of changing classes, compounded by feelings of isolation, only heighten their levels of anxiety.

Most of the fifth graders entering the middle school are concerned there will not be any people in their classes they know. Due to the size of the school and the number of elementary schools that feed into it, this is a very real possibility. For those students who are shy and withdrawn, this only adds to the anxiety and fear they bring with them. This is evidenced as with the case of Molly. She was very reserved throughout the interview,

and unlike the other respondents, never relaxed. Most of her responses were one-liners; therefore I asked many follow-up questions to obtain the information. Throughout the interview there was one thing that kept resurfacing, her <u>fear</u> about not knowing anyone in her classes. Molly's timidity and shyness forced her to seek her old friends from elementary whenever she could. Most of her friends, her closest friends from last year, were on a different team. She had made a <u>couple</u> of new friends, but still sought the companionship of her old friends at lunch and in the halls.

The remaining six respondents believe extending the visitation program to encompass the entire day at middle school would better prepare kids for their new school environment. They believe attending every class with their sixth grade buddy would enable them "to get more of an idea how the teachers are" (Misty, 9-17-99, 7), see the different classes, and prepare them for the homework.

The fifth grade orientation program allows the incoming students to experience middle school, but not in its fullest. Their encounter with the lockers is limited and the only class they attend with their buddy is 3rd hour. The high numbers of students in exploratory classes, as well as one of the sixth grade teams being on plan during the classroom visit, decreases the number of students that will attend a core curriculum class. This results in many of the concerns and anxieties of the middle school student (lockers, new teachers, changing classes, homework) not being fully addressed during the visitation. The fears and anxieties can not be lessened if the new incoming students are not given the opportunity to experience them in a non-threatening environment. Siehl & Gentry (1990) support this, when they state that orientation programs need to encompass more than just a one-day quick presentation. They believe "it is a long-term process that

begins well before the student reaches the building and continues long after he is safely within its walls" (Siehl & Gentry, 1990, p. 20).

A highlight of the orientation program for the visiting students is the lunch period.

Being able to make their own decisions, in regards to what they eat, was extremely important to them. Seven out of the 12 respondents indicated this was one of the things that excited them about coming to middle school. The food was touted as being good, but what excited them most was the opportunity to make their own choices and decisions. At this stage in the development of the middle school child, this is extremely important.

Respondents

The twelve students that participated in the study were all extremely nervous and apprehensive about attending middle school. They all wanted to be there, each seeking something different from the new environment: friendships and the challenges of a new beginning. For many of the respondents the idea that they were no longer in elementary school, but now in middle school was their driving force.

Peer relationships and established friendships were the strong ties to elementary school that manifested through the data. The strength of this tie (friendship) is supported by Granovetter's (1973) four components which characterize the tie, "time", "intensity", "intimacy", and "reciprocity", along with the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of adolescent growth and development.

Most friendships established in elementary school were begun at an early age and have continued throughout their year's together (time). Research on friendship patterns for young adolescents shows that friends are selected on the basis of similarity (intimacy)

to one's self (Milgram, 1992) and are fiercely loyal (intensity) to their peer group (Clark & Clark, 1994).

Social Networks

Strong ties to the elementary school are already established and in place before transition to middle school. These ties are formed through parents, teachers, siblings, and friends. Most respondents attending the same school for the first six years of their lives have formed relationships that reflect the strength of these ties. According to Granovetter (1973) the "strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (p. 1361). "The more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be" (Homans, 1950, p. 133), and the more similar they are in various ways" (Berscheid & Walster, 1969, p. 69-91). This is evidenced by Misty. She attended Southpark for all of her elementary years establishing and maintaining a very special friendship (time). During the beginning of her fifth grade year, upon finding out Kristin (her best friend) and herself were not going to be in the same classroom she switched teachers (intensity). The fifth grade teacher she was originally assigned was the teacher whose class she had wanted to be in, yet she changed (reciprocity). She ultimately chose friendship and Kristin over her own needs (intimacy). "I was in Ms. Rogers class and that's who I wanted. But my friend and I really wanted to be together, but my friend couldn't change. So I changed so we could be together." (Misty, 9-17-99, 1)

From my interviews with the respondents, along with observations of their classroom and hall interactions, it became more and more apparent that new ties were

being established as the respondents transitioned into middle school. All respondents in some way or another still held on to the culture and security of elementary school, some more than others, while others had developed or were beginning to develop new ties.

This was most prevalently observed through conversation and observation of Mindy. She attended school at Swift Elementary for 4 of her 6 years and attended Southland her fifth grade year. Her mother is a teacher in the Martindale School District; teaching at the elementary school Mindy attended. Though she enjoys middle school and wants to be there, Mindy still maintains a strong tie to elementary school and her mother. She desires to make new friends but still seeks the companionship of her best friend from elementary school. "When you have one teacher, you can always go to that teacher and you won't have to worry. I just like having that one teacher that you can trust. Here you have different teachers so you can go different places, but I just like having that one teacher that I can count on." (Misty, 9-8-99, 6) I believe the strength of Misty's tie to elementary school is made stronger by the presence of her mother. The one teacher or person she can trust and count on would be her mother. The new tie Mindy will begin to establish as she proceeds through her years at middle school, will also be a strong tie. Her aunt, a seventh grade teacher in the building, provides Mindy with the sense of security she is seeking and needs; "that one teacher you can trust and count on."

Molly, as is evident by her interview responses, has also maintained a strong tie to her elementary culture. This tie is reflected in the social network of her peer relationships. Throughout the interview, Molly's pervasive focus was on the anxiety and fear "of not knowing anyone in her classes." She repeatedly reiterated this fact in response to several of the questions. Though she, as all the others desired to be there, her

inability to overcome her shyness and make new friends, forced her to seek the companionship of elementary relationships already established (time, intensity, & intimacy) "I've made a couple of new friends. My closest friends from last year are on different teams, but they have the same lunch as me. So, I hang out with them at lunchtime." (Molly, 9-13-99, 3)

Mark enjoys going to middle school, but more than that he loves the food and loves recess. The ultimate highlight of middle school transition for him entails being allowed to choose what he eats for lunch, getting to have ice cream instead of sherbet, and knowing the playground is huge. For Mark, parts of the transition (lockers) have been difficult, but he has found ways to compensate. He too has developed a strong tie to elementary school. He was excited to be coming to middle school, but despondent about leaving his elementary teachers. Within the six years he spent in that one school, attachments were formed that were hard to let go of. Another strong tie for Mark was his two older brothers that attended school in Martindale. Throughout most of his years in elementary school, Mark attended school with one of his siblings. Scott, now at the junior high school, would not be there to help Mark through the transition and the rough times.

Matt is a good student, loves science and really likes changing classes. The thing that excited him most about coming to middle school was the locker. He appears to be enjoying all aspects of middle school, but the one thing that is missing for him is some of his teachers from elementary school. It was not that he wanted to be back in elementary school again, but he wanted them to be at middle school with him. He appreciated them and what they did for him, even though he was always in trouble.

Madison thinks middle school is fun and believes she is going to have a great year. She attended two different elementary schools and has an older sibling that attended school at MMS. Because of her avid interest for the Internet, she knew a lot of people from the middle school before she came, "but my old friends are still my best friends." (Madison, 9-10-99, 8) As many of the other respondents Madison has maintained a strong tie to the relationships formulated in elementary. With her and her friends being on the same team the tie relationship will continue to be strengthened.

The other respondents in the study have strong ties to the culture of their elementary school as well, but have now begun to develop new ties at the middle school. These ties are influenced by the desire to make new friends and the difference in the culture and organization of the elementary schools.

Mary, Martin, Mitch and Monica attended elementary schools that implemented some of the aspects of the middle school concept, changing classes. The schools varied in the process, but the effect was the same for all four students. The ability to tie across from elementary to middle school was easier for these students because there were fewer differences between the schools. This idea is supported by Waggoner (1994), who found "students from teamed settings in elementary school demonstrated a stronger affiliation in school activities and fewer concerns about transition to middle level schools than students in self-contained classrooms". Martin and Mary evidenced this idea.

Mary views middle school as "totally awesome". In the beginning she was scared to come, but has adapted extremely well to all aspects of it. Her social network of friends has changed from those she had in elementary school. She has moved beyond her elementary relationships, now establishing ties to middle school. Mittman & Packer

(1982) stated that students who view themselves as being off to a good start attribute their success to the making of new friends. "I have a lot of new friends. I don't really see my old friends so much, cause they have a lot of new friends too." (9-9-99, 6)

Martin and Mike had another factor in their favor that enabled them to establish new ties to the middle school. Both boys being new to Martindale in the fifth grade made a double transition. They only attended their elementary school for one year, before transitioning to middle school. As was the case for Mary, Martin and Mike's network of friends centered on those formed in middle school. Being new to the district, there were no long-term friendships that perpetuated the strong tie of elementary school. "I have a lot of new friends. They don't know anybody and I don't know anybody so we just kind of talk and get to know each other. I guess we are just kind of pushed together the same way." (Martin, 9-16-99, 5)

Mitch, Monica, and Monte appear to be in a transition phase in their life. While still holding on to relationships formed during their early years, they have begun to establish new relationships and friendships at middle school. Seeking the security of what was and anticipating the excitement of what is to come establishes their ties to both entities.

Perpetuation Theory

Social network is an important component of Perpetuation Theory. Social networks offer opportunities that either perpetuation the ties established in elementary school or build a foundation for the development of new ties in middle school. The strength of the ties though is not firmly established. Strong ties to elementary school, for some respondents, have evolved and changed as they move through the transition process.

Perpetuation Theory supports the idea that students attending the same elementary school for their first six years will develop strong ties to the culture of that school. It also supports the notion that students new to the district will develop weak ties to their elementary school, thus facilitating transition. Therein lies the disparity. This idea is not applicable to every respondent, because every respondent's situation is different and the strength of a tie has the potential to change. Ties that are considered strong ties to the elementary school may change to new ties at middle school and become strong ties again to middle school, when the child transitions out. There are multiple factors that impact transition and will therefore impact the development of "ties".

Summary

Transition Implementation

Martindale Middle School implements 3 of the 10 activities recommended by the CREMS Report in their orientation program. Research has shown that an extensive articulation program may be beneficial and will "increase the likelihood that students will succeed in their first year in the new school" (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1990, p. 17). Siehl & Gentry (1990) also support this idea, but take it one step further. They believe transition being more than a program, is a process that needs to be ongoing.

The practices implemented at Martindale Middle School impact the transition process to some extent, but have areas of weakness. The visitation program, having the most potential to impact the fifth grade students, does not provide the maximum benefit to the student. Due to limitations of the program, they are not able to fully experience the middle school environment.

Social Networks

The transitioning fifth grade student brings to middle school strong ties firmly established at elementary school. These "ties" are a product of their parents and siblings, peer relationships, and the culture and organization of the school. They influence the attitude, beliefs and actions of the middle school child. Some of the respondents, during transition, begin to develop new ties that move across the organization of the school. They are no longer dependent on those aspects of elementary school that established the strong ties. While others, still cling to ties formulated in elementary school. They are not ready to relinquish the safety and security inherent in the strength of the bond that ties them together. Others respondents in the study are in a stage of transition. They have maintained their ties to elementary school, but are beginning to develop new ties to middle school. Table 4 summarizes the existence of strong and new ties to middle school.

Table 4
Existence of Strong and New Ties

Participants	Elementary School Strong Ties	Middle School New Ties
Madison	X	
Mark	X	
Martin		X
Mary		X
Matt	X	
Mike		X
Mindy	X	
Misty	X	
Mitch	X	X
Molly	X	
Monica	X	X
Monte	X	X

Chapter five will present a summary of the preceding chapters. It will also entail conclusions of the researcher, along with recommendations and implications of this study to theory, research, and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND COMMENTARY

This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations and implications from the data collected in this study. A commentary will be included that reflects the opinion and vision of the researcher for Martindale Middle School.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the transition implementation experienced by middle school students and the impact of those practices on their basic beliefs about middle school. This purpose was accomplished by:

- Data collection from one middle school site using the long interview method and direct observation.
- Data presentation of transition implementation into (1) preparation, (2) basic beliefs, (3) concerns, (4) peer relationships, (5) informants, and (6) excitement of transition.
- Data analysis by site, from two perspectives: (1) Epstein and Mac Iver's (1990)
 Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, and (2) Granovetter's (1973)
 Network Analysis and McPartland and Braddock's (1981) Perpetuation Theory.

Data Needs

Data from a middle school that implements transition practices were needed to achieve the purpose of this study. I needed to interview and observe sixth grade middle school students to gather data on their beliefs about middle school transition.

Data Sources

Data was collected from a middle school site. The school is located in a rural community in the north central section of a Midwestern state. There was a total of 52 certified staff members, three counselors, one media specialist, and two administrators serving approximately 850 students.

Data Collection

Data were collected using two sources: the long interview method and observations.

Twelve participants were interviewed; one boy and one girl from each of the six elementary schools that feed into the middle school. Observation of interactions in the hall and classroom were conducted to validate the findings from the interviews.

Data Presentation

A literature review was conducted before the data collection began. Data were continuously compared against the literature. Data were then categorized into the six emerging themes of transition implementation: middle school preparation, basic beliefs, concerns during transition, peer relationships, middle school informants, and excitement of transition.

Middle School Preparation. The purpose of transition implementation is to ease the transition of the student's passage throughout all levels of schooling. This is accomplished through orientation programs designed to help alleviate problems associated with entering a new environment. Martindale Middle School, to prepare incoming fifth graders for their transition, implements 3 of the 10 transition activities touted as most used, by the CREMS Report. However, even with the transition practices

being implemented, Martindale Middle School students still experience considerable anxiety when they come. Many of them do not believe they were adequately prepared to come to middle school. They believe the programs, such as fifth grade visitation, should be enhanced and expanded upon to better meet their needs and ease their concerns.

Basic Beliefs about Middle School. What students know and hear about middle school before they come will often only heighten their anxiety and fears. Arowosafe & Irvin (1990) found that students entering sixth grade had developed impressions of what middle school would be like prior to entering the new school year. The incoming sixth grade students of Martindale base their beliefs regarding middle school, on the information and misinformation of siblings and peers. Information, in regards to teams, teachers, homework, and changing classes impact their beginning of the school year. They experience tremendous fear and trepidation, to the point of not even wanting to come to middle school, on their first day.

Concerns During Transition. A study by Weldy (1991) indicated middle grades students have many concerns regarding their transition to the new school. Some of the same concerns and more was indicated by the respondents in the study; homework, lockers, late to class, buses, getting lost, and not knowing anyone in their classes. These students had a real fear, heightened by misinformation, as well as little opportunity to address their concerns in a non-threatening environment, of entering the middle school for the first time.

<u>Peer Relationships.</u> The formation of friendships is one of the most significant factors in the adjustment of adolescents to middle school. "A developmental need for socialization is strong for all people, but this need is particularly strong for middle level

students" (Milgram, 1992, p.19). According to Mittman & Packer (1982), middle school students who perceives themselves as doing well attribute their success to peer relationships, both old and new. The excitement of meeting new people and establishing new relationships overrode many of the anxieties brought on by the transition. Most of the respondents looked forward to expanding their circle of friends beyond the scope of what they had in elementary school.

Middle School Informants. Before making the transition to sixth grade most students hear information/rumors from peers and siblings, parents, and teachers. Each group in their own way has the ability to significantly impact transition. The fifth grade teacher, given the rapport and trust established between teacher and student, provides a valuable resource for the integration of information that is of interest and assistance to the incoming fifth grade student. Parents, the source of knowledge and trust for their adolescent child, are the most effective tools of communication for the school. With adequate resources and information, they have the opportunity to reinforce the positive aspects of transition. Siblings and peers often have the greatest impact on the beliefs of elementary students because they are viewed as a credible source of information. Their credibility lies in the fact they have been or presently are a part of the middle school environment.

Excitement of Transition. The transition to middle school brings forth many concerns and anxieties for the middle school child, as well as much anticipation and excitement. New people, friendships, and challenges provoke a myriad of emotions that only serve to heighten their desire to be there. The fear of what may happen is often debilitated by the excitement of what lies ahead. The respondents look forward to

changing classes, and meeting new people: being in middle school and having six different teachers. But, what excites them the most about coming to middle school is lunch. Going through A la Carte, and being allowed to choose what they would like to eat was deemed important by 60 percent of the respondents.

Analysis

Data were analyzed through the lens of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS; Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and through the lenses of Network Analysis (Granovetter, 1973) and Perpetuation Theory (Wells & Crain, 1994). The design of the interview questions were based on Granovetter's (1973) four characteristics of ties: 1) amount of time; 2) emotional intensity; 3) intimacy; and 4) reciprocity. Data collection and analysis were an interactive process that happened simultaneously. Emerging insights formulated during the interviews, refined and enhanced follow-up questions enabling an in-depth collection of new perspectives. During analysis of the data, two perspectives were considered. First, the impact transition implementation practices had on the beliefs of middle school students. Second, the social networks that impact the basic beliefs of students during transition.

Findings

Transition Implementation

Martindale Middle School implements three activities to assist in the transition of fifth grade students into middle school:

- Middle grades and elementary teachers' meet together to discuss curriculum and expectations.
- 2. Parents visit the middle grades school for an evening orientation program while their child is still in elementary school.
- 3. Elementary school students attend regular classes at middle grades school.

The proper implementation of these activities is essential to the foundation of middle school transition and could be more effective if attention is given to the needs of the developing adolescent child. Martindale's program impacts the beliefs of the middle school child and to some degree facilitates transition, but only to a certain extent. The activities, especially the visitation program, are limited in scope and do not fully meet the needs of the transitioning fifth grade child. The other transition practices provide valuable information to the parents and teachers, but stops there. Arowosafe and Irvin (1990) believe parent orientation meetings should not only provide information that assists in transition, but "should address effective communication between parents and students as well" (p. 18).

Social Networks

Attending the same elementary school for six years (time), establishing and maintaining peer relationships (intensity and intimacy) and developing a bond with the teachers (reciprocity), enhances the opportunity for fifth grade students transitioning into Martindale Middle School, to bring strong ties firmly established in the culture of their elementary school. The bond established, though is variable or fluid, changing as the child changes. Not all respondents hang on to the ties established in elementary school. Some have developed new ties to middle school and some are in a transition phase moving from one culture to the other.

Conclusions

Being a middle school educator for 21 years, I have witnessed the impact of transition on fifth grade students entering the middle school. For some students the change was extremely difficult, while others were able to adapt to the new environment

with little or no assistance. This was supported by the research of Simmons, et al. (1979), "some students have serious problems making multiple, simultaneous transitions", and Offer, et al. (1988) "while other students make most changes in their lives successfully" (p.44). The difficulty students' experience during transition led to the impetus of this study being established in the framework of "Why are some students successful during transition and others are not."

In an attempt to effectively answer that question, transition was examined through the lenses of Epstein and Mac Iver's (1990) Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, McPartland and Bradock's (1981) Perpetuation Theory, and Granovetter's (1973) Social Networks. The data and findings of this case study resulted in the following conclusions:

- Transition activities are effective practices if attention is given to the developing needs and concerns of the middle school child.
- Transition activities must be an on-going process that begins long before the fifth grade students enter the building and continues after they are there.
- Transition activities impact the beliefs of middle school students during transition.
- Fifth grade students have strong ties established to their elementary school culture before coming to middle school.
- Some fifth grade students maintain their elementary ties, while others develop new ties to the middle school.
- The strong ties established in elementary school are variable and change as other factors impact the beliefs and the lives of the students.

- 7. There are no established factors that indicate whether a student will maintain their strong ties to elementary school or develop new ties to the middle school.
- 8. Perpetuation Theory is a significant tool for analysis of the data because of the effective nature of the strong and developing ties.

Implications and Recommendations

For research to be significant it must: (1) add to or clarify existing theory, (2) add to the knowledge base and (3) impact practice (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). The following will examine how this case study met each of these requirements.

Theory

Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS, Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990), in conjunction with Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak ties and McPartland and Braddock's Perpetuation Theory, were used to examine the link between social networks and the beliefs of fifth grade students during transition. To begin this process transition practices were examined by using the CREMS Report. This summary entailed the top ten transition activities principals reported they used and is supported by the National Middle School Association, with students, parents, and teachers to ease the transition of students to the middle school (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). This report was useful in that it supported the practices that were already in place at Martindale Middle School. It also provided additional activities, not being implemented at the present time, allowing for refinement and diversification of the program in place.

Social networks were then examined through Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak ties to determine their impact on the beliefs of fifth grade students during transition. This framework was beneficial for determining the strength of the ties that students established

before and during transition to middle school. The ties established are not static and will change as the students begin and end their period of transition. As the student changes and matures, so too will the ties they have developed. Strong ties will become new ties eventually becoming strong ties again.

McPartland & Braddock's Perpetuation Theory (1981) demonstrated how the strength of the bonds established between minorities did not foster or allow change, therefore perpetuating the social inequities established. This was not found to be true for every respondent in the study. Some students maintained and perpetuated their strong ties to elementary school, while others developed new ties to middle school. Each respondent entered middle school with differing beliefs and factors that impacted their transition in different ways. As the student changes so will the perpetuation of their ties being developed.

Research

The findings of this study add to the knowledge base of middle school transition, the impact of social networks on student beliefs, and transition implementation.

Transition is recognized as a vital element in educational program planning affecting the student's successful passage throughout all levels of schooling (Carpenter & Gardner, 1984). "Students who experience adjustment problems tend to be less successful in their school work" (Allan & Mckean, 1984, p. 45). There is no doubt that transition to the middle school is a traumatic event and needs further research and examination.

Further research might entail the examination of an orientation program that is ongoing to determine if the strong ties established in elementary school are still maintained or if more and frequent exposure to the middle school environment will develop new ties that facilitate a change. Further research might also entail interviewing the respondents at three different times, the beginning, mid-way, and end of the year to determine if the strong ties maintained at the beginning of the year are still prevalent or have they also evolved into new ties. I believe it would also be beneficial to examine the tenets of seventh grade students, focusing on how their beliefs have been impacted and or changed throughout their transition from elementary school to middle school to junior high school. A study by Crockett et al. (1989) and supported by Siedman et al. (1994) found that "making two closely spaced changes is indeed more debilitating than making a single transition prior to seventh grade" (p. 201).

Practice

These findings will be significant to educational practice because they will allow middle level schools to reflect on their transition implementation practices and how effective they are in easing the transition to middle school. More than 88 percent of the public school students in the United States enter a new school as they make the transition to middle school (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). This is a significant number of lives that are impacted by choices adults' make regarding their transition.

Transition implementation practices need to be established and implemented within every middle level school. These practices need to be on going and flexible to continue to meet the diverse and ever changing needs of the middle school child. According to Siehl & Gentry (1990), "each school system should survey their incoming students to discover what their anxieties are and then build an orientation program around those concerns" (p. 20). A committee involving administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, and students should be established to maintain and refine the transition process.

Commentary

As a middle school educator for 21 years, I have witnessed the despair, fear, and panic-stricken looks of sixth grade students as they try to maneuver from class to class, open a locker, or balance their books and supplies, trying to figure out where they go next. I have witnessed children become physically ill from the trauma and anxiety of coming to school. I have also witnessed the child who has stood on the curb crying after their parents have dropped them off. These are real fears to these middle school students and they impacted them every day of their young and impressionable lives.

For many students, the outward signs of middle school anxiety were effective indicators there was a problem, but for other appearances were deceiving. For those students, they were able to cope at school, but fell apart once they got home. The results were the same though, and the transition to middle school was more than they could handle. Not all students were influenced in a negative way when coming to middle school. Many of them made the transition with little or no assistance from parents or teachers. This was the driving force behind this study. I wanted to know why some students were successful during transition and others were not.

As my study evolved and I talked to the students about transition, I began to see that the role of Martindale Middle School was to foster the students transition into middle school through many diverse avenues. Limiting ourselves to practices that were not as effective as they could be was limiting the potential of the student. There are areas of implementation that I believe need refinement and improvement. The philosophy of our program needs to reflect the diversity of our students, reflecting their concerns about transition to middle school.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date:

August 31, 1999

IRB #: ED-00-154

Proposal Title:

"MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION: THE STRENGTH OF TIES"

Principal

Adrienne Hyle

Investigator(s):

Donna Smith

Reviewed and

Processed as:

Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Signature:

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

August 31, 1999

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW PROTOCAL

Interview Questions

- 1. Tell me your name and a little bit about yourself.
- 2. Tell me about your year in fifth grade.
- 3. Tell me everything you know or have heard about middle school.

Follow-up Questions

- 1. How did you find out what middle school would be like?
- 2. How does this affect/influence the way you feel about going to middle school?
- Tell me what would make you more comfortable on your first day at middle school.
- Tell me what would make you uncomfortable on your first day at middle school.
- 5. What excites you about going to middle school?
- 6. What concerns you about going to middle school?
- 7. What do you expect to happen at middle school (What do you think your year will be like)?
- 8. How do you think middle school will be different from elementary school?
- 9. How prepared do you think you are to come to middle school?
- 10. What do you think should be done differently to get kids ready for middle school?
- 11. What would you like to have been told before you got to middle school?

APPENDIX C CONCENT FORMS

CONSENT FORM

General Information

Your child has been asked by a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University working on a research project (dissertation) to be interviewed about their concerns/feelings regarding transition to Middle School. The interview will serve two purposes: (1) information collected will be used to create a scholarly project (dissertation) which will examine middle school transition implementation in terms of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle School, and (2) the same information may be used in scholarly publications of the doctoral student and/or the project director.

The interview should last from one to two hours and will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for the child. All participants will be asked the same general questions. The interviews will be audio tape recorded and transcribed by the doctoral student for analysis. Only the doctoral student and project director will review the transcripts. The transcripts will be kept in a locked office until completion of the dissertation at which time they will be destroyed.

Your child will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used in all discussions and in all written materials dealing with interviews and observations.

Subject Understanding

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director.

I understand that the interview will be conducted according to commonly accepted research procedures and that information taken from the interview will be recorded in such a manner that subject cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

I understand that the i	nterview will not cover topics that could damage the well
being of the child.	
I,	, hereby authorize Donna R. Smith to
interview my child as part of a	an investigation entitled Middle School Transition: The
Strength of Ties.	

If I have questions or concerns, I may contact Adrienne E. Hyle, project director, at telephone number (405) 744-9893. I may also contact Sharon Bacher at University

ma State University, Still	lwater, OK 74078;	
consent form. I sign it f	reely and voluntarily.	
Time:	(a.m./p.	
Str	Student Signature	
	_	
_		
Filed: Initials Directo	of Project	
	Studined all elements of this thave provided the subject	

STUDENT AGREEMENT FORM

I,		agree to participate in the research study:
	ansition: The Stren	ngth of Ties, conducted by Donna R. Smith from
Oklahoma State U	niversity. I under	rstand that my participation in the study will be an
interview, conduct	ted by Mrs. Smith	a, about my feelings and concerns during transition to
the Middle School	l. I understand tha	at I have the right to withdraw from the study at any
time without negat	tive consequences	S.
Student's Si	ignature	÷
Date		_

Phone Solicitation

Hello, my name is Donna Smith and I am a sixth grade math teacher at the middle school. I am working on a doctorate at Oklahoma State University in the last phase of my program. My research project/dissertation will examine and analyze the transition implementation experienced by middle school students. As a middle school teacher for sixteen years I have seen the stress and anxiety incoming fifth grade students go through when they transition from elementary to middle school. This is a difficult time for the child, as well as the parent.

The data for the study will be collected through interviews with fifth grade students.

These interviews will assess your child's thoughts and feelings regarding middle school.

They should last from one to two hours and all participants will be asked the same general questions.

I would like your child to participate in the study. All information obtained will be confidential. Only the doctoral student and project director will review the interview transcripts. The transcripts will be kept in a locked office until completion of the dissertation at which time they will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your child from the project at any time.

VITA

DONNA RAE SMITH

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION: THE STRENGTH OF TIES

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Fairfax, Oklahoma.

Education: Graduated from Shidler High School, Shidler, Oklahoma in May 1973; received Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education with a major in mathematics from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 1978; completed the requirements for the Master of Education degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University in May, 1985; completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in December, 1999.

Experience: Taught mathematics at Olive High School in Olive, Oklahoma; taught mathematics at Carney High School in Carney, Oklahoma; currently sixth grade mathematics teacher, Stillwater Middle School in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Professional Memberships: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics,
Oklahoma Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Education
Association, Oklahoma Education Association, Stillwater Education
Association, Phi Delta Kappan, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.