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THE MIDDLE SCHOOL: WHENCE? WHAT? WHITHER?

By Maurice McGlasson

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PROLOGUE

Early Adolescents

Confused by self-doubt, plagued with forgetfulness, addicted to extreme fads, preoccupied with peer status, disturbed about physical development, aroused by physiological impulses, stimulated by mass media communication, comforted by daydreams, chafed by restrictions, loaded with purposeless energy, bored by routine, irked by social amenities, veneered with "wise cracks," insulated from responsibility, labeled with delinquency, obsessed with personal autonomy, but destined to years of economic dependency, early adolescents undergo a critical and frequently stormy period in their lives. (Illinois Junior High Education 1965, Illinois Junior High School Principals' Association)
THE MIDDLE SCHOOL
WHENCE?

Introduction

American educators and the American public have pretty generally agreed over the years that the American educational system comprises the elementary, secondary, and higher levels, and that each of these levels is composed of certain grades or years. However, the agreement is more apparent than real when questions are asked and rationales compared. Do grade levels refer to educational progress of the individual student (based on what criteria?) or to time spent in school? Does grade six mean the same thing today in a ten- or twelve-months school as it did forty or fifty years ago in a seven or eight months school? If the typical range of ability in grade seven (exclusive of the 2 percent extremes at each end) is eight years, who is a typical seventh grader? If instruction is truly individualized and if continuous progress is more than a slogan, what is the meaning of grade levels?

Elementary and Secondary Education

Since approximately 1900 elementary and secondary education have been considered to include grades one through twelve, although there are obvious variations, including early childhood education (nursery and kindergarten) and some community and junior colleges whose grades thirteen-fourteen bear many resemblances to secondary education.
Within the 1-12 span of elementary/secondary education the eleventh and twelfth years have generally been recognized as secondary and the first three years as elementary. At various times in various places various decisions have been made and various points of view have been expressed concerning the great "middle level" of grades four to ten.

By 1900 American schools had become rather definitely committed to an 8-4 organizational pattern of elementary-secondary education, although there were some 7-4 and 9-4 exceptions. However, the 8-4 pattern had hardly received this commitment when questions were being raised and criticisms being leveled. Seventy-three years later individual educators, regional and national organizations, school systems, parents, taxpayers, textbook writers, and students are still grappling with this problem of school organization, which in many respects has been the continuing basis for change in education during the twentieth century.

Roots of the Junior High School

What were the social, economic, and educational demands at the turn of the century out of which came the junior high school, still America's most common middle school numerically speaking? We were changing from a rural, agricultural nation to an urban, industrial one. We had experienced and were continuing to experience major waves of immigration with accompanying needs for citizenship education. Most of the immigrants settled in the cities and went to work in the factories, even though there were many exceptions to this pattern, such as those who settled the great farmlands of Minnesota and the Dakotas. In the city new social problems were developing, the result of a condition which exists any time people are brought together in a crowded situation, whether it be a country, a city, or a classroom. Family influence also was becoming of lesser importance. During prosperous times children ages ten to fifteen were employed; in depression times they were on the streets. Both labor and capital were experiencing tremendous growth. Young people were attending elementary schools, but those who were not going into the professions or business were seeking early employment. Many
were foreign born or first generation Americans, but all had a voice in the solution of American problems. As William Van Til expresses it, the need was for a school between elementary and secondary "that would have characteristics of vocational education, citizenship education, and concern for social problems."

Within the profession the two decades from 1890-1910 included many educational conferences, addresses by educational leaders, and reports from various professional groups, all of which gave a sense of direction to American education for the first half of the twentieth century. Among the major problems considered were such as the following: college presidents, led by Charles Elliot of Harvard, wanted their freshmen at an earlier age and suggested a shortening of the elementary-secondary phase of education. Elementary educators, among themselves at least, admitted to a great duplication in the eight-year elementary school, particularly in grades seven and eight which often were a repetition of grades five and six. Using the European schools as examples, college and secondary school educators suggested that perhaps the secondary phase needed to be lengthened at the expense of the elementary phase. Psychologists suggested that perhaps age twelve (grade seven) was more appropriate than age fourteen (grade nine) for the introduction of secondary methods of teaching and materials of instruction. Even three-fourths of a century ago there was great concern for the dropouts, most of whom departed during the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade years. Other educators were concerned about the contrast between the training of teachers for grade nine and above with the training of teachers for grade eight and below. The program of extracurricular activities was gaining support in the high schools, and many educators felt such activities also offered great potential as learning experiences in grades seven and eight. This was a time of emphasis on practical studies and various forms of vocational education, and who needed this type of education more than the seventh and eighth grade dropouts and those who terminated their formal schooling upon graduation from the eighth grade? Finally, these decades and the ones following were times of rapid expansion of secondary schools with the accompanying problems of facilities; they were opportune times for any desired reorganization of educational programs and structures.
Growth of the Junior High School

Out of these conditions, problems, and opportunities and from the example and influence of Europe came the 1896 Richmond, Indiana, experiment in which grades seven and eight were housed in a separate building and given a new kind of educational program. Other experiments included 6-2-4 systems, a few 6-6 systems, and the so-called first "junior high schools" in Columbus, Ohio, and Berkeley, California, in 1909-10. Following a steady, if erratic, pattern of development, this new junior high school program was so influential that by 1960 76 percent of all the junior and senior high schools in this country were in systems whose organizational pattern was something other than the 8-4 plan (6-3-3, 6-2-4, 6-6). These "reorganized schools" enrolled 82 percent of the students in grades seven through twelve. And then came the Middle School!

Rationales of the Middle School

The late 1950s and the decade of the 1960s saw mounting criticism of the junior high school: it housed the wrong students, had lost sight of its transitional nature and purpose, and was too subject-matter oriented. In short, it was merely an imitation of the senior high school. In suggesting another realignment of grade levels, the proponents of the new "Middle School" cited the growth and development of today's youth that seemed to indicate they are maturing earlier, both physically and socially, than they were fifty years ago. Thus the sixth graders of today are equivalent to the seventh graders of a half century ago. At the same time (following Sputnik) Middle School proponents, in what seemed to be an inconsistent rationale in light of the junior high school imitation criticism, cited the need for a more rigorous academic program for ninth graders, implying that the rigorous program would more likely be developed in the senior high school than in the junior high school. Thus the Middle School would contain grades six to eight or five to eight.

At any rate, following these basic tenets the Middle School movement met with almost spectacular success during the 1960s, both with local problems first and subsequently with the educa-
tional case for the Middle School, which was woven into the fabric of local sociology, economics, and government. Thus the Middle School has served as a partial solution to problems other than educational problems, and within the educational program it has served as a partial solution to administrative problems rather than curricular problems. Expediency has been the key word, but it has not necessarily been a negative one.

In New York city and Philadelphia, for example, the Middle School has been used as a vehicle moving toward earlier racial integration. In the 6-3-3 pattern formerly characteristic of both cities, the student moved from his neighborhood elementary school to a junior high school, drawing from a larger geographic district and thus a more varied population at the beginning of the seventh grade. In a 4-4-4 pattern this same move occurs two years earlier, when racial and cultural integration can be brought about in a less forced manner.

Physical facilities have also been a major factor in many school systems, particularly in smaller ones in which changes in organizational pattern are easier to effect than in large systems. School boards have had to take a critical look at the local situation in an attempt to answer the question: "How can we utilize the physical facilities presently available and reasonably available in the near future to provide the best possible program of education for boys and girls?" Current enrollments, projected enrollments, birth rates, and local economic factors all combine to provide bases for reasonable guesses in some cases. In some school districts introducing public kindergartens for the first time, 1-6 elementary schools become K-5 schools, 7-9 junior high schools become 6-8 middle schools, and 10-12 senior high schools become 9-12 senior high schools.

School district legalities have also affected grade level organization in some instances. In parts of Illinois, for example, a dual district pattern exists, an elementary school district and a secondary school district, each with its own school board and administration, covering the same geographic area. Thus it is much easier locally to operate a 6-8 middle school, all of whose grades fall within the elementary district, than a 7-9 junior high school, whose grades are divided between the elementary and secondary districts. In larger cities which have traditionally followed an 8-4
pattern, it is usually simpler to change to the Middle School and a 5-3-4 pattern, leaving the senior high schools intact.

For many years junior high school principals have complained that they must operate two programs—one for grades seven and eight, and one for grade nine, because grade nine students' records must become a part of the four-year high school transcript for purposes of college entrance. The problem has been more imagined than real, but nevertheless it has been mentioned often as one of the administrative advantages of a Middle School. A simpler solution than a restructuring of grade levels, if transcripts were the only problem, would be for junior and senior high school principal groups to notify college admissions officials that they were changing to three-year transcripts. Where else would colleges get the students than from high schools?

And then some elementary educators look upon the Middle School as merely another power grab by secondary educators. Fifty years ago the junior high school (identified with secondary) took away grades seven and eight. Today the Middle School (identified with secondary) comes to take away grade six and perhaps grade five.

From Whence to What

Briefly, then, this is the "whence" of the middle level schools—more than 8,000 schools, about three-fourths of which are known as "junior high schools" and about one-fourth of which are known as "Middle Schools." The "pure" junior high school is considered to include grades seven to nine, and the "pure" Middle School includes grades six, or five, to eight. Then there are the 7-8 "intermediate schools," and the 7-12 "junior-senior high schools," and, of course, there are many other variations including 8-12; 6-9; 7-8; 9-10; 11-12; the seventh grade center, the ninth grade center, 6-7, 8-9; and so on. Although in each district an educational "case" has no doubt been built for the organizational pattern, the fact remains that in almost every instance the pattern results from influences other than the educational program, usually building facilities and enrollments. And the name is one considered best for the school district. In many districts 6-8 schools are known as
junior high schools and in other districts 7-9 schools are known as Middle Schools. Thus grade levels and names give no clues as to the school and its program, and we must look more carefully into the question, "What is a Middle School?"

Samuel H. Popper provides the transition from our question of "whence" to our question of "what" in the following paragraphs.

What over the years we have come to know as the Junior High School is institutionally America's Middle School. What is at issue now in professional dialogue is not whether there shall be a junior high school or a middle school, a semantic distinction without a difference, but rather which grades are functionally appropriate for this unit of public school organization.

From the perspective of organization theory, and out of a concern for the human condition in American society at early adolescence, a meaningful resolution of this issue has to begin with a rigorous definition of the differentiated function that is expected of a middle school in the division of labor of a public school system. Otherwise, we shall continue to mismanage the middle school as a formal system, do it violence as a social system, and abuse its uniqueness as an institutional, or cultural, system.

For in point of fact, the concept of a middle school is not of American origin. Middle schools were in existence before they were added to the structure of public school organization in the United States. However, the United States was the first cultural system to make dominant a psychosocial orientation in middle school structure and process. The learning of cognitive skills was by no means neglected, but the paramount valuation in middle school education did shift to the affective domain. An analysis and explication of the cultural thrusts which account for its radical adaptation in American society is, therefore, the burden of this book.

Its pioneers in the United States meant the middle school to serve as a transitional unit between childhood education in the elementary school and later adolescent education in the high school. Pupils in-between these two stages of maturation, standing at the threshold of puberty, were to be assigned to a middle school. Because of historical accident and tradition, but not out of any substantive relevance to the American adaptation of the middle school concept, this unit of public school organization today is more commonly known as a junior high school.

Only in the United States and Canada is the middle school unit called a junior high school. But even in the United States, there is a growing inclination to dissociate the misapplied name of junior high school from early adolescent education. The institutional authority of the American middle school resides, after all,
with the social value in educative process to which it gives expression and not with the name by which it is called. Therefore, in an institutional frame of reference, physiological and psychological science alone possess the necessary competence to set the functionally appropriate period of socialization for this unit of school organization.¹

WHAT?

Introduction

Should a school designed for early adolescents enroll students of different ages and grade levels today than it did fifty years ago? And is there any reason to assume that a middle level school should enroll only those students who are early adolescents? In the past decade Middle School proponents have answered the first question with a resounding “Yes” and the second question with a less emphatic “No.”

For Whom and Why

Those educators who favor a 6-8 Middle School point out that boys and girls today reach the onset of adolescence at least a year and perhaps two years sooner than they did fifty or seventy-five years ago. Thus a rearrangement of grade levels is a necessity. Those educators who favor a 7-9 junior high school either deny changes in maturation rate or admit to changes of only a few months, not enough to justify a rearrangement of grade levels. Those who favor a 5-8 Middle School either claim a two-year change or abandon the idea that a middle level school is only for early adolescents. The evidence on the question of physical change is certainly not clear, and the lack of clarity provides ample opportunity for disputation.

But is adolescence physical-pubertal only? The answer obviously is “No.” It is also psychological and social-cultural. Are the students in grades five through nine ready to assume more
responsibility in learning more decision making about their own educational experiences? Middle School proponents answer affirmatively with the implication that opportunities for greater student responsibility and decision making can and will work more in a 5-8 or 6-8 Middle School than in a junior high school. Furthermore, grade nine students will have greater opportunity, they believe, in a senior high school. Junior high school educators point out that such opportunities are as great or greater for all students in a junior high school arrangement. Have changes occurred in social maturation rates which tend to favor placement of sixth graders in Middle Schools rather than in elementary schools and ninth graders in a senior high school rather than in a junior high school?

There seems to be an inconsistency, if not a contradiction in Middle School literature on this point. One claim is that the Middle School helps to slow down the growing up process (implying that the slowing down is good) by moving the more socially sophisticated sixth graders out of the elementary school into the Middle School and the more socially sophisticated ninth graders out of the junior high school into the senior high school; in each case undesirable influences on the underclassmen are eliminated. However, little if anything is said about what happens to the sixth and ninth graders under the "sophisticated" influence of their elders in the Middle School and high school. And, of course, a more careful differentiation needs to be made between social growth and social pressures. Is the Middle School level designed to bring together the "alikes" or is it truly the time and place when and where the greatest "unalikes" gather?

Much research over the years has indicated the importance of grade nine and age 14 in the development of leadership potential, and the obvious accompanying conclusion is that more leadership opportunities exist for ninth graders in a junior high school than in a senior high school. Middle School proponents immediately refute this claim by pointing out that since eighth graders of today are the equivalent of yesterday's ninth graders, no problem exists under the new pattern of grade levels.

Many other questions remain, with research providing only hints, suggestions, contradictory answers, or additional questions. Are the developmental tasks of adolescence the same today as
they were twenty years ago? Do boys and girls simply approach them earlier? Are the characteristics of boys and girls today the same as they were more than fifteen years ago in Gesell’s youth of ten to sixteen, with only some outward manifestations taking different forms? Undergraduate teacher education candidates seem to think so as long as they are unaware of the publication dates of the materials. Are there sex differences of great enough magnitude to justify suggesting different groupings for boys and girls? At least some research has so indicated. Are there differences in a student’s self-image that are provided or at least fostered by being enrolled in an “elementary school,” “Middle School,” “junior high school,” or “senior high school”? Generally speaking, research seems to indicate that it depends on the individual school and its program rather than its level or name. And, finally, are there differences among boys and girls of different communities and school districts which may justify or encourage one pattern of organization as contrasted to another one—differences between rural and urban youth, inner city and suburban, East and West, North and South, agricultural and industrial, multi-racial and uni-racial, multi-cultural and uni-cultural, and so on? What is the evidence locally?

Functions

A rather careful review of research and literature in junior high school/Middle School education from the turn of the century reveals thirty-five or forty statements of function which have held greater or lesser prominence over the years. Most of these have centered around a “transitional” program and meeting the “needs of early adolescents.” One of the great points made by Middle School proponents is that the junior high school lost sight of its transitional program and became a high school in nature and program. And the junior high school proponents point out the inconsistency in this position of the middle schoolers who are, in turn, emphasizing that academic needs and intellectual challenge for grades five and six are better provided for in a Middle School climate. And then the question arises whether the needs of early adolescents have changed in a half century or have remained basically the same. Further, has the inclusion of many who are
not yet early adolescents brought a shift in functions or emphases?

Apparently there is little difference in the functions of junior high schools and Middle Schools. If the junior high school seems more aware of functions and has a greater sense of direction, this is understandable because it is an older, more established institution. If the junior high school literature tends to emphasize statements of function to a greater extent than does Middle School literature, this is understandable because the Middle School has accepted the written statements of junior high school functions but has attempted to change the implementation of those statements. If the junior high school is more aware of the guidance and vocational functions, this is understandable because of the presence of the ninth grade. If these schools are more alike than different in their statements and understanding of functions, this is understandable because they are both middle level schools.

At any rate, one of the beneficial results of the recent Middle School movement has been the re-look at the middle level of education in most school districts. Regardless of whether any change is made in organizational pattern, the program will profit from this study and concern. And boys and girls will be the winners. In these recent studies more schools are beginning to think in terms of "purposes and functions" rather than "philosophy and objectives." Perhaps this is merely a semantic difference, yet it seems to help teachers and administrators look at educational goals in terms of the local practicalities and local needs.

Of course, the classic statement of junior high school functions, excluding the very early writers, was that of Gruhn and Douglass in 1947, still referred to in almost all writing about junior high and Middle Schools. Perhaps a look at these six general functions or services might reveal even more similarities or perhaps some differences: integration, exploration, articulation, socialization, guidance, and differentiation. It is necessary to keep in mind that these functions are not unique to the middle level but present specific emphases or focuses. However, between the basic learnings of the elementary years and the high degree of specialization of the senior high school years may lie the greatest opportunity in education for the provision of these services.
In integration of learning the junior high for many years experimented with various approaches of block-of-time and core courses. In more recent years both Middle Schools and junior high schools have attempted team teaching, humanities courses, and all-school mini-courses or curriculum themes. And the open concept of the Middle School has lent itself more easily toward such integration. One of the major problems associated with such approaches has been that of teacher preparation. In the final analysis it may be students rather than teachers who force curriculum organization toward some form of integration of learning and thus change both curriculum organization and teacher preparation.

If exploration is thought of in terms of specific courses only, such as technical arts and homemaking, then in many systems a Middle School might provide greater opportunity for grades six and five. If, on the other hand, exploration is a phase of all courses, then the realization of the function depends on teachers and teaching methods rather than grade level organization.

Articulation, originally thought of and in some instances even called "transition," was designed to provide an orderly, planned, gradual movement of students and teachers from elementary methods and materials to secondary methods and materials. Recent Middle School proponents have suggested that the junior high school lost sight of this function and merely provided an abrupt break two years earlier than it had occurred in the 8-4 pattern of grade level organization. Now the Middle School is reemphasizing the articulation or transition function, but there is evidence that indicates Middle Schools may be following in the same direction as junior high schools by creating the self-contained classrooms in grades five and, in some cases, six or the complete compartmentalization of those grades in some Middle Schools.

If the function of socialization is thought of in terms of the narrow definition of social sophistication, then the Middle School may be helpful by reducing emphasis on parties, dances, marching bands, and athletics. On the other hand, if socialization is thought of as social experiences designed to help boys and girls participate in an increasingly effective manner in an increasing number of home, school, and community activities—learning how
to live and work with others in our complex social order—then both types of schools have essentially the same responsibilities.

Guidance is a major function of both types of schools, although some research indicates a greater awareness of this in junior high schools, probably in the more highly organized phases of guidance and probably because of the presence of the ninth grade.

It may well be in the function of differentiation that the Middle School has provided the greatest advance in achievement through its emphasis on individualization of learning, teaching, and pupil progress. Of course, this is a major generalization; it is presented with full knowledge of the fact that many junior high schools have moved in this direction also.

Program

Through what kind of program does the Middle School propose to achieve these functions? The program of the Middle School reads essentially like that of the junior high school insofar as subjects or curriculum areas are concerned. In fact, Middle School claims in terms of program sound much like some of the advantages claimed in earlier years for a six-year junior-senior high school. The Middle School proposes to bring "the academics" to grades five and six, yet it criticizes the junior high school for this very emphasis. Research studies have indicated that in most cases the listing of offerings in a Middle School is essentially the same as in the junior high school which preceded it, with the possible exception of introducing homemaking and technical arts earlier. In more general terms, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools suggests that both junior high schools and Middle Schools should provide "an intellectually-responsible, needs-centered, guidance-oriented, exploration-conscious program of learning."

It is the students who ask the basic questions in curriculum for which educators have sought answers that have proved to be so elusive over the years. For example, the student asks, "Why do I have to take this stuff?" This is a basic curriculum question. Or the student points out, "We had this stuff last year."

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This is a perceptive point of view in relationship to curriculum organization. Thus we are led to the next question, "Is there any difference between the Middle School and junior high school in the organization of curriculum?"

**Curriculum Organization**

Does the Middle School provide a better transition from the self-contained classroom of the elementary school to the complete departmentalization of the senior high school than the junior high school? If so, how? In some Middle Schools grades five and six are still essentially self-contained classrooms, merely having moved from an elementary building to what is called a Middle School building. On the other hand, in some Middle Schools grade five and particularly grade six are so highly departmentalized that they could fit very well, at least organizationally, into a senior high school. How can the transition be made most effectively?

Those junior high schools which kept in mind these functions usually tried through some version of a block-of-time or a core-type program. Updated, this has become in some junior high schools an academic program operating through two major resource centers—one in language arts and social studies and the other in science and mathematics. The Middle School, perhaps more than the junior high school, has tended to feature mini-courses, learning packets, so-called independent or directed study, team teaching, continuous progress, individualized instruction, and variations on the humanities theme and organization. The open philosophy of the Middle School, certainly more easily implemented in a building constructed for such a program than in a building inherited from a senior high school, has also encouraged major changes in curriculum organization, especially in regard to teacher relationships.

**Instruction**

Unfortunately, in too many Middle Schools the major change has been in the name of the school rather than in the program of
instruction. In these schools, methods have continued to be elementary or secondary, depending on which method prevailed in the schools which served as predecessors of the Middle School. Fortunately, many Middle Schools have conceptualized and achieved greater individualization or personalization of instruction combining the best of elementary and secondary methods. For example, many Middle Schools feature various types of student grouping for various instructional purposes, a greater degree of student independence in study, greater student participation in decision making about content and time, greater emphasis on learning activity packets, and greater emphasis on individual rates of progress. This is not to say that such changes are not found at all other levels, including the junior high school. Such changes in the teaching-learning process are naturally accompanied by changes in expectations of teachers, students, parents, and administrators in student conduct and in student evaluation, marking, and reporting. Thus, in a developing Middle School all four groups are reassessing and rethinking the teaching and learning process.

Teaching Staff

The junior high school has never been able to develop a program of teacher preparation designed for that level, approved by state departments of education, and implemented by teacher education institutions. Of course, there have been a few bright exceptions to this generalization, but not many. Preparation in most cases has been either the traditional preparation for the elementary school or the traditional preparation for the secondary school with some student teaching done in some junior high schools by those who lost out on the senior high school assignments. Senior high school teachers are accused of being subject matter oriented with little understanding of, and even less interest in, their students. Elementary teachers are praised for their student orientation but are accused of lacking enough depth in their subject matter fields to teach meaningfully in today's world of specialization, especially in the upper grades, which may fall within the Middle School or junior high school.
Can the middle level educators, both Middle School and junior high school, working together in a different world of teacher supply and demand, accomplish what has not been accomplished in teacher preparation in the past seventy-five years? Can the new Middle School provide enthusiasm for new approaches, an answer to the value of team teaching, both in the discipline and in an interdisciplinary course, and an answer to that age-old battle between content fields and professional education? It is interesting to note the different tendencies toward interpretations of the two schools in the regional accrediting associations which accredit middle and junior high schools. For example, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has tended to classify junior high schools and Middle Schools as secondary rather than elementary. On the other hand the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has tended to classify junior high schools and Middle Schools as elementary rather than secondary. Nowhere is this more evident than in teacher preparation.

Perhaps the finest examples of in-service education of teachers in this century have come in junior high schools and Middle Schools, chiefly by virtue of necessity. Having practically no teachers prepared for this level, junior high and Middle School principals have in some cases devised and implemented excellent programs to help their teachers come to an understanding of this middle level school, its program, and its students. Even here, however, the school has in subtle ways reflected the training of the principal himself—elementary or secondary. At any rate the problem of teacher preparation remains, and perhaps one of the greatest possible contributions of the Middle School lies in that field.

Guidance

As one reads the history of the junior high school and the history of the guidance movement, one is struck with the similarities of the two histories and by their interwoven development. Certainly, guidance has always been an important phase of the junior high school program. The Middle School promises the services of counselors one or two grades earlier, and perhaps this
is true, although many elementary schools at the present time already offer such specialized services. Regardless of the grade level pattern of organization the roles of teachers in guidance certainly remain the same—a guidance point of view, the awareness of career opportunities related to student interest and ability in the field being taught, the task of the classroom teacher in both gathering and disseminating information, as well as helping students learn how to study better in the subject fields, a knowledge concerning referral opportunities and procedures, and finally, the realization that regardless of the organization of guidance most students will come to some teacher first. The junior high school emphasized the importance of guidance in the homeroom, the block-of-time, and core-type programs. On the other hand, the Middle School tends to emphasize the importance of guidance through a home base and team teaching arrangements. There is some evidence that a block-of-time program brings the individual student closer to an individual teacher, which is probably the best first step in any guidance situation.

The history of guidance at this level seems to indicate that we have moved from a vocational-educational emphasis to a psychological-personal emphasis and then to what is now considered a balanced program. The recent emphasis on career education throughout the educational span, with many similarities to the old life adjustment program, has brought us to a reassessment of the importance of guidance in the total program. Certainly career education in the middle level school does not necessitate final unchangeable decisions but rather an awareness of, or consciousness of, career opportunities related to individual interests and abilities. Perhaps the greatest teacher guidance role is in what Conant called the “constant minor social crises.” In all these aspects of guidance we have tended to de-emphasize the importance of the classroom teacher, while research has continued to indicate his great importance. Perhaps the Middle School will help to affirm the importance of the classroom teacher in guidance.

**Student Activities**

The Middle School proposes to offer what are called “less sophis-
ticated” student activity programs, implying a slowing down of the social growing up process. One of the great criticisms of junior high school student activity programs has been that they are simply imitations of the senior high school. As one example of the lower, less sophisticated programs in some Middle Schools is the absence of dances. Another example in some Middle Schools is the absence of inter-scholastic athletics. However, in many Middle Schools both of these activities continue. In both junior high schools and Middle Schools the student activity program based on nine-weeks interest or exploration groups bears a close resemblance to mini-courses. All of which merely points up the difficulty in today’s schools in differentiating between activities and curriculum, whether it be in a junior high school or a Middle School. The difference might occur in the importance which is attached to a four-year high school transcript rather than a three-year transcript.

Administration

Whether it be in a Middle School or a junior high school, the major function of administration is the planning for, and most effective use of, time, space, personnel, content, and methods and media. The differentiations among these five factors probably represent the differences between junior high schools and Middle Schools. Although all of the following are generalizations—excellent exceptions can be seen in schools of all types of organizational patterns—the following descriptions seem somewhat accurate. The time element seems to be less rigid in Middle Schools than junior high schools. Space seems to be somewhat more open in Middle Schools than junior high schools. There seems to be more flexibility in use of personnel in Middle Schools than in junior high schools. There seems to be less emphasis on content in Middle Schools than in junior high schools. There seems to be greater emphasis on methods and media in Middle Schools than in junior high schools. Although in all fairness to junior high schools, it should be pointed out that this level has probably produced more experimentation and variations in procedures in its history than other levels and has perhaps been the leader in
much research which is now being implemented in the Middle School.

**Building and Facilities**

Traditionally the junior high school has inherited the old senior high school building, condemned for use by senior high school students but found to be highly satisfactory for junior high school students. The Middle School, in contrast, has emphasized a different kind of building featuring open space, which of course necessitated new construction. One of the great advantages of the Middle School presented to taxpayers has been the cheaper construction cost of buildings using open space and flexibility. How much relationship this has actually had to curriculum and how much effect this has actually had on programs is difficult to determine. However, there is no question but that the middle school concept has had great influence on school building construction.

**Definition**

The Middle School can be defined in terms of architecture, program, or grade levels included. The last one is the easiest to handle—a simple statement that a Middle School, in contrast to a junior high school, eliminates grade nine and adds grade six or grades five and six. And this definition by grade level is the one most frequently used.

Some of the earliest Middle Schools received their greatest publicity because of the newer architectural designs they used, particularly the open spaces designed to implement a more open program. Although this definition has tended to lose significance, it has not lost its impact on school program, regardless of grade levels included—elementary, middle, or secondary.

Probably the best definition of a middle school must come in terms of program—a program of transitional education which assists boys and girls to move from elementary to secondary education with maximal success. It may include various grade levels or it may be non-graded, depending upon the characteristics and needs of boys and girls of any school district. It must include
in greater or lesser proportion in earlier or later years the more desirable aspects of both levels of education of which it is composed.

One major Middle School research study described it this way in reference to accreditation: "By setting these standards the North Central Association is endeavoring to pull all junior high schools up to the standards which are described in the literature for the middle schools. In a real sense, then, future accreditation of junior high schools becomes contingent upon the extent to which they adhere to middle school specifications. This is a highly realistic approach, since what really matters is not the label on the bottle, but what the bottle contains."

Thus what actually exist are "middle level schools," and our answer to "Whither?" must be in those terms.
WHITHER?

Introduction

Although the current trend in most writing about education is to view it with alarm at the least and complete despair at the most, what is happening in these schools for the middle segment of the American educational pattern can perhaps lend some basis for optimism. The following few pages are not statistical results of sophisticated research; rather they are reflections, points of view, and conclusions of one who has spent most of his professional career working in, studying, and teaching about these intermediate schools. In addition, within the past three years, it has been his privilege to visit more than sixty-five middle level schools and programs for early adolescents in various parts of the country.

Practicalities and Pragmatics

Educators and schools have not helped themselves in the eyes of parents and the general community by the "much ado about nothing" junior high school versus Middle School controversy. However, in the sense that the middle school development has brought this level of education more sharply into focus for educators, parents, and the public, everyone will profit, especially the boys and girls. And one major difference in the Middle School movement today in contrast to the junior high school movement of fifty to seventy-five years ago is that elementary educators are not merely giving up, as they gave up grades seven and eight,
but are becoming a vital part of the Middle School. In fact, some of the best Middle School materials published to date have come from elementary educators, both individuals and groups.

Granted, there are differences in grade levels extending from five to nine (and possibly even four to ten), but the name is used in any way desirable for the local situation. There are many junior high schools which come closer to the ideals of the Middle School literature than do almost any Middle Schools. On the other hand, there are many Middle Schools which encompass all of the "evils" ascribed to the junior high schools, plus a few of their own. There are "junior high schools" which include the grade levels usually associated with the Middle School, and there are "Middle Schools" which include the grade levels usually associated with the junior high school. Some major school systems in this country which are currently operating on the junior high school pattern are not about to change, even though the "Middle School" has received much of the publicity in the past decade.

At any rate, the decision about grade levels is almost always a local one based on expediency, usually building facilities, so why not simply build the best program possible for the "middle segment" as it exists in the local school community? This can be done in full honesty with the local public. If accomplishments can be made, if goals can be achieved under the new name "Middle School," then use it. But the public must and does understand that there is no magic in the new name. The miracle, if it occurs, comes about in an improved educational program for this level based on sound educational principles and practices used with a slightly younger group of students. Grade levels as we have known them will become increasingly less important anyway in the more individualized education of tomorrow. Perhaps one of the greatest services which could be performed for this level would be to find a school name which would hold glamour and excitement for the students, meaning for the parents and community, and professional respectability for educators.

And, of course, some writers have in recent years suggested that we rid ourselves of the "ghetto of adolescents" which we have created in middle level schools by returning to the smaller, neighborhood 1-12 school in which students see and live with all stages of growth in a more natural situation. Some alternative
schools also propose certain elements of this philosophy or point of view. However, in all likelihood, American education will continue to use middle level schools for many years to come, and our responsibility is to make them the best possible. Thus in answering “Whither?” we should be thinking of “middle level” schools, including both junior high schools and Middle Schools. The growth of the Middle School concept during the past decade has been a major factor leading to the careful study of the purposes and goals of this level of education in almost all school districts.

In many cases the study has produced a new school district statement of purposes, functions, and goals for the middle years. At the same time has come a full realization that the implementation of the district statement may vary widely from school to school. How different this is from the time when the goal was to make all junior high schools in the district as alike as possible!

**Humanization of the Educational Program**

In many schools and for many teachers the result of this new look at purposes and goals has been a greater concern for students and a greater humanization of the educational program. What are some of the manifestations of this concern—in student and faculty personnel, in program, and in administration?

*In Student and Faculty Personnel*

The student has voice in making decisions about the use of his time. This has occurred more often and to a greater extent in those schools which have adopted some variation of large group-small group instruction and independent study. However, innovations of this sort have also had their effect on program structure and organization in the more traditional classroom. In some schools which have adopted the “LG-SG-IS” pattern with too little preparation of students and faculty, the results have been temporarily chaotic, or even permanently chaotic, leading to a retreat to previous program patterns. On the other hand, in those schools which have had a believing faculty and a program of preparation for students and parents, results have been encourag-
ing. Most consistent teacher approval has come for the small group and independent study phases of the program. Less consistent approval for, and less use of, the large group approach seems evident, although it is still vital in some aspects of the program, such as resource persons, testing, films, and special lectures. As students and teachers gain experience in this type of program, more time seems to be given to small groups and independent study, and less time is spent in large groups. Just as students need to grow in their abilities to make wise decisions concerning the use of their time, so teachers need to grow in the most effective use of their time in working with students in groups and as individuals. Such changes force teachers to reassess their roles in the classroom and the amount of time they spend in various aspects of the teaching situation, whether in a so-called “innovative program” or in the more typical classroom.

Team teaching has also brought new teacher-teacher relationships as well as teacher-student relationships. In those situations where adequate planning time has been provided for the team and where good human relationships have existed within the team, the results have apparently been quite satisfactory. However, much of the concern and much of the research seems to have been directed toward the teaching rather than toward the learning.

Efforts to provide a greater humanization within the middle level school have also led to a reemphasis of the guidance roles of the classroom teacher. For the first time since the introduction of counselors into the intermediate schools, there is now a renewed recognition of the importance of the guidance point of view on the part of all faculty members. Although a certain element of distrust between counselors and teachers probably remains in many schools, there now seems to be much greater understanding of each other’s role in guidance and greater rapport between the two types of personnel. As guidance by teachers is reemphasized, some schools are taking a second look at block-of-time and core-type programs of instruction. If the commitment to the individual student that someone will know him well and be vitally concerned about him is a high priority, there is some evidence that the block-of-time program provides a better opportunity for this than team teaching.
Various formal and informal patterns of differentiated staffing have also led to various patterns of personnel utilization. The use of lay assistants, interns, volunteers, para-professionals, and other types of part- and full-time personnel has also produced major changes in the traditional roles and activities of the teacher. And even in those schools where such added personnel are not used, teachers are rediscovering that the older student and the brighter student can be used as teacher assistants.

In Program
What has happened in the program itself? Generally speaking, there have been three major emphases—individualization of instruction, integration of learning experiences, and teacher involvement in planning. Individualization of instruction has taken many forms, including learning packets, special programs, exploratory experiences, computer and television assisted instruction, and continuous-program, non-graded instructional patterns.

Learning packets, a variation of programmed learning, have been largely produced by teachers in the local system, although commercial materials are available. Their use varies from make-up work to special interest enrichment opportunities to total course instruction. More and more programs for special groups of students are becoming available—within the school and outside the school—for those students who apparently cannot profit from the regular school program. These vary from part-day to full-day programs for bright, slow, and handicapped students. Exploration, one of the early and persisting functions of the middle level, is gaining a new emphasis, not only through new approaches to traditional subjects but also through mini-courses, other short course offerings, and increased short-term opportunities in the student activity program. The use of computer and television assisted instruction, combining the computer and television approaches, varies from required units to special interest units to full course instruction. All of these variations of individualized instruction provide an opportunity for a continuous progress, non-graded program of instruction, if the school so desires; however, they do not necessarily require such an approach. Each one also emphasizes providing for individual differences within the total learning program. Some of them also emphasize learning in the
individual situation rather than in the group situation, with all sorts of psychological and philosophical implications.

Increased relationships among the various areas of learning have occurred through the use of interdisciplinary teams, block-of-time arrangements, unified arts courses, and humanities courses. With the exception of block-of-time, each of these provides a far different arrangement than the isolated single-teacher, single-subject organization of education. Teachers involved in these programs can no longer live in the isolation of their own subject-matter and their own room. Instead they must believe in and gain satisfaction from working with other teachers in helping students and themselves gain an understanding of the relationships among the various areas of learning. Perhaps the middle segment of our educational pattern offers the best possible opportunity for this type of learning and this type of teaching.

The third great change in the program has come about through increased teacher involvement in materials development and curriculum planning. As in the other two processes, there are many avenues of involvement here, including team-developed units and other materials, courses of study and other materials developed through extended-year and summer planning, mini-grants for specific idea or program development, short-term teacher leaves for specific materials and idea development, and other forms of in-service education.

In Administration
What are some of the manifestations of this concern as exemplified in middle level school administration? One obvious answer is the greater participation of faculty and sometimes even students in administrative planning. To a lesser degree such participation also occurs in some schools in the decision-making process itself. One type of such participation is represented in a small, informal, administrative council composed of administrators and teacher representatives (and perhaps student representatives). Another type is a larger, more highly structured advisory council composed of administrators, elected faculty representatives, parent organization representatives, and perhaps students. Administrative use of the small faculty group for many aspects of program and administrative planning, in contrast to depending
on the large faculty meeting, has also been a development in many schools during the past decade. Another partial answer has come in the opening up of the school day, semester, and year through various adaptations and changes in the traditional calendar and schedule. These range from such simple approaches as back-to-back scheduling of certain courses to computer-assisted, non-graded, daily-demand schedules for individual students. The important point is that recognition is given to the fact that the schedule represents the school’s purposes in action. Many administrators have once again returned to serious study of the intriguing question: how can time, personnel, and content best be organized in order that teaching and learning can be most effective and enjoyable?

Teacher education in its in-service form has long been a major concern of the middle segment of our school system, because it is this level for which, in reality, there has been no particular program in the pre-service phase of teacher education. Some of the most effective in-service programs have for many years been a point of emphasis in junior high schools for beginning and experienced teachers. With additional help from the Middle School movement and with the shifting balance of teacher supply and demand, it is possible that pre-service programs of preparation for middle level teachers can become a reality in many states.

Although most middle level schools still hold to the traditional A-B-C-D-F system of marking, many have made an attempt to explain this system with additional information and with devices to disseminate the information. Additional types of information may include an effort scale or comparison with the student’s own ability, a work habits and behavior scale, or a profile showing a student’s performance in relation to specific criteria deemed important in each subject. The development of performance criteria by some teachers has also brought differences in marking patterns. The report card is still the basic instrument of communication with the home, but some changes have been made in its format, and perhaps more are on the way. In many schools the parent-teacher (and sometimes student) conference is being used more frequently as a supplement to, or partial replacement of, the card.

What about the facilities in which these changes are taking
place? As expected, they range from the oldest, most unexceptional buildings to the newest, most creatively designed buildings. The newer facilities tend to feature open spaces, large instructional materials centers, resource centers for many of the curricular areas, and provisions for various types of flexibility. As is so often the case, many of the middle level schools are apparently being built to include many features of the “bandwagon” types without a clear understanding on the part of faculty and administration of the program changes desirable for utilizing fully the opportunities provided by the new structure. On the other hand, there are some excellent examples of buildings constructed to house a different type of middle level school program, buildings planned by faculty, administration, students, parents, and community with that program in mind. And some of the most exciting programs are being carried on, without great publicity, in old buildings with a minimum of remodeling and renovation.

Has It Happened?

Is there really a greater concern for students and has there been a greater humanization of the educational program in the middle level school? Certainly there are many of these schools in which the daily program is typically a dull, routine, uninspiring experience for students, teachers, and administrators. But there are many more of these schools in which the daily program is becoming an exciting, challenging, and enjoyable teaching-learning experience. Certainly no one school is likely to employ all of the changes that have been discussed here, but some of these changes can be found in many schools.

Certainly the opening up of time, space, and content for greater student and teacher decision making should in no way be confused with permissiveness. But administrators are finding teachers excited, and many teachers are finding students excited, about the options available and choices to be made. Certainly many middle level schools have attempted change for change’s sake, adopting only the terminology of the day without clearly understanding the philosophy underlying real change. But many more of these schools have carefully analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of
their present program as a basis for needed change. Certainly many of these changes and new programs have been specially funded. But many of them can and are being carried on without initial or continuing special support. Certainly many of these changes and programs are the reflection of an individual administrator's philosophy and ambition. But many others are substantial enough to survive changes in administrative personnel. Certainly the current financial stringency will pose many problems in terms of class size and special programs. But creativity in administration and teaching can lead to solutions to these problems.

Middle Level Problems

There are many problems faced by the middle level schools, some a part of all education today and some peculiar to this level. Articulation with the elementary school and senior high school remains a major problem, which is apparently receiving less attention than it did a decade or two ago. Teacher education (and administrator preparation) for this middle segment of our school system should receive a number one priority in a cooperative approach from teacher education institutions and the schools themselves. The lack of student pride in self and school, one major expression of which seems to be increasing vandalism, is seriously disturbing. The continuing efforts in the lost battle to "cover" everything in the curricular area rather than to help students develop the tools and skills needed in each field of study seem an unwise use of time and personnel. And the controversy between the junior high and Middle School proponents does not inspire a great deal of confidence on the part of the community and the public.

Local Middle Level Questions

Any school system considering possible changes in its middle level of education needs to consider such questions as these:

What is the evidence (national and local) in various organizational patterns concerning:
(a) adolescent growth and development?
(b) academic achievement?
(c) social development and pressures?
(d) leadership development?

What local educational program is planned for K-12?
Are any major curriculum changes anticipated soon? Why?
How successful has the present pattern of organization been?
What are its strengths and weaknesses?
What instructional patterns are now being used or will be used—
traditional departmentalization, block-of-time, team teaching, hu-
manities, unified arts, flexible scheduling, non-graded programs,
continuous progress, and other variations?
What concerns other than the educational program must be con-
sidered?
What building facilities are available? Do these indicate or limit
any particular type of organization?
What community characteristics—social, economic, intellectual—
need to be recognized?
What are community expectations and/or desires?
What does the teaching staff prefer as an organizational pattern?
What is the education and experience background of staff
members?
What do enrollment projections indicate?
Does the four-year high school transcript present a major problem?
CONCLUSION

However, the thesis of this section was that the middle level schools have helped themselves by studying questions such as these, and the writer does believe that. The changes described are perhaps not as important in themselves as in the climate of willingness to change, the climate of enthusiasm, the climate of ideas which they represent. Administrators and teachers who have a career dedication to this level and who know it is the most challenging, exciting, frustrating, satisfying, and stimulating level at which to teach and learn must continue the leadership which will provide continuing growth and development for these middle level schools.
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