

THE MODERN MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Second Edition

THE MODERN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Addressing Standards and Student Needs

By

GILBERT H. HUNT, PH.D.

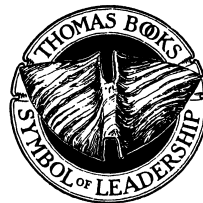
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PREFACE

Middle school educators are facing many challenges in today's educational and political environment. Government leaders at both the national and state levels have defined educational excellence in terms of student performance on standardized tests. This definition of educational excellence has affected the way society assesses schools, public school teachers, and the institutions which train those teachers. This concern for excellence as measured by achievement tests has, at times, made it a challenge to focus on the principles that form the foundation of middle school education. It is the purpose of this book to provide a discussion of how middle schools can provide a strong standards-based academic program while, at the same time, remaining focused on the student-centered principles upon which the middle school experience should be based.

Much has been written in recent years regarding what constitutes quality middle level schooling. The temptation for the authors to offer a prescriptive textbook was great; however, we believe that such a prescriptive focus would not serve to define the unique and widely varied characteristics of middle level students. Rather than a prescriptive approach, we have developed this book around the essential features of a middle level school as identified by the National Middle School Association in their landmark publication *This We Believe* (National Middle School Association, 1992). Using the essential elements identified in this work as a guide, this textbook is intended to aid readers in the development of the teaching philosophies, behaviors, and skills relevant to effective instruction in the unique middle school situation. This emphasis reflects our basic philosophy that the teacher ultimately determines the quality of schooling and that the learning environment should be student-centered while maintaining a strong academic foundation.

This study begins with an overview of the origins and essential elements of middle level schools; proceeds through discussions of middle level teachers, students, schooling structures, and teaching strategies; and concludes with a view of the future. Specifically, chapters offer suggestions for teaching and learning in the middle level environment, for planning the curriculum, for providing developmentally appropriate instruction, and for assessing and reporting student progress.

As professionals who have been middle level practitioners, who now are teacher educators, and who have evolved as teachers during a climate of change in public education and society in the last 20 years, we prepared this textbook to meet the need of future and current middle level teachers. We hope that it provides a comprehensive introduction to the middle level student, middle level curriculum, and middle level schooling in general.

Gilbert H. Hunt
Dennis G. Wiseman
Sandra P. Bowden

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THE MODERN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Chapter 1

ORIGINS AND ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS

Defining the Middle School: a school organization containing grades 6 to 8 (and sometimes grade 5) that, first, provides developmentally appropriate and responsive curricular, instructional, organizational, guidance, and overall educational experiences and, second, places major emphasis on 10- to 14-year olds' developmental and instructional needs. (Manning & Bucher, p. 7, 2001)

It is difficult to imagine a time of greater change in one's life than that which occurs roughly between the ages of 10 to 14. This is a special time of transition for all individuals, regardless of culture. Some cultures facilitate this change very well, while others less so. In the changing tide of education in the United States, much attention and debate has been given to providing a better environment to facilitate adjustment and learning of children in this age range. The result has been the rise and expansion of the national middle school movement.

The modern middle school is an institution designed to be responsive to the developmental needs of those students most typically 10 to 14 years of age. In 1966, Donald Eichhorn wrote *The Middle School*, which became and has served as the philosophical foundation of the modern middle school movement. Eichhorn established that the social and psychological development of middle level students was unique and that students in the middle have needs that set them apart from both elementary and high school students. In its evolution, the middle school has become distinctive in offering experiences especially designed for those students that Eichhorn called students in transescence. Eichhorn stated that:

Transescence is the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based on the many physical, social-emotional, and intellectual changes in body chemistry that appear prior to the time which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes. (pp. 45-46)

Eichhorn noted that the belief that transescence forms a compatible social grouping is the foundation for restructuring the transitional school organization (Eichhorn, 1967); the transescent period refers to that period in human development from late childhood to the early stages of adolescence. Although Eichhorn's publishing of *The Middle School* in 1966 serves as a watermark for the development of the middle school movement, many educators realized long before that time that a separate school for early adolescent students was needed. There was evidence that the traditional elementary-high school structure was not serving the needs of all students as early as the late nineteenth century (Clark & Clark, 1994). Today's middle school has evolved from a series of changes in educational structures affecting school organization, scope and sequence, and instruction. All of these structures were developed in the middle school to serve those special students in transescence according to the needs of society and to our increased knowledge of human development common to this age group.

Establishment of Junior High Schools

In 1888, Charles Eliot, President of Harvard University, proposed that school programs should be shortened and enriched in order to prepare students better for college. The resulting *economy of time* movement led to a restructuring of school organization which added the seventh and eighth grades to the secondary school program, thus changing the traditional school structure from grades one through eight (1-8) and nine through 12 (9-12) to a structure of grade one through six (1-6) and seven through 12 (7-12). Many educators determined, however, that college preparation should not become the sole purpose of the new organization. The *raison detre* for the seventh and eighth grades being joined with grades nine through twelve also should be attuned to the needs of students' development rather than just to preparation for college (Lounsbury, 1992).

G. Stanley Hall (1905) added greatly to the sparse knowledge base concerning human development at the time with his landmark two-volume work *Adolescence*. Hall's position was that the quality of education received during adolescence was a critical factor in the overall future development of the individuals involved. What has been referred to as the junior high school movement had found support in the early twentieth century. A movement that began as an expansion of high school for the purpose of better college preparation ultimately took on an identity that became more student-centered (Lounsbury, 1992). With greater attention being given to the needs of the individual student, along with increased focus on preparation for higher education, the 6-3-3 grade configuration gradually emerged, creating an elementary school of 6 years and a secondary school of 6 years with the first three of the secondary school years identified as the junior high school (Manning & Bucher, 2001).

The first junior high schools opened during the 1909–10 school year in Columbus, Ohio, and Berkeley, California (Lemlech, 2002; Manning & Bucher, 2001; Hansen & Hearn, 1971) and within a decade, the movement was well under way. In 1918, the National Education Association Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education officially endorsed the formation of the junior high school concept (Manning & Bucher, 2001). Thomas Briggs (1920) and Leonard Koos (1920) became two of the early leaders of the movement. Koos issued what is generally considered the first statement of purpose for the junior high school (Kellough & Kellough, 1999). Koos maintained that the junior high school would make more economical use of instructional time, provide for students' developmental differences, offer vocational education, begin departmentalized instruction, and enhance the development of educational and social skills through physical education. Lounsbury (1956) noted five early purposes of the junior high school:

1. Effecting economy in time through earlier offering of college preparatory subjects, the elimination of duplication, promotion by subjects, and departmental teaching.
2. Improving articulation between elementary and secondary education by introducing an intermediate step and gradually inaugurating the elective system.
3. Improving the noticeably poor holding power of the schools and reducing the heavy number of failures and repeaters by new and richer con-