IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

CONCEPT: A PROFILE OF

PERCEIVED EFFECTS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Gail Bantle Hartin, B.A., M.Ed., C.A.S.

Denton, Texas

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This study addressed the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students in a suburban middle school about the effects of implementation of the middle school concept on instruction, peer group interaction, teacher attitudes and practices, and school culture.

A qualitative approach was used for this study. Interview questions were developed to determine perceptions about effects in the areas identified in the research questions.

Interviews were conducted with selected teachers, parents, and students who had exposure to the school before and after planned changes were implemented. Documents were examined for evidence of perceptions in the four areas identified. In addition, an existing data set (a student survey) was examined and the same survey was administered to a more recent group of students to identify possible patterns in student perceptions. The resulting data base consisted of interview transcripts, as well as a collection of documents and the survey. Data were reviewed and coded into categories using the constant comparative method. All data sources were cross-checked for each category to allow for triangulation of data.
The following conclusions were drawn as a result of this study. Teachers, students, and parents in this school perceived that:

1) Instruction is now more interactive, authentic, interdisciplinary, and flexible.

2) Collaboration is taught and modeled by teachers, and student interaction and collegial interaction are broader in the restructured school.

From the student, parent, and teacher perceptions, five targets for growth were identified. Five recommendations based on these targets and on the findings of the study were made for teachers, parents, and administrators. Suggestions were made for further research related to the middle school concept.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Middle school, like the middle child, has long been regarded as an enigma. Because middle level students are in such a period of transition, educators have not been sure whether to treat them as elementary or secondary students. By the same token, middle school teachers often have been regarded as "paying their dues" in anticipation of "moving up" to a high school position.

This study is about the transition of one school from a junior high model to a middle school model. It includes perceptions of students, teachers and parents regarding the effects of this transition.

The concept of middle level education is not entirely new. As early as the late 1800's, the issue of adolescent development and its implications for education was addressed by Charles Eliot with the Committee of Ten and later by the Committee of Fifteen (Mulhern, 1946). Their recommendations included shortening the elementary program and extending secondary courses into the grammar school. This is generally recognized as the origin of the junior high school. During the first three decades of the 1900's, studies endorsed first a 6-6-, then a 6-3-3- plan. Reasons
for endorsing the three-year junior high plan included responding to individual differences, providing opportunities to explore interests and capabilities, and humanizing the education of the adolescent (Floyd, 1983).

The middle school movement as we know it today began to evolve in the 1950's, gaining momentum throughout the next two decades (Alexander, 1976). However, the efforts of this era were for reasons which were substantially different from those which form the framework of the current middle school movement. By 1977, there were 5,000 middle schools in the nation. Many of these, however, had been created mainly in response to situations involving convenience and/or space allocation (Cubberly, 1923; George, 1990). The configurations and programs often were modeled after those of a high school even though there was already research supporting the need for program changes to meet the assumed needs of younger adolescents. In addition, some of the middle schools created in the late 1960's and the 1970's were in response to equity and desegregation issues. Creating new grade configurations was seen as an easy way to comply with desegregation mandates without disrupting neighborhood elementary schools (George, 1990).

A 1975 report by the Educational Research Service (cited in Floyd, 1983) outlined the characteristics of a successful middle school. The report concluded that the successful middle school would create the proper environment
by providing for educational, social, and personal needs through a student-centered program. This would be accomplished by emphasizing guidance, exploration, and individual activities as opposed to subject-centered programs and sophisticated activities. This set the tone for a change in focus in the middle school movement during the 1980's, with a shift to an emphasis on programming needs. Now educational leaders began to turn their attention to making the facilities and resources fit the programs rather than vice versa.

Throughout the 1980's, the middle school concept grew in popularity in Texas. In 1982, the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals recorded 279 middle schools in the state. In 1992, the Texas Middle School Association recorded over 1465. National projections foresee the existence of over 10,000 middle schools nationally in the 1990's.

Because of the rapid growth in the number of middle schools both statewide and nationally, studies highlighting the unique characteristics of the middle level child have gained wide recognition in the last decade. As a result, many junior high and middle schools have undergone significant changes reflective of a shift in philosophy and research. Among the issues which have emerged are: teacher training, grouping practices, interdisciplinary teaming, advisory programs, health awareness and promotion,
adolescent self-esteem, peer support, and cooperative learning.

The culmination of the research of the last three decades is *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the Twenty-first Century*, published by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1989. *Turning Points* cautions that today’s adolescents are caught in "a vortex of new risks" (p. 22), and that it is most urgent that a fundamental transformation of the education of young adolescents take place so that their critical educational, health, and social needs are met. In summary, its recommendations are as follows:

1) Create small communities for learning.
2) Teach a core of common knowledge.
3) Ensure success for all students.
4) Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions concerning the experiences of middle grade students.
5) Prepare teachers for the middle grades through specialized preservice and inservice.
6) Improve academic performance by fostering health and fitness.
7) Renegage families in the education of young adolescents.
8) Connect schools with communities.

The response to *Turning Points* among middle level educators has generally been one of support, sharing, and collegiality so that schools seeking to implement
restructuring plans can have a broad professional network. However, an examination of this list of recommendations indicates that the middle schools of the future will need to address major changes. For example, curriculum will need to be simultaneously restricted (core of common knowledge) and expanded (exploratory experiences), teachers may be asked to teach in teams, schedule their students within an instructional block of time, and serve as advisors, and the long-standing traditions of selecting and sorting (such as academic tracking and elected cheerleaders) may need to be replaced by programs fostering cooperation rather than competition. These changes will result in transformations in school culture, not only in the way teachers teach, but in the way principals lead, and in the way students interact with each other and with adults in the school community.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the change process itself is problematic. It can cause dislocation, uncertainty, anxiety, and information overload. It is critical that educational change be approached with careful attention to issues such as the multidimensional reality of the classroom and the need to give those affected by the change an opportunity to work out and attach their own meaning to the experience. It is also important to acknowledge that situations vary, and that one can never predict what implementation of change will or should be until people in specific situations attempt to articulate
it through practice. Therefore, the middle school as it evolves may come in several variants of middle school as it is proposed, depending on the characteristics of the changes, the characteristics of the school, and any influencing external characteristics (Fullan, 1991).

A study examining the effects of middle school restructuring effort is therefore relevant to current professional development and to knowledge needed for middle school research as well as research on school change. Such information is potentially beneficial to middle school practitioners and their students in the context of planning and implementing middle school restructuring.

Statement of the Problem

The problem for this study was to describe perceived effects on instruction, teachers, students and school culture resulting from planned implementation of key elements of the middle school concept.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine a profile of perceived effects on teachers, students, and school culture resulting from the implementation of interdisciplinary teams, an advisory program, heterogeneous grouping, cooperating learning, and special, systematic staff development in a suburban middle school. The major portion of the restructuring took place over a five-year period. Selected student and parent attitudes and perceptions,
teacher attitudes and practices, perceived effects on valued student outcomes (leadership, group relationships), and perceived effects on instruction as well as on school culture (roles, rules, relationships, rituals, informal communication networks, etc.) were studied.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed through this study:

1) What are the perceived effects on instruction produced by key aspects of the middle school concept, such as heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, and interdisciplinary teaming?

2) What are the perceived effects on peer group interaction produced by instructional and organizational aspects of the middle school concept?

3) What are the perceived effects on teacher attitudes and practices produced by implementation of the middle school concept?

4) What are the perceived effects of the implementation of the middle school concept on school culture as indicated by roles (teacher and student), rules (professional behavior), relationships (among teachers, parents, administrators, and student), rituals, and traditions?
Background

The present study focused on the perceived effects of a middle school restructuring effort which began in 1986. A needs assessment was conducted to obtain input from teachers, parents, and students. A mission statement and goals were developed based on this input. In 1987, interdisciplinary teaming was introduced. In 1988, an advisory period was added to the team block. A plan to discontinue tracking was also announced in 1988, but parental concern over the issue was so widespread that the Board of Trustees postponed the change and appointed a committee of parents and educators to study the issue of tracking in the middle grades. The committee spent five months researching, discussing, visiting other schools, and consulting national experts. As a result of the committee's study, a recommendation was made to the Board of Trustees to discontinue tracking. The recommendation included the following support measures:

1) Provide staff development on addressing multi-level needs within the classroom, including content modification, content enrichment, and cooperative learning.

2) Revise core curriculum so that all students have access to the enriched curriculum formerly reserved for honors classes.
3) Refine and expand the fledgling advisory program.
4) Continue to offer pre-algebra in seventh grade and algebra in eighth grade, but allow students not placed through the normal recommendation process to be placed at parents’ request (Boone, 1989).

Subsequent changes have included further development of the advisory programs, creation of additional exploratory electives, and team-based decision-making with respect to scheduling within the team block.

By the early 1970’s the middle school concept was emerging as one of the most revolutionary changes in education since the establishment of its predecessor, the junior high school, six decades earlier (Trauschke & Mooney, 1972). Although the intent was widely accepted and even welcomed, implementation issues were met with apprehension and ambivalence. The most common response to the movement was merely a grade reorganization. Gradually, however, the focus shifted to developmental issues. By the late 1980’s, organizational, developmental, and instructional issues were being addressed or at least examined by most districts. These include: staffing, interdisciplinary teaming, advisory, grouping practices, cooperative learning, and development of the early adolescent.

Throughout the literature on middle school, the issues which consistently emerge are the uniqueness of adolescent development, the importance of addressing and building self-
esteem, and the importance of tailoring programs to fit the recognized needs of middle level students. The caution against superimposing a high school program model on a middle school is repeatedly and prominently featured.

A study conducted by the National Middle School Association (Johnston & Markle, 1986) concluded that middle level practitioners believed that a "definition" of middle school and of the middle school child had already been sufficiently explored and that more research about what works with students of the middle years was now of greater concern. However, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development cautioned that changing times bring with them unprecedented choices and pressures which affect all aspects of the middle school child's development (1989).

Knight (1988) pointed out that elementary and high school students generally fit a perfect mold. However, students experience the most powerful changes in their minds and bodies, more than at any other time in their lives, at the middle level. Johnston (1989, 1990) and Toepfer (1990) underlined the dramatic and ever-widening range inherent in what is "normal" physical and intellectual adolescent development. For example, an eighth grade girl may still play with dolls or may be preparing for impending motherhood. She may look like a young boy or resemble a Miss America finalist. Her male counterpart may be 4'3" or 6'2". Both may feel pride, confidence, shame, fear, and
self-doubt all on the same day. Their muscular and skeletal growth spurts can make it extremely uncomfortable and sometimes literally impossible to assume or sustain normal positions such as sitting at desks (Beane, 1990; Johnston, 1989). In terms of intellectual development, the thinking levels of a middle school population may range from beginning concrete operational thinkers to mature adult abstract thinkers, and the range of reading levels may range from second grade to post-secondary.

With respect to self-esteem, the common thread throughout the literature is that of the adolescent’s need to feel a sense of belonging within one’s peer group and within the school organization as a whole. The emphasis is on creating a safe and positive environment, and the advisory programs are seen as a way to help accomplish this. The goal of most advisory programs is to increase trust and encourage positive interaction which, in turn, contributes to each student’s sense of belonging to the group (Kronholm, Jespersen, & Fjell, 1987). Current research on effective middle schools affirms that such schools work hard to reduce the size of the group to which students belong, and that they make it possible for students and teachers to spend meaningful time together in non-instructional ways (Doda, George, & McEwin, 1987; George, 1990; Johnston, 1990). Critical to the success of advisory programs are staff development, adequate and appropriate resources, a strong
and well-publicized commitment on the part of the principal, and teacher ownership in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program (Gill & Read, 1990).

Placing emphasis on cooperation rather than competition is viewed as another strategy for increasing students’ sense of self-worth and belonging. Cooperative learning, for example, develops learning in a safer psychological environment than that of the large group. In addition, positive interdependence is developed as students work together and assume responsibility for their own growth as well as that of their group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1988; Toepfer, 1990).

In terms of program planning, the issues of organization, content, and process must be addressed as they relate to the needs of young adolescents. Without question, one of the major challenges in designing a responsive middle school program is fashioning an experience which is as holistic and as integrated as possible, where one cannot necessarily tell where cognitive outcomes leave off and affective outcomes begin. This is a stark contrast to the traditional configuration in which a student attends six or seven discrete, unrelated classes in which teachers never communicate with each other about what they teach. Experts’ recommendations for creating a meaningful and effective middle school program include organizing teachers into interdisciplinary teams, with sanctioned team planning time
(Beane, 1990), and emphasizing academic and extracurricular activities and approaches which foster cooperation rather than competition (Beane, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnston, 1989; Toepfer, 1990). Another important facet of the middle school program is that of equal access to knowledge and to high expectations. The literature strongly points to the need to organize students into heterogeneous groups and provides overwhelming support, as well as overwhelming evidence of the positive academic and social outcomes it produces (George, 1990; Goodlad, 1984; Johnston & Markle, 1986; Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1988).

Fullan called change a personal as well as collective experience involving unpredictability, information overload, stress, and fear (1991). Since it is possible to change only on the surface without really understanding the beliefs and rationale underlying the change, individuals must be given the chance to attach their own personal meaning to the change (Deal, 1990a; Fullan, 1991). According to Sizer (1991), school change requires attending to many parts of a school at once because one change touches many areas. Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987) and Deal (1990b) underlined the importance of focusing on culture and context because change can bring with it the implication that there are problems with the status quo. In addition, change produces a feeling of loss, and those affected need an opportunity to grieve.
The future of change education is expected to include both cognitive and social development goals, along with staff development to enhance individual and collective capacity for change (Fullan, 1991; Joyce, 1990).

Qualitative research is a way of studying human life which involves both product and process. Brandt (1972) described it as the investigation of phenomena with and in relation to their naturally occurring contexts. This type of naturalistic research frequently is conducted by practitioners to determine how well some plan of institutional action is working.

The use of qualitative research methodology allows researchers to study things as they occur rather than as they may be manipulated. This is a fairly new concept in educational research, because professional educators formerly were oriented to a prescriptive, rather than descriptive, approach (Lecompte & Goetz, 1984).

Qualitative research is characterized by fieldwork methods such as interviewing, observation, and document collection, but data collection and data analysis take place concurrently instead of sequentially. This is known as the constant comparative method, in which categories and concepts emerge from the data instead of being predetermined (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

According to Brenner, Brown, and Cantu (1985) and Drew and Hardman (1985), the value of the interview as a data
collection tool lies in the rapid response and the potential for both parties to explore and clarify meanings. Worthen (1981) stressed the importance of including representatives of all important audiences in the data collection process.

There are guidelines for designing and evaluating qualitative research which serve to increase its reliability and validity. For example, the triangulation of data collection presents the opportunity to examine an issue from more than one angle or view so that varied perspectives can be used to examine the issue in question in greater depth (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Worthen, 1981).

**Significance**

At the state and national level, school restructuring is a prominent issue at all levels from early childhood through higher education. Success of restructuring efforts depends heavily on how the changes are perceived by all of the parties affected. This is evidenced by recent publications designed to help educators deal with resistance to change (Barth, 1990; David, 1991; Deal, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Sizer, 1991). An awareness of the barriers to change, strategies for overcoming the barriers, and subsequent payoffs can provide an opportunity to give close attention to process. This applies to any educational setting regardless of demographic or socioeconomic considerations.
Assumptions

The major assumptions underlying this study were as follows:

1) The experience of informed respondents is one of broader experience, and an informed respondent can articulate this experience in a meaningful manner.

2) The things respondents say in an interview or survey are the things which they perceive as being most important.

3) Well-constructed surveys and interviews are valid representations of respondents' opinions and thoughts.

4) Documents are reflective of peoples' intents and practices.

Definition of Terms

1) Cohort A - Students who were in the eighth grade in the school under study during the 1989-1990 school year.

2) Cohort B - Students who were in the eighth grade in the school under study during the 1990-1991 school year.

3) Cohort C - Students who were in the eighth grade in the school under study during the 1992-1993 school year.

4) Open-ended interview - An interview involving questions in which response categories are not specified, thus allowing for probing and elaboration.

5) Constant comparative method - A method for developing grounded theory in which the researcher simultaneously codes and analyzes data in order to develop concepts.
Limitations

This study provides descriptions of some perceived effects of implementation of the middle school concept in one school district. The district has a large percentage of families of high socioeconomic status. Most staff members have graduate degrees and experience. Broad generalizations of these findings to other contexts are therefore inappropriate. Data were collected mainly through interviews, survey instruments, and existing documents and analyzed qualitatively. Since self-reports are known to be imperfect reflections of thought processes and include the possibility of the Hawthorne effect, conclusions should be treated with appropriate caution. Furthermore, since this was a naturalistic study, there is the possibility that the respondents’ answers were bound by the researcher’s questions.

In order to minimize the possibility of researcher bias, no student who was taught by the researcher was interviewed, and no teacher who taught in the same department as the researcher was interviewed.

It should also be noted that the researcher has been away from the school under study for four years and is now in a position which requires a K-12, rather than a 6-8, perspective. Participation in district-wide strategic and instructional planning now requires looking at the middle level program in the context of the K-12 continuum rather
than as an entity unto itself. This creates the need to view the program in terms of how it is perceived by past, current, and future clientele as well as central office personnel, K-12 staff, and patrons.

Procedures

A qualitative research approach was used to provide a description of a number of interrelated factors within a particular context. The first population for this study was the student body of the eighth grade of a suburban middle school. It included students who were in the eighth grade during the 1989-90 school year and who had also been enrolled during the previous year (Cohort A). These students were informed respondents for purposes of survey data because they experienced two years at the school prior to the implementation of the major portion of the restructuring plan and one year subsequently. Since student turnover in the district is very low, this is a stable population. The second population was the eighth grade class of 1990-1991 (Cohort B). The students selected from this group to participate in interviews were informed respondents who were selected based on ability to express their thoughts and opinions articulately and confidently. A pool of names of students was created by the principal and counselor. These students also met the criteria of being willing to participate in the study, being a member of the 1990-1991 eighth grade class of the middle school.
under study, and having attended the school all three years. Students were selected from the pool with attention to achieving a balance in terms of gender and level of academic success. The third population was the eighth grade class of 1992-1993 (Cohort C).

Three types of data were collected: surveys, interviews, and documents. For the survey, all members of the eighth grade class of 1989-1990 who had also attended the school the previous year were included, and an existing data set was used. The existing data set was a survey completed as part of a program review at the end of the 1989-1990 school year (Appendix A). For the interviews, five informed respondents from the eighth grade class of 1991 were selected, along with five parents and five teachers. The parents were selected from a pool of families who had a child in the middle school prior to the completion of the restructuring plan, who also had another child in middle school during the 1991-1992 school year, who were articulate and informed, and who were willing to participate in the study. Teachers selected from a pool were staff members whose tenure began before restructuring took place, who were informed and articulate, and who were willing to participate. In all cases, attention was given to selecting teacher and parent respondents with a range of opinions about the middle school program, including some who had actively questioned and challenged some of the proposed
program changes. Further details on the selection process are provided in Chapter III.

Interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting. The interviews began with the researcher establishing rapport and providing a brief explanation of the study. Participants were informed that the interview data would be used as part of this dissertation and that their names would not be used. The methods used to record interview results are outlined in Chapter III. They included scripting each interview as it occurred and writing a summary at the conclusion. The interview was focused on obtaining responses to a list of questions from an interview schedule. These questions were used to support the research questions of this study. In addition, probe questions were used to elicit greater specificity if appropriate (Appendices B, C, and D).

Shortly after the interview was completed, the researcher recorded journal notes on the interview process. Observations about recurring themes and the responsiveness of the informant were included.

Documents analyzed included teachers’ lesson plans, middle level professional journals and conference program booklets at the state level, and school publications. These were examined for evidence supporting the interview responses, as was the existing data set (surveys).
Finally, a survey was administered to the eighth grade class of 1993. It was the same as the existing data set which had been administered three years earlier. This was so that response patterns could be compared, with the original survey serving as baseline data.

Data analysis consisted of the use of a categorical coding system for content analysis of surveys, documents, and interview responses. Coding categories were developed through the use of the constant comparative method used in generating grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in which the process is controlled by the emerging theory. Each interview transcription was reviewed for recurrent patterns of response to each research question and to probe questions as well. The surveys were also reviewed for such patterns. Thus, through an iterative process, naturalistic generalizations emerged. These generalizations were coded into categories which were used as a vehicle for comparing responses. A matrix of responses was developed and answers for each respondent were recorded therein (Sample, Appendix E).

A second matrix was created by reviewing the responses of each group (students, parents, and teachers) for patterns recurrent across groups. After the data were reduced and recorded in this form, they was analyzed for similarities and differences among the groups. A third matrix was used
to compare the data as they related to each research question.

Repeated reviews of the survey, interview transcriptions, documents, and researcher’s journal notes occurred until the researcher was satisfied that all major categories had been identified and that the research questions had been explained satisfactorily. Areas of focus included perceptions related to instruction, interaction, teacher attitudes and practices, and school culture.
Chapter Bibliography


CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of professional literature begins with a brief history of events and circumstances leading to the emergence of the middle school. Next, key aspects of the middle school concept are examined in order to illustrate the differences between the traditional junior high school model and the middle school model, as well as the reasons why the middle school model is thought to be more responsive to the needs of young adolescents. Third, selected findings on the change process are presented in order to provide a context for events and processes surrounding the implementation of the elements of the middle school concept. The final section describes methodologies used to study perceptions and beliefs concerning the effects of planned educational change.

History and Development

This first effort to create a better balance in the continuum of education began in 1872. Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, initiated an investigation of strategies to improve and reduce the total educational program prior to college admission. This was prompted by Eliot's concern over the average age of entering college
freshmen at Harvard. Eliot served as Chairman of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies and pursued the investigation through this channel. In 1893, the Committee of Ten recommended that the secondary program begin two years earlier, with eight years of elementary and four years of secondary education. Shortly afterwards, the Committee of Fifteen, which was charged with making recommendations for elementary curriculum and instruction, concurred with the recommendation concerning the shortening of the elementary program and beginning the secondary program earlier. However, the curricular recommendations of the Committee of Fifteen served to sustain a relatively fragmented and subject-centered curriculum (Glatthorn, 1987). Twenty years later, the Committee on Economy of Time in Education recommended a separate junior division of secondary education (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992; Gruhn & Douglas, 1971).

Although plans for the first junior high school were based on a philosophy similar to that currently advocated for the middle level (Tye, 1985), in practice, outside influences prevented this philosophy from being addressed. For example, in communities with only a small number of students of high school age, no high school program was offered, making the junior high school the exit-level program for most students. Furthermore, emphasis shifted to preparing the few students who might be sent to the high
school in the county seat. This phenomenon was coupled
with the influence of European universities on Harvard, and,
in turn, Harvard's influence on other American universities.
These universities exerted similar influence on high
schools, so that high schools assumed the role of preparing
students for university study, and junior high schools, in
turn, took on the responsibility of preparing students for
high school. Programatically, the junior high school took
on more and more aspects of the high school, such as
departmentalization, specialization, and grouping by
ability. By the middle of the twentieth century, there were
over 50,000 junior high schools nationally, and most were
patterned after the high school model (George, 1990).

By 1960, a movement to examine and address the needs
of the middle grades was underway. Many schools responded
by moving the ninth grade to the high school. However, even
though emerging research showed strong support for the very
program changes which are now occurring a quarter of a
century later, other issues precluded their implementation
at that time. These issues included space, financial
resources, equity, and mandated integration (George, 1990;
Hornbeck, 1989; Toepfer, 1989).

Continued research throughout the 1970's set the stage
for substantive efforts to address the needs of middle level
students during the 1980's (George et al., 1992; Glatthorn,
1987, 1990). The success of these efforts influenced many
other districts to explore, consider, and implement program changes response to the needs of young adolescents.

In 1989, Turning Points, a report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, focused on educational and developmental needs of students at the middle level. Turning Points (1989) examined the risks inherent in young adolescence, particularly in the context of modern society, and sent forth an urgent message about the restructuring needed in order to address the needs of middle level students. According to Erb (1992b), this document made educational and developmental needs of the middle level the centerpiece of a national study, and its forthright recommendations, as outlined in Chapter I of this study, have had major implications in terms of curriculum, instruction, organizational structure, staffing and staff development, and involvement of families and community members.

George et al. (1992) described successful middle level education as an educational version of dynamic tension. This includes a creative balance between elementary and secondary perspectives, between specialization and generalization, between curriculum and community, between equity and excellence, between teaching the mind and touching the heart.
Key Aspects of the Middle School Concept

In the literature on the middle level, there is a body of knowledge on the needs and characteristics of young adolescents, as well as theory on how to address these needs. This theory consists mainly of a set of assertions based on inferences from research and is referred to as the middle school concept.

Communities for Learning

One of the major implications of *Turning Points* (1989) is the need to create small communities for learning and to teach a core of common knowledge within those communities. In the middle school program, this is often achieved through organization of teachers and students into interdisciplinary teams, use of cooperative learning, creation of advisor-advisee programs, and integration of subject matter and process skills across disciplines.

Teaming

Forming interdisciplinary teams of teachers is a key characteristic of the middle school concept; in fact, it has been referred to as the heart of the successful middle school model. In a nationwide survey of middle schools, George (1988) found that every middle school in our country that was identified as an outstanding model of early adolescent education had a strong team organization at its center. The benefits of teaming for students included the opportunity to belong to a stable, sanctioned, and defined
group of peers and to develop a close relationship with adult team members (George, 1988; George et al., 1992; Golner & Powell, 1992). Collaborative efforts of teachers resulted in a synergistic, enhanced capacity to meet individual academic, social, and emotional needs and to make instruction more meaningful and student-centered (Erb, 1987; George et al., 1992). A survey of 159 of the 311 middle schools in six New England states showed that teaming also provided benefits to teachers by promoting a culture of collegiality rather than isolation (Plodzik & George, 1989). Erb (1987) found that teachers reported greater satisfaction with the conditions of teaching when organized into teams. This study involved interviews and classroom visits with 200 core teachers, as well as their administrators, support staff, and some elective teachers. In addition to providing an effective means of socializing new teachers into the workplace, teaming afforded teachers increased decision-making opportunities, more control of facilities, scheduling, and resources, and mutual support in the areas of communication, record-keeping/reporting duties, and instructional planning as reported in surveys by Doda et al. (1987), Erb (1987), Powell (1993), and Stavro (1992).

Although there is no set formula or magic number for team membership, the most common configurations are two-member teams with each teacher responsible for two core subjects, or four-member teams, with each member teaching
one core course (George et al., 1992; Golner & Powell, 1992). According to the theory of teaming, as well as actual surveys and interview studies on teaming, of even greater importance than the number of members was the set of skills and attitudes needed for a team to succeed (Golner & Powell, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Stavro, 1992). These skills included the areas of leadership, communication, conflict-management, consensus-building, decision-making, trust-building, and a commitment to team planning and team goals. Since these are not necessarily skills which all teachers possess, staff development was identified as a critical component of the teaming process (Beane, 1976; Golner & Powell, 1992; Kain, 1993). Stavro (1992) identified nineteen characteristics of a well-functioning and collaborative team. These characteristics emphasized shared vision, support, and trust, shared excitement about team membership and about the team’s activities, open communication, a sense of ownership, a focus on cooperation rather than on competition, and valuing of the talents and efforts of each individual member as well as the collective talents and efforts of the team.

Arhar, Johnston, and Markle (1989) reviewed research studies on the effect of teaming on student achievement. These studies covered a time period extending from the late 1950’s to the late 1980’s. Despite early research reports indicating that team arrangements did not produce a
difference in student achievement, more recent studies have shown not only improved scores on state assessment tests, but also increased teacher confidence in students' abilities, leading to higher expectations and greater student productivity (Arhar, Johnston, & Markle, 1989; Veach, 1993). Other studies reported improvement in the psychosocial environment, including better school discipline and a reduction in conflicts, truancy, tardiness, vandalism, and drop-outs (George & Oldaker, 1985; Powell, 1993; Walsh & Shay, 1993). These benefits were perceived not only by teachers but by students themselves, particularly in a year-long study by Powell (1993) involving classroom observations and student interviews in a school which had implemented teaming. As explained in Turning Points (1989), by having teachers share responsibility for the same students, they can often solve problems together before they reach the crisis stage.

Teaming appears to provide social and emotional benefits to students. Simpson (1989) affirmed the importance of rituals and ceremonies to provide recognition beyond academic and athletic prowess. George et al. (1992) pointed to the need for a touchstone group, a "first line of belonging". Berman (1992) described a school setting in which a site-based decision-making team used funds allocated for counselors and vice-principals to hire extra teachers instead. By reducing the student-teacher ratio and
developing a partnership with community social service agencies, teams were able to meet students' individual needs with minimum intervention from outside the team.

Advisory

Simpson (1989) stressed the importance of finding ways to link middle level students into our schools and to eradicate the colder, more impersonal nature traditionally associated with secondary education. This was reiterated by Ayres (1994), who conducted a survey of 75 schools which indicated that exemplary advisory programs included most of the effective approaches for meeting needs of young adolescents as defined in the literature on adolescent characteristics and needs. Andrews and Stern (1992) emphasized that youngsters need a transition between the self-contained, "safe" environment of the elementary school and the more anonymous, multi-changing periods of the high school. An advisory program was seen as an effective way to support the teaming process in this endeavor because by involving all teachers rather than just team teachers, the size of advisory groups could be reduced (Andrews & Stern, 1992; Gill & Read, 1990). Gill and Read (1990) conducted a study in which fifteen nationally recognized experts in middle level education responded to a questionnaire on procedural and theoretical aspects of advisor-advisee programs. The benefits of a schoolwide advisory program as cited by researchers and practitioners included the
opportunity to get to know students in a non-academic atmosphere, the chance to meet a variety of students of all ability and interest levels, and a unique way for special teachers to be a part of the total school program (Gill & Read, 1990). Although programs described in the literature varied in terms of curriculum and organization, the common denominator was seen in program goals. The main goals were to ease transition, to help improve interpersonal skills, to strengthen decision-making skills, and to help students understand their feelings and developmental needs (Andrews & Stern, 1992; Ayres, 1994; George et al., 1992; Gill & Read, 1990; Natterman, 1988). Many successful programs involved some sort of cross-grade "buddy" system designed to help older students practice and maintain their interpersonal skills while helping with the induction of younger students (Sportsman, 1987). The authors of Turning Points (1989) noted that many schools had only one or two counselors to serve hundreds or even thousands of students, making it nearly impossible to provide personalized counseling and interaction. However, by using the counselor as a resource to train teachers and to assist them in developing group activities for the advisory period, each student could benefit from regular adult guidance and monitoring in the advisory setting, allowing the counselor to concentrate on problems that went beyond what the advisors were trained to handle.
Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is another way of reducing the size of learning groups to which students belong. Johnson and Johnson (1989) compiled a review and synthesis of research on cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning structures. In addition, they conducted more than 80 related studies over the past 30 years. They pointed out that the five critical attributes of cooperative learning must be present in order to provide maximum benefit. These attributes include positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and group processing. According to Slavin (1990), research consensus in his review of 60 studies indicated that positive interdependence and individual accountability were the factors that made for a positive effect on student achievement. He added that in successful models, cooperative activities supplemented but did not replace direct instruction. They could, however, replace a substantial proportion of individual seatwork (1990). Rottier and Ogan (1991) cited research findings which indicated that cooperative learning promoted improved cognitive and affective outcomes. Slavin (1990) cited affective gains in self-esteem, liking of school and of specific subject matter, time on task, and attendance. Many benefits specific to middle school were pinpointed. In fact, Slavin (1990) indicated that the research on the
benefits of cooperative learning past the ninth grade were less definitive than that in the elementary and middle grades. In addition to research findings, there are many assertions concerning cooperative learning. George et al. (1992) cited cooperative learning's benefits of greater social support, acquisition of a collaborative outlook, and appreciation of differences. For example, cooperative learning provides opportunities to have a sense of belonging, to develop new friendships, to be sensitive to others' talents, and to show consideration for others (George et al., 1992). It also provides sanctioned time for interaction, so that students are less likely to socialize at inappropriate times. Since students at this age have a short attention span and the need for frequent physical movement, cooperative learning is a strategy which provides needed stimulus variation (George, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1990). There is also increased opportunity to move from concrete to abstract thinking as well as more opportunity for risk-taking. Furthermore, students are more likely to take risks in a cooperative group because there is less fear of failure and more receptivity to praise or criticism (Lyman & Foyle, 1990). Finally, cooperative learning fosters independence from the teacher at a time when young adolescents are feeling the need to be more independent of adults concurrent with doubts about their capacity to handle independence (Rottier & Ogan, 1991).
Schultz (1990) addressed this issue by explaining that part of cooperative learning involves "unlearning" total dependence on the teacher for all learning. He described the role of the teacher in cooperative activities as a facilitator working with people who are working together the way they will work together in the world outside school.

Prawat (1992) pointed out that according to Piaget's theory, real learning involves invention or construction, which has major implications for teachers. Specifically, in order for learning to be meaningful, theoretically there is a need for animated conversations about important intellectual issues. Cooperative learning provides a framework for such discussion to occur (Wood & Jones, 1994). Lyman and Foyle (1990) added that new attention must be given to fostering the dynamics of group functioning in order to surmount the barriers of unfamiliarity and distrust and thus to provide a forum which all group members consider safe and inviting. According to Schultz (1990), the success of teaching social skills lies in the articulation of a collaborative goal along with the academic goal. This is supported by research conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1989). George (1992) added that differentiation between academic and affective goals needs to be avoided, since both are important and mutually supportive. Rottier and Ogan (1991) provided examples of how many activities and games
can successfully combine an academic task and a social outcome.

Although there is debate on the issue of heterogeneity versus homogeneity in cooperative groups, Slavin (1989), Lyman and Foyle (1990), and Johnson and Johnson (1990, 1993) indicated that heterogeneity is generally desirable, based on their review of studies in this area as well as studies which they conducted. The issue of grouping practices is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Rowley (1992) defined certain essentials to teacher effectiveness in the use of small groups, including use of appropriate questioning strategies, interaction, and monitoring techniques. Johnston and Markle (1986) cited research findings that groups exhibiting high cohesiveness tended to enjoy better social and academic outcomes and advised that teachers can contribute to group cohesiveness by minimizing competition, promoting pro-social behavior, and helping each member to identify with the group as a whole.

In *Turning Points* (1989), the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development emphasized that in addition to helping students learn course material faster, retain it longer, and develop critical reasoning power more rapidly, cooperative learning sets the stage for the requirements of adult work life and for citizenship in a multicultural society. This was reiterated by Johnson and Johnson (1990),
who stressed that interpersonal competence is just as important as technical competence in being able to secure and retain employment, as evidenced by their studies involving reasons for dismissal of employees from their jobs. Sapon-Shevin and Schiedewind (1990) cautioned that it is important to consider context, because placing cooperative learning alongside a predominantly competitive framework could send confusing mixed messages to students. They suggested instead that cooperative learning be used to model what inclusive communities might look like, where everyone helps everyone else, no one is left behind, and satisfaction derives from overcoming obstacles together.

Curriculum

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) summarized theory on middle school curriculum in the study Turning Points. It described a student-responsive middle level curriculum as one which teaches young people to think critically, to develop healthy lifestyles, to be active citizens, and to learn as well as test successfully, and one in which subject matter is integrated across disciplines. Such a curriculum is predicated on two main assumptions: that the teacher assumes the role of facilitator and promoter of a spirit of inquiry, and that the use of themes in instruction lends itself to inquiry, synthesis, and association (Cook & Martinello, 1994). Beane (1990) recommended the use of broad-based themes with wide
applicability for each student and for society at large, such as democracy, human dignity, and cultural diversity. George (1992) called this an opportunity to help students gain a sense of personal and social efficacy, experience learning as a whole and unified activity, and bring knowledge and skills to life in meaningful ways.

Willis (1992) called the teaching of thinking an equalizer. This is because in order to be successful, some students need to be taught thinking strategies that the academically-able already use. However, he stressed that thinking must be taught with reverence for what the curriculum calls for, not just for the sake of teaching thinking. Lyman and Foyle (1990) noted that creative and critical thinking are emphasized in the interactive classroom, and that thinking outcomes such as brainstorming and innovations, rather than rote memorization, become end goals of learning experiences. They added that these capabilities are needed for information age expectations. Toepfer (1990) recalled that in the past, people were judged as "learned" by the facts and information they retained. By contrast, because information now has an increasingly short life, in the information society people will be judged as "learned" by the degree to which they can think and process information rather than by how much of it they can recall. Lifelong learning, according to Toepfer, is becoming an educational basic. Infusing the teaching of
thinking across disciplines and themes is seen as more effective than teaching thinking in isolation. This, of course, has major implications for assessment, since it involves assessing reasoning, not recall.

With respect to health education, the Carnegie Council (1989) recommended that it be taught within the context of life science, and that the life skills needed to increase self-control and to reject dangerous behavior be developed through systematic instruction and role-playing. With regard to citizenship, youth service as a part of the school program was seen as a way to promote collaboration, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and seeing a project carried out in its entirety rather than in pieces. Another point of emphasis was that the students must feel a sense of ownership in the project, and that opportunities for reflection must be built into the experience. While there have been many successful projects related to ecology, helping the poor, and understanding the workings of our government, there are many other possibilities for students to take an active role in their learning. Prawat (1992) stated that context plays a key role in shaping and constraining learning, and reiterated that the classroom should not be considered the prototype of effective learning. Rather, the emphasis should be on learning communities which lend themselves to productive partnerships.
According to Willis (1992), if middle level schools are truly committed to implementing alternative approaches to curriculum, then new assessment approaches must logically follow. If something is not assessed, teachers are less likely to demand it of students. Therefore, assessment must be expanded to include real learning tasks. Assessment options such as interviews and student portfolios offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in a format other than rote memory, thus expanding the types of skills that can be assessed. Willis (1992) called for the use of challenging tasks without obvious solutions to assess students' ability to reason, evaluate, analyze, apply, and synthesize.

Throughout the literature, the term "core curriculum" appears repeatedly. Beane (1990) interpreted this as a general education concerned with the common needs and interests of young people both as individuals and as participants in the larger world. It involves raising the common outcome to a level formerly reached only by college-bound students. The implications here are the elimination of remedial courses and the establishment of support systems to help all students succeed in an inclusive program which provides equal access to the core curriculum to all learners. Also implied is the creation of a myriad of connections across disciplines and within themes so that a great deal of information can be condensed into one intense
experience in which the whole is equal to far more than the sum of its parts.

Jacobs (1989) described interdisciplinarity as nurturing a different perspective with focus on themes and problems of life experience to which methodology and language from more than one discipline are consciously applied. It is an approach which stresses linkages rather than delineations. Ackerman and Perkins (1989) proposed a futuristic paradigm which has two levels: the curriculum and the metacurriculum. The curriculum is comprised of substantive content and concepts, and the metacurriculum is comprised of learning skills and strategies designed to help students acquire the curriculum content and develop the capacity to think and learn independently. They emphasized that this metacurriculum must be integrated across subjects. They considered the benefits to be a more coherent set of learning experiences for students, enhancement of acquisition of vital learning skills by reinforcement through a range of applications, unification of process and content goals, and a way for diverse teachers to work together toward common goals.

Tickle (1988) underlined the need for diversity of teaching and learning approaches to enhance motivation to learn as well as quality of work. Sometimes this involves introducing strategies not ordinarily associated with a particular discipline or grade level. For example, even
though research does not restrict the appropriateness of math manipulatives to certain grade levels, there is widespread belief among teachers that this is most appropriate in the elementary grades. Yet the use of manipulatives at the middle level provides opportunities for interaction and for addressing a greater variety of learning styles (Tooke et al., 1992). Likewise, the use of trade books normally associated with language arts in other areas such as social studies can stimulate discussion, promote higher-level thinking, broaden horizons, and provide a meaningful context for learning facts and vocabulary (Fuhler, 1992).

Xenos-Whiston and Leroux (1992) considered another source of appropriate curriculum for the middle grades. They noted that many good practices in gifted education are based on models originally developed for general and special education. The exploratory and process activities that are typically found in a gifted curriculum are good models that can meet the needs of individual learners. This is every child's right, not just that of those identified as gifted, for as Erb (1992a) reminded us, giftedness is not a single trait. The implication is that teachers need to be trained to adapt good curriculum models and teaching models to meet the individual needs of all students.

Rist (1992) spoke to the need for a holistic approach to education in the middle school. He called for a system
which would deal with obstacles to learning, such as poverty and abuse, through a partnership arrangement designed to upgrade human service delivery systems and deliver them through the school. He cautioned that teacher training and a partnership view would be critical to the success of such a program. Johnston and Markle (1986) supported this concept in their statement that by attending to the physical, social, and emotional areas, we may actually create an environment in which the student can spend more time "on-task" because their more fundamental needs have been satisfied.

Grouping Practices

Turning Points (1989) challenged middle level educators to ensure success for all children by grouping students for learning, scheduling to maximize learning, and expanding the structure of opportunity for learning. The expectation set forth was that all young adolescents should have the opportunity to succeed in the middle grade program regardless of prior achievement or pace of learning. The grouping issue refers to the elimination of the long-standing practice of tracking. The Carnegie Council (1989) stated emphatically in Turning Points that tracking is a damaging, divisive practice because children are locked into a lower track with lower expectations at an early age. Their claim was based on studies involving surveys and interviews with teachers, administrators, and students,
classroom observations, and analysis of data related to student outcomes and drop-out rates. The gap created by tracking keeps widening because this grouping tends to remain rigid regardless of performance (Kuykendall, 1993). This is especially damaging at the middle level because student learning capacities change more rapidly and more often during the middle grades than at any other time (Toepfer, 1990). They also found that it reinforced racial isolation and alienation toward school. The detrimental effects of tracking included lower teacher expectations for the students in the lower track, who generally performed to the expectations set by the teacher. Instructional practices in the lower track tended to be a more direct, less flexible approach with emphasis on basic comprehension skills (O’Neil, 1992; Wheelock, 1992a, 1992b). Student perceptions as noted in surveys and interviews were those of stereotyped and stratified roles, thus perpetuating notions of superior and inferior classes of citizens (Johnston & Markle, 1986).

Erb (1992a) admitted that practices like tracking may have made sense in a by-gone era, but he cautioned that they are not compatible with attempts to create learning communities based around interdisciplinary teaching and advisory programs. Kuykendall (1992) warned that the lure of homogeneity and standardized practices conspire against youngsters who may just be different, not deficient. She
added that when youngsters become convinced that they cannot succeed in our school programs, they take whatever skills they have, and they take the low road. This was addressed over fifty years ago by Hagman’s research in 1941 (Black, 1992). This research showed that addressing individual differences was important and that tracking was not necessarily beneficial, but schools continued the practice anyway. The issue of equity was addressed by many other advocates of "untracking." Gamoran (1992) cautioned that grouping by "ability" is actually a misrepresentation because students are divided according to measured or perceived performance in school, and sometimes grouping which affects a student’s entire program is based on ability in only one area. Hastings (1992) called an end to tracking a "moral imperative," adding that we must accept and celebrate diversity and believe in the fundamental worth and dignity of each person. Oakes (1985) pointed out that the rich, contextualized, problem-oriented curriculum which is usually thought of as appropriate for only the high-achieving students is, in reality, also the most promising kind of curriculum for those who have difficulty doing traditional school learning.

Looking at the issue through a positive lens, Lyman and Foyle (1990) asserted that in the classroom of the 1990’s, high expectations for the academic success of all students could be realistic. Ravitch (1992) called for
raising expectations by establishing a vision of what is possible for all children. Such a vision calls for a support system which expands the structure of opportunity for learning by providing ways of giving students more time, encouragement, or instruction. Lotan, Swanson, and LeTendre (1992) referred to this as "finding numerous routes into the curriculum." The goal, as stated in Turning Points (1989), is to nourish strengths and overcome weaknesses of individual students. Miller (1992) put this in perspective by asserting that for some students, learning is measured in great gulps, while for others, it is in tiny sips; thus, our job is to take the children the way they come to us and to move them forward. Kuykendall (1992) pointed out that schools that are succeeding with a diverse population are thinking creatively about ways to "hook" students by building on their strengths. This requires a flexible approach to scheduling in which teachers have blocks of time which they can allocate based on their collective judgment and their students' needs at any given time. This allows teachers to respond to needs, interests, and special learning opportunities. George et al. (1992) advised that those seeking to experiment with flexible scheduling must have the courage to try something new and the sense of humor to live with the slings and arrows that are inevitable when "singletons" are no longer allowed to drive the master schedule.
While there is ample support in the literature for heterogeneous grouping in middle level schools, supporters are quick to add that certain support measures are critical to its success. Lyman and Foyle (1990), Brandt (1992), and Oxley (1994) noted that given what we now know about the social nature of learning, isolated learning environments are especially frustrating for those whose background, motivation, and learning style make achievement in such an environment impossible. Lotan et al. (1992) suggested a move to small group instruction and discovery learning in response to this need for an interactive environment. Ciscell (1987) discussed the importance of developing questioning strategies which ensure meaningful and successful teacher-student interaction for all students. This encompasses decisions about differentiated levels of questioning, what is to be accomplished as a result of the questions, use of wait time, prompting, and rewarding responses. Klemp and Hon (1992) and Floyd (cited in Wheelock, 1992a) stressed that this inclusive, participatory approach also needs to be extended to extracurricular activities such as sports, with emphasis on participation and involvement, not on winning. Wheelock (1992b) considered a belief system to be an essential ingredient to untracking. This includes the belief that all children can learn, belief in the value of parent involvement, and belief in the need for a partnership of leaders and teachers.
Cooperative learning is seen as a way to support "untracking" because it provides a way to effectively teach students of diverse ability and differing rates of learning. However, for this type of instructional arrangement to be successful, certain conditions must be present. This issue was addressed by Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1990, 1992), Slavin (1990), Toepfer (1989, 1990), Johnston (1990), and George (1990). First and foremost, there must be collegial and administrative support (including staff development) for teachers. Next, the uni-dimensional view of intelligence must be replaced by a view which recognizes many different kinds of strengths (Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1994). This should be reflected in public recognition of contributions of low status students. Finally, cooperative norms must be established, and cooperative skills must be taught, for it cannot be assumed that students bring with them the skills needed for successful group functioning. Kagan (1990) explained that our behaviors are determined largely by the situations we are in, and cooperative learning leads to a more pro-social orientation among students. A key component to this, according to Johnson and Johnson (1990), lies in making the student see the payoff of learning the social skills targeted for development by the teacher.

Rottier and Ogan (1991), found that in addition to being developmentally appropriate for young adolescents,
group work offered numerous benefits, including access to a variety of opinions and information, group feedback and support, less personal risk, development of social skills, a sense of shared responsibility, development of a broader vision, and the fun of socializing around academics. Research results cited by Rottier and Ogan included higher achievement, especially for average and slower students, greater use of reasoning strategies, more positive relationships, positive attitude toward subject, and higher self-esteem. Augustine, Gruber, and Hanson (1990) had similar findings and also found increased acceptance of differences and improved attitudes toward school. Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1990) indicated that in addition to the short-term outcomes of greater learning, retention, and critical thinking, a powerful long-term outcome of greater employability and career success is an opportunity that schools can offer students through cooperative learning.

On the other hand, advocates for gifted education contend that homogeneous grouping is beneficial for identified gifted students. Johnson and Johnson (1989) indicated that a conservative interpretation of the overall data from studies conducted over a period of twenty years would be that participating in heterogeneous cooperative groups does not hurt, and often facilitates the achievement of high-ability individuals, and clearly benefits that of medium- and low-ability individuals. Recent studies
indicate that gifted students benefit academically when they are placed with other gifted students at least part of the time (Allan, 1991; Kulik, 1991, 1992; Robinson, 1990, 1991). In a study involving gifted sixth and eighth graders, Matthews (1992) found that gifted students had negative attitudes about participating in heterogeneous cooperative groups. However, in responding to this research, Johnson and Johnson (1993) and Sapon-Shevin and Schiedewind (1993) pointed out that the examples used were not well-structured cooperative learning situations. Furthermore, Erb (1992) cautioned that the research base deals almost exclusively with comparing formal classes provided for different levels of learners (the traditional junior high model) and not flexible models such as interdisciplinary environments. He, too, asserted that the current controversy results from the misuse or overuse of one particular strategy, such as peer tutoring. There is agreement, however, that a heterogeneous environment does address important social outcomes for all students, including the gifted (Johnson & Johnson, 1993; Matthews, 1993; Sapon-Shevin & Schiedewind, 1993). Kulik and Kulik (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of controlled studies of grouping carried out over 50 years by many different investigators. The summary of this analysis is that the academic benefits of ability grouping for gifted students are small but positive, and the evidence is less clear about non-cognitive outcomes.
Staffing

The staffing of middle level school is a critical variable in creating a student-responsive program. The literature in this area focuses on preservice and inservice, specialized middle level certification, behaviors, attitudes, and qualities seen in effective middle level teachers, and the role of teachers in school governance. With respect to program design for the preparation of middle level teachers, Scales (1992) summarized the research consensus as advocating training in the nature and needs of early adolescents, middle level curriculum and instruction, specialized methods and reading courses, a broad academic background (concentration in a minimum of two areas), along with early and continuing experiences in good middle schools. Turning Points added that training related to cultural sensitivity, teaming, and advisory and guidance principles must be included. Inclusion of field experiences such as internships and apprenticeships were also encouraged.

Even before the publication of Turning Points, the National Middle School Association (1980, 1986) had published two position papers concerning middle level certification. These papers emphasized the importance of specific certification standards for middle level teachers. Their purpose was to provide guidelines to anyone who might be concerned with the competencies of teachers of young
adolescents. A study by Valentine and Mogar (1992) found
that 33 states had some form of middle level certification
in 1992, as compared to only two states in 1968. Variations
existed in grade levels and requirements. It was also noted
that this is a gradual process, since most states have
grandfathered practitioners already teaching at the middle
level. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development
stated that promoting middle level certification recognizes
the talents and training of teachers at the middle level,
encourages universities to offer specialized courses in
middle level education, and provides legitimate status to
middle grade teachers. It helps erase the perception of
middle school as a professional and educational "way
station."

Several clusters of behaviors typical of effective
middle level teachers have been identified, and there are
many common denominators among them. In summary, they:
1) have a good self-concept and a sense of humor;
2) model warmth, respect, and fellowship;
3) are optimistic and enthusiastic;
4) are flexible and spontaneous;
5) demonstrate awareness and acceptance of developmental
   needs;
6) demonstrate knowledge of subject matter and
   methodology;
set high expectations and address individual learning needs;
listen and understand;
are committed to teaching at the middle level and to making a difference (Connors, 1992; George et al., 1992; Johnston & Markle, 1986; Knight, 1988; Liner, 1990; Rist, 1992).

Williams (1987) noted that to "survive and even thrive", a middle level teacher must have insight into the needs of young adolescents, personal memories of what adolescence was like, and a "blend of humanity" including compassion and confidence. Mason (1992) added that the portrait of an effective middle level teacher includes a focus on real world problems, a constant effort to integrate various disciplines as well as social skills, and an interest in the students outside of the academic context.

George et al. (1992) found that students ages 10-13 are more concerned about their teachers' personal attributes and interpersonal skills than their content knowledge or teaching skills. Informal inquiries carried out by researchers and classroom teachers, along with studies of adolescents who had done well in school, suggested that personal characteristics and attitude toward students had significant influence on how students perceived their teachers (Beane & Lipka, 1987; Stevenson, 1986). The things they wanted most were respect, fairness, safety,
trustworthiness, a sense of humor, and a commitment to achievable challenges.

Turning Points recommended empowering teachers to make decisions about allocation of time, materials, and funds. Raywid (1992) described circumstances that "make miracles" in a setting in which teachers and students are given the responsibility and autonomy to control their own operation, they are encouraged to collaborate with their peers, they are controlled more by shared values than by rules, and they are made to feel like important contributors. Cole (1992) and Schlechty (1994), in elaborating on this point, said that flexibility in the face of changing conditions is a necessary component of innovation, and considered the building blocks of innovation to be flexible use of time, space, people, knowledge, and physical support. This calls for changing what Tye (1992) called the hierarchical mindset. State authorities and local administrators will need to learn to facilitate and support rather than direct. Teachers and principals, working with their communities, will need to learn to make collective decisions rather than relying on being told what to do. The same skills needed for successful teaming are also the building blocks of an empowered teaching staff.

Family and Community Involvement

Re-engaging families and communities in the education of young adolescents was another recommendation of the
Carnegie Task Force (Turning Points, 1989). For example, parents and community members can become more involved as a result of strategies for offering increased avenues of communication, opportunities to volunteer, and roles in shared decision-making processes. The main issues which emerged in the professional literature were the need to make teachers and parents more aware of the benefits of increased family involvement, and the need to create many avenues for positive and proactive communication between schools, homes, and communities. Dunham and Bailey (1992) indicated that schools should assume that parents possess the potential to exercise the greatest stimulus to learning during a child's early years. However, Mack (1992) cautioned that communicating with different family structures and with divorced parents is relatively new to most school personnel. Furthermore, schools tend to make communication and involvement opportunities inaccessible to many parents because of scheduling, creating the perception that parents are unwelcome (Edwards & Young, 1992). Therefore, to increase the mutual comfort level with family involvement, Mack (1992) suggested asking students to help design ways to involve a wide diversity of parents.

Dunham and Bailey (1992) asserted that involved and informed parents develop more positive attitudes about education and about school personnel. With respect to conferencing, they suggested making parents feel like
partners in the educational process. It was also recommended that conferences include the development of a plan of action that involves school and home and that provides for follow-up (Levy, 1992). Gibbons (1992) found that in a study of middle level students with disciplinary problems, a combined effort of parent education (including monthly updates to parents), teacher training, and student group sessions, produced significant improvement not only in student behavior but in academic performance as well.

*Turning Points* (1989) recommended offering families and community members meaningful roles in school governance and giving them opportunities to support the learning process in and out of school. Suggested strategies included providing community service opportunities and expanded career guidance for students, encouraging family members and community members to assume instructional or instructional support roles as volunteers, and including parents and community members in governance committees such as site-based decision-making councils.

Edwards and Young (1992) proposed recommendations that call for increased inclusion of adults who are important in children’s lives, in ways which are substantially different from our traditional conception. These included organizing efforts around preventive strategies, exploring multiple models for reaching out to families (including drawing on community resources on a routine basis), and emphasizing
family and community relations as part of the professional preparation program for prospective educators.

Middle school theorists, such as Myers and Monson (1992) and Dunham and Bailey (1992) suggest that there are numerous benefits to family and community involvement in schools. In addition to improved parent and community attitudes toward school, benefits cited included improved student achievement, attendance, and behavior, improvement in the school's capacity to address sensitive issues, and a financial savings for the school through the use of volunteers (Myers & Monson, 1992; Dunham & Bailey, 1992).

The Change Process

The middle school concept represents a number of innovations which distinguish it from the junior high model, as outlined in this chapter. The implication, therefore, is that schools seeking to implement the middle school concept must identify and follow a change process in order to accomplish this transformation.

Fullan (1991) characterized change as a personal and collective process experience involving ambiguity, information overload, stress, and apprehension. He further defined improvement as a change which will increase the number of successes and decrease the number of failures. Two common denominators of current restructuring efforts are that they are driven by a focus on student performance, and they represent a long-term commitment to fundamental
systemic change rather than just small "pieces" of change (David, 1991).

There are various cautions and recommendations associated with the change process. Fullan (1991) cautioned that people need pressure to change, but that they also need to be able to react and to form their own position. He added that the most effective help comes from colleagues, since teachers tend to struggle privately. According to Sizer (1991), significant school change requires attending to all the consequential parts of a school at once because of the synergistic nature of the school organization. In other words, one change can actually touch many areas.

Covey and Parnsworth (1991) identified trust and a common vision as critical elements. Hord et al. (1987) and Deal (1990) stressed the importance of focusing on context and culture because change produces a loss of status or symbols, and those affected need an opportunity to grieve for that which is lost. For example, in changing from a junior high school to a middle school, a teacher may occupy the same job position, but the "rules of the game" dramatically change. One major change, according to Duvall (1992) is the evolving role of the classroom teacher from the transmission model to the transaction model. Adequate lead time prior to implementation can alleviate some of the discomfort produced by change (Kasak, 1988).
The set of teacher concerns outlined by Kasak correspond closely to the ethic of practicality described by Doyle and Ponder (1977), in which congruence (concern for impact on self), instrumentality (tasks required), and cost (understanding of payoffs) affect the degree to which an innovation is implemented. In addition, teacher in a redesigned school requires a new mindset, an updated knowledge base, and different skills, so restructuring requires a supportive growth environment with professional development resources and ongoing monitoring (Brock, 1991). Riley (1992) called for the principal’s role to be that of "leader of leaders", creating conditions in which other leaders thrive and facilitating consensus and collaboration.

Certain elements of the middle school concept lend themselves to supporting the change process. For example, teaming provides the collegial support and the common vision. Participatory decision-making as advocated in *Turning Points* (1989) offers teachers ownership in the process. Preservice and ongoing development address the need for a supportive growth environment. Additionally, as characterized by David (1991), the focus is on improving student performance and on fundamental systemic change rather than just one or two isolated changes.

The future of change in education is expected to include a balance of cognitive and social development goals, and a cultivation of individual and collective generic
capacity for change through targeted staff development efforts (Fullan, 1991; Joyce, 1990).

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research is a way of studying human life which incorporates process as well as product. It is an analytic description or reconstruction of intact groups (Lecompte & Goetz, 1984). Brandt (1972) described it as the investigation of phenomena with and in relation to their naturally occurring contexts. This type of naturalistic research frequently is conducted by practitioners to determine the effectiveness of a particular plan of institutional action. A unique feature of qualitative research is that ex post facto studies can play an important role, because some problems do not lend themselves to experimentation but are appropriate for doing controlled inquiry (Kerlinger, 1973). In such instances, archival data can constitute a key component (Cozby, 1977).

An examination of the critical attributes of qualitative and quantitative research reveals definitive contrasts between the two. Qualitative studies are correlational rather than experimental; in other words, they describe an existing context or situation rather than controlling or manipulating a situation created expressly for the study (Cozby, 1977). Naturalistic research is also inductive rather than deductive, generative rather than verificative, constructive rather than enumerative, and
phenomenological rather than objective (Lecompte & Goetz, 1984). Agar (1986) explained that ethnography is neither subjective nor objective, but rather interpretive. It involves sustained interaction with the people being studied in their own "language" and on their own turf (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

Qualitative research methods allow researchers and practitioners to study things as they occur rather than as they may be manipulated. This involves studying both explicit social structures and tacit conceptual systems, such as the hidden curriculum. This is a relatively new direction in educational research, because educational practitioners formerly were oriented to a prescriptive, rather than descriptive, approach (Lecompte & Goetz, 1984).

The qualitative approach is characterized by fieldwork methods such as interviewing, participant and non-participant observation, and document collection. However, data collection and data analysis occur concurrently rather than in sequence. Categories and concepts emerge or are inductively derived from the data instead of being predetermined. This is known as the constant comparative method, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The interaction of emergent variables in the natural setting is also of interest. The researcher in a naturalistic study thus aims primarily for the comparability or translatability
of generated findings rather than for generalization to other groups (Lecompte & Goetz, 1984).

A number of factors may influence the outcomes of a qualitative study. These include the personality of the researcher, the nature of the research object, the impact of the presence of researchers, and the social, ethical, and moral obligations that are generated by fieldwork (Punch, 1986). Thus, the issues of informed consent and confidentiality are important to the researcher's efforts to obtain and report authentic data in a manner which is ethically acceptable.

According to Brenner et al. (1985), the value of the interview as a data collection tool lies in the rapid response and the potential for both parties to explore and clarify meanings. It is considered to be an especially appropriate research method when the research interests are relatively clear, when the study involves past events, when there are time constraints, and when the research depends on a broad range of settings or people (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In addition, the interview tends to have a better response rate than a questionnaire, and it affords the researcher the opportunity to control the environment and to record spontaneous comments and nonverbal behavior (Bailey, 1987). Drew and Hardman (1985) identified three major types of interview questions which foster elaboration: descriptive, difference, and relationship questions. Much
of the data obtained in interviews can be summarized under the categories of frequencies, incidents/histories, and institutionalization of norms and statutes. Worthen (1981) stressed that the data collection process should include representatives of all important audiences. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) recommended maintaining a detailed journal during the interviewing. This helps the researcher keep track of emerging themes and interpretations, as well as nonverbal expressions which might be essential to understanding the meaning of a person's response. Such notes also help in guiding future interviews and in interpreting data at a later time.

Guidelines for designing and evaluating qualitative research serve to increase its reliability and validity. For example, Davitz and Davitz (1967) identified three important considerations: a central theme as well as a theme within a context; appropriateness of the sample population, and opportunities for discovery. Mead (cited in Kirk & Miller, 1986) developed techniques to standardize questioning and recording of observations in order to introduce into qualitative research some of the reliability of laboratory and survey methods. Spradley (1979) recommended four separate kinds of fieldnotes: the verbatim account, an expanded account of each session, a journal containing reflections about the experiences that arise, and a provisional running record of analysis and interpretation.
Furthermore, the triangulation of data collection affords the researcher the opportunity to examine an issue from more than one angle or view. This involves bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point so that varied perspectives can be used to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the issue in question (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Worthen, 1981). This strategic choice which was originally derived from navigation science has successfully been applied to social science inquiries and can enhance a study's generalizability.

Summary

Current theory and research in the area of middle level education call for changes which represent a significant departure from the traditional departmentalized, fragmented, competitive secondary model. The changes discussed in this review included the practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisory programs, cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping, core curriculum, special preparation for and empowerment of teachers, and increasing family and community involvement.

The implementation of the middle school concept, then, could be described as a process which involves a "bundle" of interrelated innovations. Therefore, this study is important because it seeks to investigate the perceptions of individuals and groups involved in such an implementation experience.
Chapter Bibliography


CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

Research Approach and Design

A qualitative research approach using data from interviews, documents and an existing data set was used for the following reasons:

1. The goal of the study was the description of perceived effects of the implementation of educational restructuring. The intended result of this study was increased conceptual understanding rather than manipulation or large-scale generalization.

2. Detailed information was sought on several interrelated factors, some of which would emerge only during the course of the study; therefore, controlled experimentation was not appropriate.

3. Data would consist mainly of transcripts and documents for which qualitative analysis was best suited.

The research design for this study was the collection of data from several sources, triangulated through the use of surveys, interviews, and document collection. Specifically, the researcher interviewed students, teachers, and parents who had been associated with a suburban middle school both prior to and since the implementation of key
aspects of the middle school concept. A list of the changes implemented is found in Appendix G.

Data collection occurred between 1991 and 1993. Eighth grade students from the class of 1990-1991 were interviewed at the conclusion of their eighth grade year. Teachers and parents were interviewed during the summer and fall of 1992. A survey was administered to eighth grade students in 1993 and was compared to an existing data set (a similar survey which had been administered to the eighth grade class of 1989-1990). The researcher also collected a number of documents in order to build a data base which could be used to support and expand the data obtained through the interviews and surveys.

The researcher's entry into the setting for this study was facilitated by having been first a teacher and then an assistant principal at the school under study prior to assuming a principalship elsewhere in the district. It was made clear to all participants that this study was in no way related to the researcher's official capacity and that it was in no way related to teacher or student evaluation. They were told that the purpose of the study was to find out how students, parents, and staff perceived the effects of changes which had taken place as a result of implementation of the middle school concept.
Data Collection

Subjects

The subjects for the interviews were five teachers, five parents, and five students at a suburban middle school. Since this is the only middle school in the district, representing multiple campuses was not a concern. The teachers were selected from a pool of teachers identified by the principal. All were teachers whose tenure began prior to the major portion of the restructuring. Two male teachers and three female teachers were selected. Four different subject areas and three grade levels were represented. Students were selected from a pool created by the principal and counselor. All five were eighth grade students who had attended the school for all three years. Three male and two female students were selected. Parents were also selected from a pool compiled by the principal and counselor. All parents selected had a child who had attended the middle school prior to restructuring and another child who was now in attendance. Three mothers and two fathers participated. Further information on the selection of interview participants is provided later in this chapter.

Pseudonyms were assigned to all interview participants to ensure confidentiality. The students were identified as Ron, Phil, Sharon, Mark, and Meredith. Ron had never taken honors courses when they were in existence. When asked
about his grades, he identified himself as a "B" student, which was consistent with his academic records. He had attended school in the district since kindergarten. He participated in the two sports in the extracurricular athletic program and in school-related community service projects as well as Boy Scouts.

Phil described himself as a "B-/C+" student who had not taken any honors courses. His actual records indicated that he was a "C+" student. He had been in the district since first grade. He was a member of one athletic team. He indicated that he limited his participation in extracurricular activities so that he could concentrate on keeping his grades high enough to maintain the state-mandated academic standard for athletic eligibility. He considered himself to be a hard worker and said that schoolwork was not easy for him.

Sharon's description of herself as a "B+/A-" student was consistent with her records, and she had taken one honors course in the sixth grade. She was a member of the eighth grade Pep Squad and worked on the school newspaper staff. She also participated in orchestra. She had attended school in the district since fourth grade. She considered herself to be capable of doing "A" work, but added that cocurricular and extracurricular activities played an important role in her life.
Mark had taken two honors courses in sixth grade and was an "A-" student, although he identified himself as a "B+" student. He had attended school in the district since second grade. He was involved in the Odyssey of the Mind program as well as two sports teams. He had served as a Student Council representative in the past and expressed an interest in becoming involved in student government at the high school.

Meredith was an "A" student both in self-perception and in actuality, and she, too, had taken two honors classes in sixth grade. She was a squad leader on the eighth grade Pep Squad. She characterized herself as being more interested in fine arts than athletics, as evidenced by participation in choir and drama programs. She had been in the district since fifth grade.

Teachers interviewed were Jim, George, Ann, Sarah, and Barbara. At the time of the interview, Jim was a science teacher with five years of teaching experience. In addition to his teaching certification, he held a graduate degree in geology. He was employed for several years in private industry in a related field prior to beginning a teaching career; thus, he was older than the typical fifth-year teacher. At the district level, he participated in curriculum writing projects. He described his teaching style as collaborative and hands-on, and this type of approach was evident in classroom observations conducted by
the researcher as well as written records of observations by other supervisors which were made available to the researcher by the principal. He had expressed skepticism about the proposed changes, particularly heterogeneous grouping, during teacher forums provided by the restructuring committee.

George was a reading teacher who had been in the district for eight of his fifteen years of teaching. His graduate degree was in English. He previously taught high school and college as well as the middle level and had experience in teaching other subjects besides reading. He also sponsored various extracurricular projects such as the yearbook and served on the site-based decision-making committee. He served as a trainer in the district's staff development program and was sometimes called on to deliver presentations to other districts who were restructuring their middle schools. He considered his teaching style to be eclectic, with adjustments based on the nature of the courses and the needs of the students. This flexibility was evident in the differences noted during observations of sixth grade reading and eighth grade remedial reading. He served on the restructuring committee and initially expressed no strong opinion either way before the committee began its research.

Ann taught social studies and had been in the district for twenty-two years. She held a master's degree in
elementary education. Her grown children had attended school in the district, so she had exposure from a parent’s point of view as well as that of a teacher. She was first employed as an elementary teacher in a self-contained class, and she moved to the middle school when grade configurations were reorganized in the early 1970’s. She felt that her teaching style was in transition, which she defined as moving away from direct teaching and into more student-directed activities. Classroom observation records showed increasing use of cooperative learning and fewer worksheets with answers taken directly from the chapter. She had expressed a positive opinion about the possibility of heterogeneous classes, as her team did not have any of the honors classes, and she felt this left her classes without a "spark". She had also expressed reservations about assuming responsibility for an advisory.

Sarah was a language arts teacher with eighteen years of experience and a graduate degree in English. She had been in the district for eight years at the time of the interview. She held certification in several other areas besides language arts. In addition to serving on curriculum committees at the district level, she led campus-based committees on student publications and on learner support programs. She also coached students for academic competitions such as Academic Pentathlon. She described her teaching role as that of facilitator. Classroom
observations and records revealed the use of simulations, cooperative learning activities, student use of the computer, and more "student talk" than "teacher talk". Although she had taught honors classes and had enjoyed them, she also felt that many more students could benefit from the honors curriculum and thus was open to heterogeneous grouping.

Barbara was a social studies teacher with a master's degree in history and seven years of experience, with all seven years spent at the school under study. She had previously served as faculty sponsor to extracurricular activities and was also involved in a curriculum revision project. She characterized her style as child-oriented and said it was important to her to establish relevancy to students' lives. According to Barbara, the strategies she used to accomplish this included simulations, interdisciplinary projects, student debates, and journal writing, all of which were noted in observation records. She had not expressed strong opinions about changes as they were proposed but showed willingness to implement them as they were introduced, especially advisory and teaming. Her team generated additional activities as extensions to the advisory program.

The five parents interviewed were John, Cathy, Rachel, Laura, and Adam. Information on their professions and their children's ages was obtained from enrollment records, and
information about their parental involvement was obtained from the principal and counselor. Parents chosen were not related to the students interviewed. At the time of the interview, John’s younger child was in the seventh grade and his older child was in eleventh grade. John had been involved in Dads’ Club fund-raising projects. He was employed in the legal field and had been a guest speaker at school. He considered himself to be well-informed about school issues. He had actively questioned the district’s decision to eliminate honors classes in the middle school, as evidenced by attendance at the committee meetings and letters to the school board.

Cathy had one child who had just finished eighth grade, and an older child who had completed middle school two years earlier. Although she had not served on any formal committees, she attended PTA meetings, parent communication meetings, and extracurricular activities on a regular basis. She was college educated, served as a community volunteer, and was employed in a part-time clerical position. Although she had not expressed a position either way on the issue of eliminating honors classes when it was under consideration, she had attended most of the committee meetings as an observer. In the course of these meetings, she had asked many questions and had studied the committee’s proposal and research.
Rachel had a sixth grader and an eighth grader in middle school, as well as three older children who were in grades ten, twelve, and college. She had attended the school in the district herself and had graduated from the high school. She also held a college degree. She had volunteered for PTA committees and had also served on a district committee to study facility and programming needs for the district's increasing student population. She was employed part-time in the financial field. Her children's abilities ranged from severely learning disabled to highly gifted as measured by state and district criteria. During discussions of proposed changes, she expressed concern over whether diverse needs, such as the range seen in her own children, could be met in a heterogeneous environment.

Laura had a sixth grader and a tenth grader, as well as a child in college. Although she had been a teacher prior to the birth of her children, at the time of the interview she was not employed outside the home and was active in projects and committees related to her church. According to the staff, she generally came to school for any conferences, open houses, and parent communication meetings. During the period of restructuring, she had expressed an interest in investigating private schools because she felt that the middle school was not nurturing enough and not encouraging enough.
Adam had a sixth grader and a tenth grader. He was self-employed in the computer field. Because of the demands of his profession, he was not involved in committees or parent volunteer activities, but since his spouse was involved in these endeavors, he had access to information about school programs, and he did attend open houses, parent conferences, and Dads’ Club meetings. His comments at community meetings about proposed changes expressed a concern about whether students would still be adequately prepared for high school if the proposed changes were implemented.

Instrumentation

The interview was chosen as the primary research tool because it allows for the establishment of rapport that stimulates respondents to elaborate and to share confidential thoughts which might not be shared in writing. It also affords the researcher the opportunity to clarify questions and to ask for clarification or elaboration of responses (Brenner, Brown, & Cantu, 1985). It was further determined to be appropriate because the study involved past events (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) and it was expected that spontaneous comments and nonverbal behavior might offer additional data (Bailey, 1987).

Downs, Smeyak, and Martin (1980) describe four options for ensuring that the verbal responses and nonverbal communication occurring during an interview are properly
preserved for later analysis. These options are:

1. Taking notes during the interview. This helps document the interviewer's immediate perceptions of important points, and in later reviews for data analysis, it calls to mind points which might otherwise be forgotten. One disadvantage of this method is that in the case of an interviewer with limited experience, the attention devoted to taking notes may inhibit the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

2. Writing out a comprehensive summary immediately after the interview is finished. However, this is effective only if the interviewer is able to listen intently and retain important points. It is also critical that the summary be completed immediately after each interview.

3. Taping the interview. This is helpful when the interviewer wishes to return to analyze the interaction in depth, and it eliminates the need for notetaking during the interview. The disadvantages noted include the time it takes to listen to the tapes and transcribe them, as well as the need to obtain consent of the interviewee for taping.

4. Having a second person sit in on the interview. This provides the opportunity for post-interview discussion which might call to mind most of the important things and which allows the interviewer to test for agreement
in his/her assessments. The main disadvantage is that the presence of another person could affect the comfort level of the respondent.

It was originally the researcher's intent to tape all of the interviews as described in the third option above. However, an unusual feature of the school community in this study is that it consists of many high-profile individuals and families in terms of financial, social, or political stature. In addition, there are several volatile situations involving complicated child custody proceedings. For this reason, parents experience a high need to avoid the public eye and to protect their privacy and that of their children. Likewise, because the nature of the community is such that teachers are closely scrutinized both individually and collectively, they are similarly protective. When respondents were invited to participate in the interviews, they were also asked if taping would be acceptable. Although all of them agreed to be interviewed, more than half were not comfortable with the taping. Based on the selection process described later in this chapter, the interviewer felt that this was a very carefully-selected group which was representative of the population and whose responses would be valuable to the study. At the same time, the issues of consent, confidentiality, and ethics (Punch, 1986) needed to be addressed. So that all of the interviews would be documented in a consistent format, the researcher
selected a combination of the first and second options described by Downs et al. (1980). The interviewer is a certified teacher appraiser with six years of training and experience in scripting verbal and nonverbal interaction during classroom observations, as well as training in shorthand notetaking. Immediately after each classroom observation, the notes are reviewed and a summary is written in preparation for scoring the appraisal instrument and for conducting a formative evaluation conference with the teacher. A similar process is used for personnel interviews when selecting new staff members. This same process was applied to the interviews in this study. A form was developed for recording responses and nonverbal interaction during each interview. A second form was developed for summarizing the interview immediately after its conclusion. These forms are found in Appendix F.

A survey also was included in this study because of the availability of an existing data set for comparison purposes. This was a survey which had been administered to the eighth grade class (Cohort A) by the principal at the conclusion of the 1989-1990 school year. The main purpose of the original survey was to compile information on student perceptions of the changes which had been implemented, particularly the abolition of "AT" (honors) classes. The questions dealt mainly with students' impressions of how individual needs were being met through enrichment, academic
support, teaming, and cooperative learning. The same survey was administered to the eighth grade class of 1992-1993 (Cohort C). No claims are made relative to the reliability or validity of this survey. It served as a holistic examination from which information relevant to the issue under study was extracted. The intent of the researcher was to see if students' perceptions changed over time and if there were differences between the perceptions of those who experienced both tracked and untracked settings and those who experienced only untracked classes. In order to triangulate the data collection, an additional source of data was needed. The original data set pre-existed this study, and while the format of the later survey was driven by that of the existing data set, both did include open-ended items. The items for which a response had to be selected included multiple options so that respondents were not limited to a "yes/no" selection. Since there was complete anonymity, the survey offered the possibility that students might express perceptions which they would be hesitant to verbalize or to expressly publicly in an interview setting (Bailey, 1987).

Documents examined included lesson plans from three teams of teachers. Teams from sixth, seventh, and eighth grade provided lesson plans for a month in each core area. School newsletters, handbooks, and team publications were also reviewed. Professional articles written by staff
members and programs of conferences attended were reviewed as well. The purpose of reviewing all of these documents was to look for evidence and examples of aspects of the middle school concept, such as interdisciplinary teaching activities, as well as identification of the team as an instructional, organizational, and cultural unit. As described in Chapter IV, evidence included reference to interdisciplinary units such as the Texas unit in seventh grade in which all core teachers on the team based instruction in their subject on a Texas theme during a given time period. Updated school publications were examined for references to the instructional program and for information related to developmental issues and to the middle school concept, particularly to teaming. Based on middle school theory and the critical attributes of the middle school concept as described in Chapter II, it could be predicted that there would be less emphasis on rules and regulations and more information on instructional and extracurricular opportunities as well as team and advisory activities. It could also be predicted that sections relating to conduct and discipline would be stated more positively than they had been in previous documents (i.e., communicating expectations rather than prohibitions). The professional articles and conference programs were expected to provide evidence of public sharing about actual implementation
experiences with instructional and organizational
strategies.

Procedures for Collecting Data

Data collection began in the spring of 1991 with
student interviews which were scripted as described in the
previous section. The principal and counselor compiled a
list of students meeting the selection criteria. These
criteria included:

1. Being a member of the 1990-1991 eighth grade class
   (Cohort B).
2. Having attended the school for all three years.
3. Being able to express thoughts and opinions
   articulately and confidently.
4. Not having been taught by the researcher.

The ability to express thoughts and opinions was
determined by students' public speaking experiences in
class, in conference situations, or at school functions.
After the list was compiled, it was reviewed by the
researcher to ensure that none of her former students had
inadvertently been placed on it. From this list, the
researcher and the counselor selected five students to
represent a mixture of male and female students as well as
a range of ability levels as measured by academic records
and prior participation or non-participation in honors
classes. Since mobility in the district is low, all of the
students on the list had attended school in the district
for at least a portion of their elementary years. For this reason, having all four of the district's elementary schools represented was considered, and there was at least one student from each elementary attendance area. The school counselor contacted the students, obtained parental permission for them to participate, and consulted the respective teams of teachers to schedule the interviews at convenient times. In all cases, only the student and the interviewer were present.

Four of the student interviews took place in the assistant principal's office at the middle school under study and one took place in the interviewer's office on another campus. Prior to each interview, the interviewer reviewed the requirements of a good interview. This was accomplished by reviewing related notes from four graduate courses in educational research as well as a summary of notes from professional literature on qualitative research, with particular attention to interview techniques. The interviews began with the interviewer introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the interview. All five of the students gave their opinions willingly. Meredith, Sharon, and Phil were much more talkative than Mark and Ron, who were more reflective and generally gave brief answers. Phil, Sharon, and Meredith consistently elaborated on their responses and almost seemed to anticipate what the probe question sought; therefore, few probe questions were needed
in these interviews. Sharon frequently cited anecdotes or examples to support her responses.

Sharon: . . . We tend to identify with our advisory more than any other group. This sounds kind of sappy, but we are like one big, happy family. We have lots of discussions, and there’s a group spirit that’s different from our teamwide spirit. It’s more personal . . . . There’s more attention to us as individuals . . . . We started bonding right away at our opening picnic. It was the first time we had a picnic like that, and it really helped us connect with the kids in our advisory and our team.

Ron and Mark gave less detailed responses, but when probe questions were asked, they were able to elaborate or give examples.

Interviewer to Ron: Do you notice teachers doing things differently?

Ron: . . . Teachers seem to expect more of us.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of what they expect and how it is different from the past?

Ron: Well, we used to do a lot of copying, like from the board or from the overhead. Now we do more independent notetaking.

Interviewer: What does independent notetaking involve?

Ron: Well, the teacher talks about a topic or we have a class discussion on it, but we have to decide what’s important to write down. We have to take responsibility for picking out the important points and putting them on paper in a way that will help us learn them.

Interviewer to Mark: Do you think the changes affected students’ self-esteem?

Mark: I think it was beneficial.

Interviewer: What was beneficial?

Mark: Mixing the classes.
Interviewer: Why is that?

Mark: You can be with more friends because kids aren't separated by ability.

Interviewer: Does that help students feel better about themselves?

Mark: Yes, and it makes them feel more equal, too--it's more fair.

Both became more relaxed and required less prompting during the second half of the interview, and Ron's responses to the last two questions showed much more spontaneity and fluency than his earlier responses.

Interviewer: Looking back at the changes or innovations that have occurred in this school during your time here, which ones do you feel have been beneficial, and why?

Ron: Well, cooperative learning because you get good practice by explaining things and it helps you learn to resolve conflicts. Mixed grouping helps because you don't feel stupid and it's good for the AT kids to be with others. It helps them socially. Uh... advisory is a good time for loosening up, and it's a good way to ease into the day... TRIBE is good deal because you make new friends and help other people all at once. And,... um... teaming is good because it helps with homework and stuff.... Teachers stay in touch with each other so you don't get bogged down with work, and they act like they care about the kids on their team.

The interviews ranged in length from twenty-five to forty minutes. At the conclusion of the interviews, the participants were thanked and asked if there were any "afterthoughts" which occurred to them at that point. Meredith, who had originally expressed indecision in her response to the question about changing things back, said she had decided that it would not be good to change things
back because now everything was geared toward including as many students as possible in the educational and extracurricular opportunities available to students. She used the cheerleading program as an example.

Meredith: ... I guess it wouldn’t be good to change things back, because now everything centers around giving people as many opportunities as possible. There’s a lot of emphasis on including a wide variety of people in things ... like in challenging academics and cheerleading ... . It’s not exclusive like it used to be, and that’s good.

Phil said that although he would not want to see group work eliminated entirely, he liked it when there was less of it, because sometimes he just preferred working alone.

Phil: Group work is OK; it has good points. I wouldn’t want to see it cut out entirely, but I guess I liked it better when there wasn’t as much of it.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Phil: Well, sometimes I like to work alone. Sometimes I just want to develop my own ideas. Or sometimes I don’t really have an idea or opinion to add to the group, but they keep saying that everyone has to participate.

Immediately after each student interview, the notes were reviewed by the interviewer. A summary of the interview was written taking into account the interviewee’s demeanor and nonverbal behavior including posture, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact (Bailey, 1987). Also included were issues about which the student expressed a very decisive opinion as well as commonalities among the examples or elaborations cited in response to probe questions. After all five interviews were completed, the
five summaries were compared. Further details on this process are included later in this chapter. The interview schedule is included in Appendix B and a sample journal entry is in Appendix F.

Teacher interviews took place in the fall of 1992. Teachers were selected from a pool identified by the principal. The pool included teachers who met these criteria:

1. Having taught a core subject at the school for at least five years. This was considered to be important because these teachers, having experienced the middle school prior to many of the changes, would be in a position to recognize the differences between the current program and past practices.

2. Being capable of expressing their opinions confidently and articulately, as determined by prior classroom observations and presentations at faculty meetings or other forums.

3. Not having taught in the same department as the researcher.

4. Representing a range of opinions about the implementation of the various aspects of the middle school concept as evidenced by oral or written comments shared at faculty, team, or committee meetings or in other forums.
The list was reviewed by the researcher, and any teachers with whom she had a personal friendship were deleted. Also deleted were teachers who had worked with the researcher on committees for extended periods of time. The resulting list consisted of teachers who had known the interviewer primarily in a supervisory capacity. Five teachers were selected representing three grade levels and four subjects. Two male and three female teachers were invited by letter to participate, and all five teachers agreed to do so during a follow-up phone call from the interviewer. Appointments were set up by the researcher during each teacher's conference period, and the interviews were conducted in their respective classrooms.

Prior to each interview, the interviewer reviewed guidelines for effective interviewing as described earlier. Since all of the teachers knew the researcher, introductions were not necessary, but the purpose of the interview, as stated in the letter each received, was reiterated. To ease previously-mentioned concerns about privacy and confidentiality, it was explained that the interview would be scripted in much the same manner as a classroom observation, and that the teacher would not be identified by name at any time.

After the formal interview was finished, the interviewer visited informally with each respondent, and in each case, issues related to the interview re-emerged and
were included with the transcriptions. The purpose of the visiting was to help transitionalize from respondent back to teacher and from the interview situation back to the workday. However, an unintended effect occurred in that the teachers of their own volition went back and spontaneously referred to earlier comments they had made, sometimes expanding on them. The researcher decided to factor these extensions into the data analysis, taking into account one of the advantages of the interview as a research tool as described by Bailey (1987), that of the opportunity for spontaneous comments. Four of the teachers appeared relaxed, and they responded readily with little or no prompting. Jim was somewhat reticent at first, and when probe questions were used, he gave more details, but he seemed most willing to do so in the areas of instructional planning and teacher-student interaction, with more limited comments in other areas. His final comment during informal visiting was that things seemed to be "headed in the right direction". The other teachers were eager to respond and to give copious examples of instructional and organizational strategies, collegial interaction, and efforts to maximize communication among teachers, students, and parents.

Ann: . . . . It's great to be able to talk to others who know the child . . . . We can get more information about how they learn. There is one student in particular--I've completely changed my way of working with him because of my team's insights . . . .
Sarah: . . . . We’ve really broadened our interaction with the faculty, even outside of our team. We pull in elective teachers for some of our interdisciplinary activities. That sort of teaming has provided another bridge. Not only does it help us see the kids from another angle, it also lets us see how the elective teachers interact with the kids, and we learn from that, too.

Barbara: . . . . I think we have a good rapport with parents. You pick up on things pretty quickly because of teaming, so we can usually sit down with the parents before things reach the crisis stage. We’ve done a lot to make parents feel involved, too, like the open team meetings. And we’ve held some of our team and advisory socials in students’ homes instead of at school.

The shortest teacher interview lasted thirty minutes, and the longest lasted fifty minutes. In each case, the interview time included three to five minutes of informal visiting at the end of the session as described earlier.

The same summary process used at the conclusion of the student interviews was also employed with the teacher interviews. This included individual summaries as well as a group summary.

Parent interviews occurred during the summer and fall of 1992. A list of potential participants was drawn up by the principal and counselor. Selection criteria included:

1. Having a child who had attended the middle school prior to the restructuring as well as another child now in attendance. This was felt to be important because these parents experienced the middle school program as it used to be and as it was at the time of the
interview. Therefore, they would be in a position to see and react to the differences.

2. Being able to express opinions articulately and being informed about school issues through attendance at school meetings or participation on committees or task forces were also considered as criteria. Expressive ability was based on parent presentations as guest speakers, in conferences, or at events such as parent meetings or school board meetings.

3. Having a range of opinions about the changes implemented, as listed in Appendix G.

4. Not being related to the students interviewed.

After the list was compiled, the principal and the researcher selected three mothers and two fathers who met the above criteria and who represented a range of opinions on the issues addressed by the restructuring, such as doing away with honors classes. This range of opinions was determined by parent comments, either oral or written, in forums such as school board, PTA, letters to the editor, or parenting meetings. Parents were invited by letter to participate, and the interviewer followed up with a phone call to discuss details and set an appointment.

Again, prior to each appointment, the interviewer reviewed notes on interviewing techniques as had been done for student and teacher interviews. In accordance with the preferences of the participants, four of the interviews took
place in the interviewer's office, and one was conducted in an interviewee's office to accommodate her schedule. Since all five parents had been at least minimally acquainted with the researcher in her capacity as middle school assistant principal, introductions were not needed. The purpose of the study was reviewed at the beginning of each interview.

Each parent interview was very different from the others. Laura tended to get off the subject and seemed to have a desire to talk about elementary, high school, and family issues, but when redirected, she was always able to share perceptions about specific middle school issues. This interview took longer than the others as a result.

Laura: I used to team teach, and it worked because I was so young and flexible. But fourth graders need a lot of nurturing. Fortunately, there was only one other teacher on the team with me, so the kids only had to adjust to two teachers.

Interviewer: How about teaming as your family has experienced it at the middle school now?

Laura: Well, I like it, because the team cooperates and communicates. The teachers are flexible, and they are well-adjusted to teaming . . . . My sixth grade son has some of the same teachers my oldest son had, and I think they have really broadened their methods and approach as a result of teaming.

Rachel needed prompting, and more probe questions were used in this interview than in any of the others because she tended to discuss issues in terms of her children's perceptions rather than her own. A point which she stressed repeatedly was her perception that there had been
significant improvement in the amount and nature of the communication between the school staff and parents.

Rachel: . . . . Communication has definitely improved . . . . The Teacher Hotline is a real plus . . . . Even though my kids don’t say a lot about schoolwork, I feel more informed than before . . . . There are fewer unknowns . . . . Teachers seem better educated about ways to keep the lines of communication open. We get more phone calls and more newsletters . . . . They have more parent awareness meetings and they’ve started having more parental involvement on major committees . . . .

John, Cathy, and Adam addressed each question and offered examples and elaboration. Cathy gave many examples in every area examined, while most of John’s elaboration was in the area of curriculum. Adam’s comments and extensions were mainly in the areas of interaction and curriculum.

Cathy: The curriculum is still just as challenging even though the classes are mixed, and I see more emphasis on writing across the disciplines. For example, my son even uses the writing process in his math class . . . . I see evidence of more flexibility in instruction and more teachable moments based on relevant events—whether expected or unexpected—instead of lock-step lesson plans. This seems to be true mainly in science and social studies, although in language arts they do use current event topics as writing prompts sometimes.

Adam: It seems that there is far less "force feeding" in the curriculum now . . . . Everyone is expected to engage in a high level of thinking and participation . . . . My older child used to talk about kids who never volunteered and were never called on to answer in class. Now there are so many activities that are not just question/answer, question/answer . . . . It seems like every student is more accountable, and the thing I really like is that they have to talk to each other in order to complete assignments and projects.
I can tell from what teachers say in the open team meetings that they are using many new methods and that the curriculum is definitely beefier.

The parent interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to one hour and ten minutes, including about five minutes of informal visiting at the end. During the transitional visiting time pertinent comments and issues resurfaced and were noted in the same manner as those in the teacher interviews. Again the summary process described earlier was used with the parent interviews.

Immediately following each student, teacher, and parent interview, the interviewer reviewed the scripting notes, made minor additions if appropriate, and wrote a summary of the interview as outlined previously. The notes and summaries were then transcribed and typed. A sample of this appears in Appendix F.

The student survey was administered in the spring of 1993. As previously mentioned, it was based on an existing data set. The purpose was to see if students' perceptions had changed over time, as compared with the existing data set from three years earlier. With the permission of the principal, it was distributed to all eighth grade language arts teachers, who received a letter from the researcher explaining the purpose of the survey. Their students completed it during an advisory period. Teachers then collected the surveys, which were picked up by the interviewer.
Data Analysis

Data analysis was a recursive and iterative process, with categories and concepts emerging or being inductively derived from the data as they were reviewed rather than being predetermined. This is known as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967). During each phase of the study, emerging patterns were sought and coded into categories. For example, when the surveys were examined, the main categories which emerged were: perceptions about heterogeneous grouping, differentiation of instruction, cooperative learning, and teaming. As explained earlier in this chapter, the survey was based on an existing data set whose reliability and validity had not been established; therefore, attempts were not made to analyze results quantitatively. Rather, it was used as a holistic examination of information relevant to the study in order to see if students' perceptions had changed over time. Results of both surveys were recorded on a matrix which is found in Appendix B. The information was used to help corroborate findings from other data sources as a part of the triangulation of data.

An iterative process was used to identify the categories and record perceptions. This occurred within each phase of the data collection. The process was used after each individual interview, after the whole group of five interviews, and after all three interview groups. It
was used across data sources as well, for example, when interview responses were compared with survey results.

Specifically, every interview transcript, along with accompanying journal notes and summaries, was reviewed and categories were identified based on responses. Examples of categories which emerged include teaming, curriculum and instruction, interaction, communication, and social skills. These and other categories are explained in further detail in Chapter IV and listed in Appendix H.

Example of coded text:

Interdisciplinary teaming:  Sarah:  We do curriculum mapping, and we’ve become familiar with each other’s curriculum. We move units around very comfortably. The

Flexibility:  longer you team, the more blurred the lines between content areas become. And you start to see so many other dimensions to the child that the teaching process and the evaluation process are broadened.

Instruction:  Teaming is a more humane approach, and one of the results is that the kids leave with better people skills.

Holistic:  Peer interaction

The five interviews within a group (student, parent, or teacher) were compared. Next, the three groups were examined for similarities or differences in perceptions based on the categories which emerged. A sample of the matrix used to summarize the results appears in Appendix E. Finally, the data were re-examined in the context of the four research questions, and perceptions were compared for each question.
With each successive aspect, patterns which had emerged in prior phases were targeted and coded, and the data were then re-examined for evidence of new patterns which had not been identified in previous parts of the study. For example, student surveys generated a positive feeling about interdisciplinary teaming, and references which would provide evidence of a similar perception on the part of teachers and parents were sought when interview transcripts were examined.

Examples:

Survey (student comments): .... It makes learning mean more because they show how things relate to each other. .... It’s like a family; they really care. .... Things are organized because they get together and plan, and the best part is that they don’t all give tests on the same day! .... You know what to expect from all four teachers instead of being confused by one being super-strict and another being super-lenient.

Teacher interview (Sarah): .... I’m no longer in isolation .... I always take into consideration what is going on in the other classes even if there isn’t an interdisciplinary unit in full force at that particular time. .... I’m able to look at students in terms of their total learning experience instead of just what happens in my classroom.

Parent interview (Rachel): .... Teaming is the major thing that has changed. I think it is a wonderful idea. The teachers know the kids better, and they (the teachers) know each other better, too. Communication at every level is so much better because with four teachers working together, someone is bound to pick up on things before they get out of hand .... And they can do so many things that an individual teacher would have a hard time taking on alone--like the trip to Sea World.

In addition, as new patterns or categories emerged and were coded, previous phases were once again evaluated to
look for evidence of the new categories. For example, parents made repeated references to improved communication between the school staff and parents, and teacher interview transcripts were again reviewed to check for references to activities and programs designed to enhance teacher/parent communication.

Examples:

Parent interview (Cathy): . . . . There is much more communication, and most of it is positive, and I guess you could call it preventive . . . . There are more written explanations of things made available to us, and the staff goes out of the way to provide informational meetings and orientation sessions . . . . I’ve even had teachers call at times when they sensed that maybe there were difficulties at home, just to see if we were OK and if they could do anything for (my son) . . . .

Teacher interview (George): . . . . We have daily team meetings, and our team meets weekly with the administrators. That keeps a good exchange of information going, so we can keep parents well-informed, too . . . . The open team meetings have been very successful, and we usually have a good turnout of parents . . . . We’ve encouraged parents to schedule team conferences, too, and that is so much more effective than conferences with individual teachers. It tends to be more positive because at least one teacher on the team has some positive comments and some suggestions for helping to build success for the child.

After categories had been identified from surveys and interviews, documents were examined to identify evidence of perceptions related to the categories which had emerged in earlier phases of data analysis. Pertinent information was marked with colored highlighters. Once these were identified and coded, the documents were examined again for any new categories.
Thus, through an iterative process, generalizations emerged which were coded into categories. These categories were used as a vehicle for comparing responses. The categories were compared to identify elements common to all five sources of data. These included student surveys, student interviews, teacher interviews, parent interviews, and documents. Perceptions within and across groups were compared. For example, it was noted that with respect to instructional strategies, every data source contained references to more student-directed learning.

Examples:

Student interview (Mark): . . . . There is a lot more group work and discussion, which we didn't have in sixth grade. Students are a lot more involved in the learning. We do things like skits and projects to help develop a concept. It seems like we have more choices about how we learn. . . .

Teacher interview (Barbara): . . . . I do far less "straight teaching" and "straight testing" . . . . There is more map work, more group work, more synthesis--like essays, more student products and productions . . . more of what they're telling us is part of authentic assessment.

Parent interview (Cathy): . . . . More hands-on activities have crept in . . . . There seem to be more expanded experiences like long-term projects with different options. . . . I've seen it in all of the core subjects, and it even seems to have carried over into the elective classes. . . .

Document (excerpts from staff newsletters): . . . . The creativity integrated into the lessons I've seen recently is outstanding. The life skills presented intertwined with higher level thinking requirements to turn out some incredible student projects . . . Wow! The kids were on the edge of their seats during the Black Plague unit in sixth grade! What an example of
integrated and interactive learning! Congratulations to (the four teachers) for a class act!!

Survey (student comments in section on teaming): They (the teachers) can plan activities that tie subjects together and make learning more fun . . . . They talk to each other and get ideas from each other on how to make things easier or more interesting . . . . Teachers communicate about their lessons, so there's not a lot of repetition or busy work . . . .

Repeated reviews of the data sources and the researcher's journal notes occurred until the researcher was satisfied that all major categories had been identified.

The next step involved looking at the data in terms of the research questions posed in Chapter I. The four areas were instruction, peer group interaction, teacher attitudes and practices, and school culture. Responses were again coded, this time for the purpose of identifying which of the four areas they addressed. For each area, all five data sources were examined for findings pertinent to that specific area. This phase of the coding process was simplified as a result of the coding which had already taken place because in some instances there was overlap in the codes. A matrix was used to record perceptions within a source (such as student interviews) as well as across data sets. A sample matrix is found in Appendix E.

Summary

This study utilized qualitative data collection and analysis procedures to describe the perceived effects of the implementation of the middle school concept. Multiple
sources of data were used to build a data base from which to infer perceptions common to teachers, parents, and students, as well as those held by only one or two of the groups studied. These perceptions were analyzed in the context of the four research questions identified at the beginning of the study. The data sources included student surveys, documents, parent interviews, teacher interviews, and student interviews. Generalizations and inferences concerning the respondents' perceptions were developed. From these could be drawn implications for current practice and for middle level restructuring efforts.
Chapter Bibliography


CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The results from this study are presented in this chapter in six sections. The first section describes the organizational culture, including changes implemented before and during the study. The second section addresses the first research question as stated in Chapter 1. Findings on the perceived effects on instruction are presented as obtained from interviews, documents, and surveys. Following the same format, the third section addresses the second research question, perceived effects on peer group interaction. Similarly, the fourth section deals with the research question on teacher attitudes and practices, and the fifth section with the question on school culture. Finally, the sixth section identifies the major patterns which are common to all of the phases of data collection and compares the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers with regard to each issue.

Background

The school under study is a middle school which includes grades six, seven, and eight. The principal’s tenure began in 1979. The principal had prior experience in restructuring a middle level school. The researcher's
tenure extended from 1980 to 1990. At the time of the principal’s arrival, the school was organized around the traditional junior high school model, with departmentalization of faculty and courses. Students attended seven discrete classes with no connections across academic disciplines. Tracking existed in several areas, and in some cases, the choices made in sixth grade affected a student’s ability to take accelerated courses in high school. A great deal of importance was placed on certain traditions and elaborate rituals, such as the election of eighth grade cheerleaders, formal dances, and extensive campaigning for Student Council positions. Parents frequently complained that in comparison to the elementary school, where they felt that their presence and involvement were welcomed and that they had access to ample information, middle school tended to keep parents uninformed and at arm’s length, and to discourage their involvement.

Over the next twelve years, planned changes were introduced at various intervals, along with programs to educate parents and teachers about the needs of early adolescents. Most of the changes pertinent to this study occurred between 1987 and 1991, with preparatory activities taking place throughout 1985 and 1986.

During the 1985-1986 year, brainstorming sessions were held for selected teachers, parents, and students. Process facilitators were used to help each group identify the needs
of young adolescents and formulate a vision based on these needs. This became the basis of plans for staff development and parenting workshops for the following year. In 1986-1987, staff development was offered in the areas of interpersonal communication, the change process, and peer pressure reversal. In response to a need expressed by parents, round table sessions were held at which parents from each grade level were able to share ideas and beliefs pertaining to parenting issues such as expectation, curfews, discipline, and the physiological and emotional changes of adolescence. Personality inventories were completed by core teachers in anticipation of forming interdisciplinary teams the following year.

In preparation for the 1987-1988 school year, interdisciplinary teams were established at each grade level, and every student was assigned to a team of four teachers who had a common planning period in addition to their individual conference period. For the first year, no minimum expectations were set as to the quantity or nature of the connections to be established across disciplines. A Learning Center was established to provide academic support to students. The center was directed by a special education teacher, and each period of the day it was staffed by core teachers as one of their class assignments. Highlighted textbooks, textbooks on tape, modified tests, and individual reteaching were among the services available. Students
needing to use the center were sent by their classroom teachers during class, with the restriction that a student could not be sent while direct instruction was taking place in the classroom.

At this time, the practice of electing cheerleaders was discontinued, and an eighth grade pep squad was formed, with membership open to any eighth grade girl willing to attend scheduled practices. Over one hundred girls took part, and they were organized into satellite squads which were assigned to cheer at games on a rotating basis. The entire squad performed at pep assemblies. Staff development on middle level issues continued to be offered by sending teachers to conferences and by bringing guest speakers to the school district.

At the end of the 1987-1988 year, a plan to discontinue tracking was announced, but due to widespread concern on the part of parents of students enrolled in the AT ( Academically Talented) classes, a committee was formed to study the issue. This committee, consisting of parents, teachers, administrators, and a Board member, met throughout the 1988-1989 school year and ultimately recommended reorganizing students into heterogeneous groups (Boone, 1989).

In preparation for this change, teacher committees revised district curriculum so that the core curriculum for each subject would offer strategies for modification and enrichment of content to meet individual needs. Suggestions
for interdisciplinary and cooperative learning activities were also integrated into curriculum documents at that time. Staff development in cooperative learning and differentiating instruction was provided for all staff members. In addition, to help teachers expand the advisory program which was begun in 1988, sets of activities were developed based on broad themes such as study skills and making friends.

The following year, the AT program was discontinued. A state-mandated gifted program was established in 1989, but it was separate from core subjects and emphasized creative problem-solving as opposed to acceleration of core courses. Expanded offerings of exploratory electives, such as an interdisciplinary art/drama class (as opposed to separate semester or year-long courses in each area), were added in 1990. At this time teams were also given the freedom to schedule their own students within their team block. Prior to this, the computer had generated student schedules, and teams were free to move students as needed. Co-teaching was added in 1991, which replaced some of the "pull-out" special education services with a teaming situation in which the special education teacher went into the regular classroom. The changes discussed in this section are summarized in a chronological list in Appendix G.
Efforts continue to refine the restructured school. There is an emphasis on improved communication between school and home, increased opportunities for connections across disciplines, including elective courses, and increased opportunities for inclusion and participation, such as collaborative teaching (a less restrictive special education placement involving a regular education and special education teacher together in the regular classroom) and a limited number of intramural sports.

**Research Question 1**

The research directed to this question sought to determine the perceived effects of the implementation of key aspects of the middle school concept on instruction. Data were obtained from interviews, documents, and surveys as outlined earlier. The research question was stated as follows:

What are the perceived effects on instruction produced by key aspects of the middle school concept, such as heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, and interdisciplinary teaming?

**Interviews:** All five of the students interviewed made references to more active learning, as evidenced by group work, more class discussion, more student involvement in class activities, and a greater expectation that everyone will participate and contribute. Sharon felt that these changes already had begun in seventh grade, so it seemed to her to be more of a gradual change.
Sharon: In some ways seventh grade was a harder year than eighth grade. I guess you could say it was a transition year. Teachers started expecting more, and they started working in some changes . . . . or, well, for some teachers they were changes; others had been teaching that way before . . . . We do more things in small groups, and everyone gets to feel like they have good talents . . . . In my AT classes, teachers made everyone participate all the time. Now every kid is expected to do that, even if they’re not at the top of the class.

Phil: There is more group work now . . . . Kids like it because you can learn quicker from each other. It helps us socially too, because we learn to work together and get along . . . . We get to discuss things ourselves and instead of just listening to the teacher talk . . . .

Meredith: We do more work as a group . . . mostly small groups. Some teachers were already doing that before, but almost all of them do it now. It gives us a range of opinions and viewpoints, and sometimes different techniques for learning, too. That makes discussions pretty interesting most of the time . . . . And we have more interdisciplinary activities, like the paper we did for history and language arts. Sometimes those are easier to do than two separate assignments and sometimes they’re harder . . . . You definitely have to do more thinking and planning on the interdisciplinary work . . . . It takes a lot of responsibility and independence to carry it out.

Mark: There is a lot more group work . . . which we didn’t have in sixth grade, and only a little in seventh grade, but it’s really caught on with the teachers this year . . . . It makes it easier to have discussions, and you can learn from other good ideas in the group. And everybody is expected to contribute . . . . you can’t just sit back and let others do all the talking like some kids used to. You can’t just get away with that now . . . . Students are a lot more involved in the learning . . . . It seems like we have more choices about how we learn . . . .

Ron mentioned that he perceived more emphasis on student independence; for example, he noted that there was less copying from the board and more independent notetaking.
He also noted that there were fewer study sheets where the answers came straight out of the book, and that these were replaced by "thinking questions" which required students to do something with the information learned rather than just memorizing it.

Ron: Most teachers use more group work .... They call it cooperative groups. We used it in social studies when we studied the Monroe Doctrine .... I think we learned more as a group than we would have by ourselves .... We used to do a lot of copying, like from the board or from the overhead. Now we do more independent notetaking .... picking out important points and putting them on paper in a way that will help us learn them .... And we have to do more things with the material instead of just memorizing or filling in blanks ....

The students also made reference to a perceived lessening of competition, which was replaced by more inclusive opportunities. They attributed this to the use of cooperative learning, teacher acceptance of a range of opinions, talents, and responses, and high teacher expectations for all students in the areas of participation and effort.

Mark: The good thing is that there's less competition and more cooperating. Now that we're in class with a more mixed group, we can branch out more .... We know more people, and when we pick people for leadership positions, we can vote for the people who show good effort and interest instead of just the smartest or most popular ones .... It takes some of the pressure off when you know it's OK to just be yourself.

Phil: There's more emphasis on working together in class and outside of class. We don't try to show each other up or outdo each other. As long as we just do our best, that's good enough.
Sharon: Everybody is expected to try their best...and everyone gets to feel like they have good talents.

Meredith: There are lots of opportunities that weren't available for most kids before. Under the old system, lots of girls never would have been a cheerleader because they would have been afraid to try out, especially if they were shy.

Ron: Now that everyone takes the same classes, kids who weren't in AT classes feel like they can do as good as the smart kids. No one has to feel stupid or left out.

Like the students, all of the teachers interviewed perceived that there was more active learning. Specifically, they saw evidence of considerably less direct teaching and far more facilitating. They cited the use of more application and process activities, authentic assessment experiences, and use of outside resources such as field trips and guest speakers. All five of them also added that instructional decisions were at least partially based on connections as determined by the interdisciplinary planning sessions and curriculum mapping which were now an integral part of the teaming structure.

Jim: I see less facts and more processes and principles...a lot more application; in fact, the lab tests are 100% application...I do very little memory work now; it’s mainly essay and interpretation instead of multiple choice...We always map to see what opportunities there are to tie things together.

George: I always coordinate the stories we’re reading with science or social studies...Since we map our plans together, I just automatically check to see what’s going on in other subjects before I teach a skill or select a story...Things like that just didn’t happen before...I’m using a lot more essay
assignments and tests, so that gets them thinking at a higher level, and it supports the writing process, too . . . .

Barbara: . . . . It’s totally different . . . . I couldn’t live without my team . . . . I do far less "straight teaching" and "straight testing" . . . . We always talk about who is doing what, and usually math and language arts adjust around social studies and science . . . . They are really good about that, like when we were going to Sea World, (the math teacher) did a unit on measurement that related to the science end of things, and (the language arts teacher) pulled in reading and writing topics, too . . . .

Ann: . . . . We always look at social studies and science as the key subjects, and we plan from there . . . . Whenever we can, we plan assignments or projects that students can get credit for in more than one class, like the coat of arms . . . . We do more field trips because now we can get enough mileage out of them curriculum-wise to justify the time and the cost . . . .

Sarah: It’s a major paradigm shift . . . . You transcend your own classroom . . . . I always take into consideration what is going on in the other classes even if there isn’t an interdisciplinary unit in full force at that particular time . . . . I no longer evaluate students totally in terms of the language arts program . . . . I am definitely moving toward being a facilitator, and the counseling role has grown a lot, too . . . .

In addition, each teacher perceived that advisory had evolved into a connection between academic and social goals.

For example, Jim’s team used advisory as an opportunity to showcase current events.

Jim: It’s a time to talk about likes and dislikes, current events, and just generally combining academics with real life . . . . We do a lot with current events . . . . We did an interdisciplinary unit on the elections with our advisory.
George’s team made free-choice reading the focus of their advisory and offered projects relating student reading to real life.

George: We’re emphasizing free-choice reading in advisory, and we’ve done some neat projects where the kids have to assume the role of a character or an author or somehow make their reading connect with the real world . . . . It’s a great way to get to know the kids better . . . . And it’s neat having the art teacher on our team, because she has great ideas for projects.

Ann’s team brought in a number of guest speakers during advisory for book talks, career awareness, and self-assessment topics.

Ann: We didn’t care too much for the suggested advisory activities which were published . . . . We do a lot with guest speakers and book talks during our advisory, and we try to make it interdisciplinary as much as possible . . . . We have so many parents and teachers with interesting backgrounds and experience, and the kids love being exposed to unusual things -- well, things which seem unusual for a school setting . . . .

Parent interviews revealed perceptions about instruction which were consistent with those held by students and teachers. All five parents cited examples of strategies which represented a departure from teacher-directed instruction and a move to more active learning.

John mentioned increased use of interviews and guest speakers. He also observed a decrease in the number of worksheets and what he referred to as book assignments.

John: . . . . There seems to be more teacher contact with individuals and small groups . . . . I’ve noticed that there are more guest presenters, and the kids have
even had to interview family members or community members as part of the learning process. . . . I don't see many worksheets or book assignments; the kids have to produce more original work with what they learn . . . .

Cathy made reference to more creative, hands-on activities. She also perceived that there was greater teacher flexibility, as noted in her comments about teachable moments. She also noted a decrease in the number of pre-printed worksheets.

Cathy: More hands-on activities have crept in . . . . I've seen more "skits and fun things" . . . . There seem to be more expanded experiences like long-term projects with different options . . . . At the same time, the use of printed worksheets seems to be declining . . . . I see evidence of more flexibility in instruction and more teachable moments based on relevant events - whether expected or unexpected . . . . The kids were really excited after a major earthquake when (the science teacher) put aside his plans and used it as the basis for the day's lesson . . . .

Rachel remarked that along with an increase in hands-on activities, she saw evidence of increased student and teacher use of the computer. She added that instruction seemed more coordinated, i.e., there was more "rhyme and reason" to what the students were learning because it had connections to what was happening in their other classes.

Rachel: Things seem to be a whole lot more coordinated as far as academics go . . . . There's a lot more rhyme and reason to it all . . . . like the way elementary teachers tied things together . . . . There are more hands-on things and more field experiences, like the trip to Sea World . . . . I see a lot more computer use. The teachers use it for preparing materials and newsletters, and there are actual class activities on the computer with software for different topics in the
curriculum. The kids are allowed to do assignments and projects on the computer, too.

Laura also sensed a connection across disciplines and an emphasis on relationships. She, too, observed greater emphasis on concepts and less reliance on drill and factual material. Her perception was that there was a sense of wonderment and excitement about learning which she had not seen in her experience with her older children.

Laura: The teachers are flexible, and they are well-adjusted to teaming . . . . I think they have really broadened their methods and approach as a result of teaming . . . . There is more tying together of things . . . like putting together the pieces of a puzzle . . . . There is more emphasis on global concepts and less on facts. Sometimes I think they could still use more drill, though . . . . Now there is a sense of wonderment and excitement because the kids are given more choices and more latitude about what and how they learn . . . .

Adam mentioned that the interdisciplinary, hands-on experiences he saw offered on a regular basis at the middle level were now beginning to be available in the high school to a limited extent. Although high school teachers were not part of teams, some of them had recently taken the initiative to collaborate with colleagues from other departments to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary experiences, particularly in English and history.

Adam: The kinds of things kids are creating on their teams are great . . . like joint projects for more than one subject . . . and what's really neat is that high school teachers are hearing about it and starting to try it out . . . .
Documents: Documents reviewed included lesson plans and school publications. Three teams (one each from sixth, seventh, and eighth grade) provided lesson plans for one month. All three teams used some type of curriculum mapping form on which to record their handwritten lesson plans. In sixth grade, the form showed the core subjects of language arts, social studies, math, science, and reading. Seventh and eighth grade forms showed language arts, social studies, math, science, and "team time". The difference is due to the fact that reading is taught as a separate class in sixth grade but not in seventh and eighth grades. Thus, seventh and eighth grades have an extra period in their team block which the team uses in various ways based on their needs at any given time.

Each set of team lesson plans showed evidence of interdisciplinary approaches to instruction. For example, sixth grade had planned a unit around social studies based on the British Isles. In language arts, the spelling list was related to the British Isles. Social studies classes worked on a family coat of arms, and the writing instruction for this project was handled in language arts. Science classes studied diseases, with emphasis on the Black Plague. Math classes studied Roman numerals and created word problems with contexts from the social studies and science topics.
In seventh grade, a Texas unit was planned. Social studies classes studied Texas geography, while science classes examined plant and animal life in Texas. Language arts classes planned trips around Texas and did persuasive writing on the benefits of visiting particular cities, regions, and landmarks. Math classes created a budget for their trip and calculated distances, times, and expenses. Instruction in graphing and statistics was included in this unit.

The eighth grade unit also had a social studies theme as its central focus. The emphasis was on the World War II era. Language arts classes read the Diary of Anne Frank and wrote a research paper as a combined social studies/language arts assignment. Math classes studied projections and geometric measure in contexts related to the historical period. The science unit was on war technology and how it compared to today’s technology.

Thus, all of the lesson plans showed evidence of connections across disciplines.

Publications reviewed included school newsletters, professional journals on the middle level, programs from professional conferences, and the student handbook. Formerly, the only newsletter published was generated by the PTA approximately every six weeks and focused on service projects, extracurricular activities, and PTA news. That newsletter still exists, but there is also a bi-monthly
staff newsletter published by the administrative and counseling team with periodic contributions from teachers. Each edition includes articles written by the principal, both assistant principals, and the counselors. Specific mention is made of instructional strategies, interdisciplinary projects, and other activities observed by the administrators. The examples cited below are illustrative of the use of active learning and collaboration.

Examples:

The students in Think Tank are studying multiple intelligences. (The teacher) has assigned them to present an idea to the teacher of their choice that incorporates kinesthetic learning techniques into a unit currently being taught at our school. They had some really great ideas; maybe we can try a few in the classroom.

I have enjoyed my walk-throughs this week. I see students actively participating in most classrooms.

Authentic assessment - what is it? How do you implement it into your teaching style? How will your students benefit from it? Begin asking questions and working with authentic assessment. A lot of information and literature on this strategy is coming your way soon. Familiarity is the key ingredient.

I enjoyed visiting classes again this week. (Math teacher)’s kids are really going to know coordinates for graphing. The kids were using graph paper to play battleship with a partner, and they really knew the concept. I was also impressed with the presentations made by students in (science teacher)’s class on the greenhouse effect. The computer lab is full of activity; it’s great to see the new computers being utilized.

Each team also publishes a team newsletter periodically, highlighting team activities such as
instructional themes, field trips, and upcoming parent meetings. In most instances, this newsletter is published every six weeks. The computer lab director and other teachers who have an advanced level of proficiency on the computer offered classes after school on a voluntary basis so that any teacher wishing to use the computer as a tool for producing newsletters would have the skills to do so.

Since 1987, there have been faculty presenters from this school at every state and local conference and at two national conferences of middle level organizations. These included the Texas Middle School Association (state conferences and regional affiliate meetings) and the National Middle School Association. Faculty presenters also took part in three Texas Association for Gifted and Talented conferences and one Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development conference. Their presentations promoted active learning, collaboration (at student and faculty levels), and connections (among subjects and between the classroom and the world). Specific presentation topics included block scheduling, cooperative learning, teaming, specific interdisciplinary activities or units, academic support and academic extension in heterogeneous classes, differentiated curriculum and instruction for gifted students, advisory, and exploratory electives. In addition, the principal and two teachers wrote articles which appeared in publications at the state level, and the principal was

The student handbook which existed prior to 1989 was a lengthy document which consisted mainly of rules, restrictions, and policies. In many instances, things which were already published in state-mandated district documents such as the Discipline Management Plan were restated verbatim. In 1989 it was replaced by a brochure called Great Expectations: Middle School from A to (almost) Z (Hartin, 1989). This publication outlined procedural information which students were most likely to need (e.g. attendance, tutorials), along with descriptions of school activities and instructional programs. Information on required courses and electives was included in an overview of the three-year sequence of study for middle school.

Surveys: The existing data set was a survey completed by 219 eighth graders in 1990 (Cohort A). The survey was also completed by 244 eighth graders in 1993. The researcher looked for clusters of questions concerning instruction. No attempt was made to treat the survey responses quantitatively. The intent was to look for trends and patterns which might support the data obtained from the other sources, namely, interviews and documents. The items on the survey which related to instruction were those indicated below. A summary of the related responses is presented in Appendix A.
2. Most of your classes in middle school are heterogeneous, which means that students are grouped together instead of being separated by ability. What aspects of heterogeneous classes do you feel have been an advantage to you? Check those which apply, if any.

d. Everyone has access to enrichment and higher-level thinking activities, not just the brightest students.

e. Class discussions are more interesting by having a variety of students.

3. What aspects of heterogeneous classes do you feel have not been an advantage to you? Check those which apply, if any.

e. The teacher has to adjust the pace to accommodate everyone.

5. Have your teachers offered any optional activities for extra challenge?

a. Yes, several times.

b. Occasionally.

c. I don’t know of any.

6. Have your teachers used the Learning Center for students needing extra support?

a. I’ve been to the Learning Center.

b. I’ve seen classmates go there.

c. I haven’t noticed students from my classes going there.

7. Many teachers in this and other schools use cooperative learning. What is your personal reaction to working in cooperative groups? Check those which apply.

b. I think we learn more as a result of explaining it to each other.

c. I think it makes us more accountable.

d. It helps us learn social skills as well as academic skills.
8. In what ways do you think the "pod" system is of benefit? Check those which apply and give a brief example.

a. Instructional

d. Communication

Examples cited included increased communication and coordination among teachers (with respect to curriculum, tests, projects, and assignments), ease of communication among students because of advisory and team activities, and teacher-parent communication because the entire team could meet with a parent and share information that might help them work more effectively with the student.

Examples: They . . . tie subjects together and make learning more fun . . . . They . . . get ideas from each other on how to make things easier and more interesting . . . so there’s not a lot of repetition or busy work. . . .

In cases where there was a large difference between the responses of the two groups, the researcher reviewed the interviews and documents for possible explanations and then contacted the teachers who had participated in the interviews to determine their interpretations regarding the reason for the difference. These teachers were selected because they already met the criteria determined at the beginning of the study, as outlined in Chapter III. They were also familiar with the purpose of the study as a result of their participation in the interviews, and they had established a rapport with the researcher with regard to the study. They were sent a copy of the survey and the
results as shown in Appendix A. A cover letter from the researcher asked that they look at specific questions and comment in writing on their interpretation of the responses. Their written responses indicated that program changes and an increased comfort level on the part of the teachers explained, in their opinion, the difference in student perceptions. For example, in looking at question 2e, which makes reference to classroom discussion, four of the teachers said that they and their teammates were now using class discussion more frequently, and that the first group of students surveyed were more accustomed to a teacher-directed environment. The fifth teacher (Barbara) said that in the past two years, students had had more exposure to discussion and diversity of opinions as a result of an exchange program with another school as well as further development of the advisory program.

Barbara: The students have had a lot more exposure to open discussion and diverse opinions in the last couple of years. In the first place, we've developed the advisory program and we're doing more discussion instead of "cookbook" activities. We have an exchange program with an inner-city school, too, and when we get the kids together, they always have a lot to talk about.

George: We use a lot more class discussion now, where two years ago the teachers probably still did most of the talking.

With respect to 5c (extra challenge activities), teachers replied that many of the activities which they used to consider enrichment are now part of the regular
curriculum. They also commented that the activities which they require of gifted students are now made available as an option to any student who wishes to do them, so they are not necessarily perceived as "extras" because they are not considered "extra credit".

Jim: . . . . There are projects and things I used to make available only to gifted kids that I offer to everyone now . . . . I might let them do it in place of another assignment, but I don't give extra credit for it . . . .

For question 6, the number of students who had not noticed anyone going to the Learning Center doubled (6c). Teachers attributed this to the implementation of a co-teaching program, in which special education teachers were in the regular classroom with the core teacher to help special education students in a less restrictive environment. Because these teachers could help any student rather than just identified special education students, teachers in co-teaching classes were experiencing less need to send student to the Learning Center during class. George also pointed out that the Learning Center was now open before school every morning, so some students were using it before school rather than during the school day.

Sarah: Now that we have co-teaching, I don't send nearly as many students for reteaching or one-on-one instruction because they can get it right in the classroom. I do still send students who need things like oral testing or textbooks on tape.

George: The Learning Center is open in the morning before school now. If you looked at the total number of kids using the Learning Center, it would probably
be pretty close to previous years, except now more of
them are there before school instead of during class.

With respect to 7b and 7d (cooperative learning), all
five of the teachers said that as a result of further
training and experience, they were now more comfortable with
cooperaive learning and were using it more selectively (in
contrast to initial overkill) and, in their opinion, more
effectively. Barbara specified that she felt she was
monitoring positive interdependence more closely, which
avoided the "one person does all the work" pitfall that can
occur. (Johnson & Johnson, 1993). Sarah felt that
increased emphasis on social behaviors such as paraphrasing
and active listening in advisory activities, individual
conferences, and teaching situations had increased student
and teacher awareness of the social skills dimension of
cooperative learning.

Barbara: I monitor more now to see that everyone
performs their assigned roles, and I've gotten a better
handle on the individual accountability part. I don't
seem to be having any more complaints about certain
kids doing or not doing their share of the work.

Sarah: We've done a lot on being a good listener and
checking for understanding. We make the kids do a lot
of paraphrasing and restating in class and in advisory.
I even make kids summarize what I've told them when I
have conferences with them about behavior or
schoolwork.

There was also an increase in the number of students
who perceived that teaming offered benefits in the area of
communication (8d). All of the teachers pointed out that
in the past two years, communication had been a major goal
of the school, and teams had implemented new formats of communication such as team newsletters and open team meetings for parents every six weeks. They had also increased the number of instructional activities such as guest speakers or book talks for which the entire "pod" (team) assembles, giving students additional opportunities to interact outside of the classroom setting. Similar examples are found in the interview excerpts in Chapters III and IV.

**Common patterns:** Among the findings related to the first research question are three main common threads. All of the data sources indicate perceptions of more active learning and involvement of students, more instructional collaboration and communication at the student and faculty levels, and more connections across disciplines, between cognitive and affective outcomes, and between subject matter and real life.

In the area of more active learning, perceptions are based on the comments of students interviewed, who consistently mentioned the use of more group activities, more projects, more independence, and more discussion. Teachers cited examples of strategies and activities used by their teams to promote active involvement such as cooperative learning, field trips, and games in advisory. Parents reiterated these same examples. Examples of related comments are found in Chapters III and IV.
The presence of active student involvement was also documented in team lesson plans (e.g. making chess pieces in advisory), in school newsletters (e.g. the battleship game), and in comments related to cooperative learning and team activities on the survey.

Students, teachers, and parents perceived an increased level of collaboration and communication on the part of students and teachers with respect to instruction. Again, the comments from all three groups, as cited throughout Chapter III and IV and as noted in Appendix E, highlighted the use of cooperative learning, team planning, interdisciplinary units, and group projects. One area which was emphasized in the teacher interviews and in the documents (but not in other data sources) was that of increased professional involvement on the part of the staff. Teachers mentioned workshops and staff development opportunities which played a role in their instructional decisions. Documents described teachers' efforts to share their experiences with others by presenting at conferences and writing articles. Students and parents would not necessarily be aware of these developments since they were not systematically publicized.

All data sources were consistent in indicating that there are now more connections across disciplines, between academic and social skills, and between the classroom and the real world. As noted in interview excerpts,
interdisciplinary opportunities served as the basis for teacher decisions in planning instruction as a team. Every parent and student made mention of activities which tied subjects together, such as the Sea World field trip. Lesson plans and newsletters described these and other activities. Teacher presenters shared some of their interdisciplinary ideas, such as the elections unit and the Texas unit, at conferences. Most of the comments about academic and social outcomes came from parents and teachers, who noted that cooperative learning and group projects fostered this connection. However, students did mention the concept of learning to get along and resolve differences as a part of group work.

In terms of connections between school and real life, examples in the interviews and documents cited in this chapter and Chapter III highlighted field trips, guest speakers, book talks, assignments which required the use of community resources, authentic assessment strategies, and community service projects.

One unanticipated effect was observed with regard to grouping practices. Based on the high level of interest and discussion about eliminating honors classes and replacing them with heterogeneous classes, it could be predicted that interview respondents would perceive this change as one which had heavily impacted instruction. At the time of this change, parents and teachers were concerned
about the possible problems created by trying to provide instruction at many different levels within a class or even "watering down" the program. However, in all cases, if mixed classes were brought up at all during the interviews, it was in the context of social and emotional impact, inclusivity, or downplaying competition. When asked to enumerate the major changes which had taken place, two of the parents (Rachel and John) never mentioned abolition of the AT program, one (Adam) mentioned it only after a prompt from the interviewer, one (Laura) could no longer remember the name of the program and called it AP, but all five immediately mentioned teaming. Comments during the interview indicated that the change in grouping was not seen as the most decisive factor impacting instruction.

Adam: The level of the curriculum didn't seem to change just because there was no longer an AT program; instead, everyone got what AT classes used to get. Even though there are new teaching ideas being used, they seem to have more to do with the teams than with how the kids are grouped.

Cathy: I don't see any polarity by ability level now, but I did when (my older son) was in middle school. Since only 25% of the kids could be in AT classes, peripheral kids were hurt. . . . I think the mixed grouping has made kids more accepting of each other on both ends. . . . (My younger son) is just as challenged academically as (my older son) because the teachers are using so many higher level experiences, but he's far better prepared socially. . . .

When teachers were asked to enumerate major changes, all five teachers mentioned teaming, but only three (Jim, George and Ann) mentioned the move to heterogeneous
grouping. Again, their comments pointed to a greater influence of teaming on instruction, with heterogeneous grouping providing benefits of less exclusivity and a more even distribution of what Ann called the "spark". No one mentioned the need to make major adjustments in instruction specifically to accommodate a range of abilities.

George: There is less exclusivity . . . less separating themselves out . . . . The slower kids have perked up because of being exposed to the brighter kids . . . .

Ann: Having the AT kids back in the mainstream is so nice - it has brought the "spark" back . . . .

Sarah: Heterogeneous grouping does not play as decisive a role as teaming or some of the other changes. The answer to dealing with gifted kids is good teaching, not special programs . . . .

Student comments relating to grouping also were related to inclusivity and minimizing competition.

Meredith: It helps your self-image because people who weren't in AT felt excluded before, and people who were in AT felt like they stood out . . . . It was awkward . . . .

Mark: The good thing is that there's less competition and more cooperating. Now that we're in class with a more mixed group, we can branch out more . . . . It takes some of the pressure off when you know it's OK to just be yourself.

Ron: Now that everyone takes the same classes, kids who weren't in AT classes feel like they can do as good as the smart kids. No one has to feel stupid or left out.

Targets for growth: All data sources were examined again to identify possible recommendations or targets for growth. A list of topics was generated, and the list was coded
according to the four research questions. The only target for growth identified with respect to instruction was the advisory program, and it was mentioned by all five of the teachers interviewed. In each case, the teacher and his/her team found that the advisory materials provided (by the counselor and a small committee of teachers) were too limiting and not always responsive to the needs of teachers and students. These materials consisted of a synthesis of activities from various sources, with emphasis on self-awareness, study skills, and making friends. A suggested timeline was included with the materials, but conformity to the suggested program was not monitored.

Sarah: We developed our own advisory workbook because the ones we got didn’t meet our needs. Advisory is not "500 activities for building self-esteem"; advisory is an attitude . . . . We’ve included goal-setting, organization, etiquette, listening skills . . . . It’s a time for opening more doors for communication, so you have to be flexible . . . .

Barbara: Our team didn’t like the "cookbook" approach; it seems like there was too much starch. We like having more latitude and being able to pull in our own activities.

Jim: It’s hard to have any kind of structured home room without some kind of accountability attached, so we ended up trying to tie things into something going on in the classroom, like with the current events. When we tried to use the book they gave us, the kids didn’t take it seriously, but most of what we’ve tried on our own has worked out pretty well.

George: Since we decided to focus on free reading, we did projects instead of planned activities. I think we were able to accomplish the same things, or maybe even more, and it was a lot more fun than doing those "touchy-feely" activities.
Ann: We didn’t care too much for the suggested advisory activities which were published . . . but we’ve done a lot on our own, and it’s better now . . . . We do a lot with guest speakers and book talks during our advisory, and we try to make it interdisciplinary as much as possible . . . .

Interpretations and recommendations related to all of the targets for growth are included in Chapter V.

**Summary of findings for Research Question 1**: All of the data sources revealed perceptions that implementation of key aspects of the middle school concept, particularly teaming, had produced observable effects on instruction as described in this section.

**Research Question 2**

This question sought to determine the perceived effects on the identified changes on peer group interaction. The same data sources which were previously identified were used to address this question. There was some overlap between data related to this research question and the first research question (perceived effects on instruction). The research question was stated as follows:

What are the perceived effects on peer group interaction produced by instructional and organizational aspects of the middle school concept?

**Interviews**: The interview questions in the student interviews dealt with social identity, cultural identity, and leadership. There were contrasting views among the five students in the area of social identity. Sharon and Meredith felt that their social identity was most connected
to their own group of friends and also to their advisory.
Mark said that he had made many more friends on his team
due to the mixed classes, so he felt that his social
interactions were, for the most part, connected to his team.

Meredith: ....  Well, I have my own group of
friends, but ... you get really close to your
advisory.

Mark: ....  Now that we’re in class with a more
mixed group, we can branch out more ... There is
loyalty to the people on your team, although by eighth
grade you know most of the grade level because you’ve
been here three years.

Sharon: ....  We tend to identify with our advisory
more than any other group .... There’s a group
spirit that’s different from our teamwide spirit
....

Phil felt that his social identity was primarily with
a group of friends and also with his team to a certain
extent. Ron said that he socialized primarily with a group
of friends, but he added that he found that in eighth grade
the entire grade level took on a greater role in the
students’ social life.

Phil: As far as social activities go, I identify
mostly with a group of about fifteen friends, and a
little with my team, but not as much ....

Ron: Most of my social life is with my own group of
friends, but it seems like this year we do more things
as a team ... picnics, parties .... It seems like
there are lots of get-togethers that have to do with
moving to high school.

With respect to cultural identity, three of the
students (Mark, Sharon, and Ron) mentioned loyalty to both
their advisory and their team. Phil mentioned only his
team, and Meredith mentioned only her advisory.

Ron: . . . . I'd say it's more of a team identity in sixth and seventh grade, but I've found that in eighth grade my advisory tends to stick together even when we have team parties . . . . The team has traditions, and the advisory does, too . . . . We started an advisory scrapbook . . . .

Meredith: . . . . You get really close to your advisory. It becomes almost like a family . . . . You can almost bet on making some new friends among kids in your advisory . . . . I still keep up with kids from my sixth and seventh grade advisories . . . .

Phil: It's the team that has its own customs and traditions like parties to celebrate the end of the six weeks or the end of exams.

In the area of leadership, all five students expressed the perception that recognition and status were achieved on the basis of effort and interest rather than ability or grades. This applied to cocurricular and extracurricular areas such as athletics and fine arts as well as Student Council. Two of the students (Sharon and Meredith) observed that it is frequently the same people who achieve recognition or leadership status, but they reiterated that it was not because of their grades.

Meredith: Qualifications and ability are both important . . . . When I say ability, I don't mean grades. It has more to do with the ability to get the job done . . . . It tends to be the same people who always end up in leadership positions, but grades really are not a factor . . . .

Sharon: It seems to be mostly the same people all the time, but not necessarily because of ability. They are the ones who have the interest and are willing to make the effort . . . .
Mark: We know more people, and . . . we can vote for the people who show good effort and interest instead of just the smartest or most popular ones . . . .

Teacher interviews had a common denominator in that all five of the teachers made reference to conscious teacher planning for social skills and interaction in academic and non-academic contexts. They cited the use of cooperative learning, group games and collaborative projects in advisory, and social events such as team picnics.

Sarah: We really approach teaching the total child . . . . In advisory we work on etiquette, skills like mending fences . . . . The kids leave with better people skills.

Barbara: . . . . This sounds crazy, but sometimes we play cards in advisory . . . . It’s on such a different level . . . . I think the social aspect is at least as important as academics. I can’t remember much about my own eighth grade year academically, but I can remember the social aspects.

Barbara observed that the eighth graders had also become more protective of the younger students, taking an active role in their orientation and induction. George mentioned that the teacher model collaboration in their team planning and in the actual delivery of instruction, so it could be expected that students would follow their example.

Barbara: Our kids (the eighth graders) are more protective of the little kids . . . . They love giving them tours and helping them find their way around . . . . This year we made exam survival kits for the sixth graders before the first semester exams . . . .

George: The kids know we meet and plan together every day. We talk to them about how sometimes we have to work together to reach agreement on what we plan for the team. We also give each other credit in front of the kids . . . . like if one teacher on the team makes
the arrangements for a field trip or speaker, I make sure that when I'm preparing the students for my end of the experience, I mention what a big help the other teacher was. That way, when the kids work in group situations, they'll know we practice what we preach.

Parent interviews revealed a range of perceptions related to peer group interaction. Adam explained that his children had always interacted with a variety of students rather than just those in their classes. However, he did see evidence that there was more interaction and collaboration related to academics, particularly through the use of active learning strategies such as cooperative learning.

Adam: . . . . My kids have always interacted with a wide variety of students, not just kids in their classes. I see them interacting more with their own classmates now because of the nature of the teaching methods. When they have cooperative assignments, they have to contact other people in their group to make sure everyone is up to speed and prepared . . . . But they still interact with a wide variety of kids outside of class . . . .

Documents: School newsletters contained a variety of examples of programs and activities related to collaborative peer group interaction. These included school partnerships, service projects, and class activities.

. . . . Last week the four types of peer pressure were taught and reinforced, and this week's lesson enabled the students to role-play eight ways of saying "no". I asked some of them how this information could help them in other situations besides resisting drugs, and they mentioned cheating, hurtful pranks, choosing friends . . . . they are absorbing and applying the new knowledge to important areas of their daily lives.

. . . . Start thinking community service in advisory; it is time for the spring project . . . . We are going
to sponsor a book drive in conjunction with the Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center in D.I.S.D. Both schools will collect books to give to the L.I.F.T. program for adults . . . . The art departments of both schools will also make banners to be used to decorate the L.I.F.T. center . . . . The culminating activity will be a picnic at the park in the Meadows Foundation area with students from Pearl C. Anderson to present the books and banners.

The Laredo ISD visit was another huge success. This partnership bond will reap great benefits for all involved. The preparation and personal warmth we extended to our partners was exceptional . . . .

"Making someone's day a little nicer" is really picking up steam with our sixth graders! I received notes about two different students this past week who went out of their way to make someone feel more included. The teachers and I commended these efforts with notes and stickers. They were pleased and so was I; keep me posted.

Lesson plans included a unit in advisory in which students made chess pieces and chess boards and learned to play chess. This was tied to the instructional focus at that time, which was the British Isles. This took place on Ann's team and was indicative of the efforts she mentioned in the interview (i.e. trying to give advisory an interdisciplinary focus).

In addition, each team's plans documented cooperative learning activities in each of the four core subjects. These included class debates in social studies, group presentations in science, writing poems in language arts, and metric measurements in math.

Surveys: A cluster of three questions on the survey was
identified as being related to peer group interaction (2, 7, 8).

2. Most of your classes in middle school are heterogeneous, which means that students are grouped together instead of being separated by ability. What aspects of heterogeneous classes do you feel have been an advantage to you? Check those which apply, if any.

b. I enjoy being with a variety of students.

e. Class discussions are more interesting by having a variety of students.

7. Many teachers in this and other schools use cooperative learning. What is your personal reaction to working in cooperative groups? Check those which apply.

b. I think we learn more as a result of explaining it to each other.

d. It helps us learn social skills as well as academic skills.

e. I prefer working alone.

8. In what ways do you think the "pod" system is of benefit? Check those which apply and give a brief example.

a. Social

d. Communication

Examples cited for response 8a included being like a family, knowing a core group of students well, and being able to plan activities together easily and conveniently.

. . . . We are like a family . . . . You get to know a group well, and we do activities together in school and sometimes outside of school . . . . It’s nice to get to know a big group like this before going to high school . . . . The teachers on our team can get together and plan activities for us . . . . and it’s easy for kids to help each other, too . . . . we’re all together in the same hall and teachers let us move our schedules around.
Again, the process of gathering interpretive teacher comments mentioned with respect to research question 1 applies to the situations in research question 2 in which there was a large difference between the responses of Cohort A and Cohort C. Specifically, this applies to class discussions and cooperative learning. The same comments made with regard to research question 1 are again pertinent in this situation.

George: We use a lot more class discussion now, where to years ago the teachers probably still did most of the talking.

Barbara: I monitor more now to see that everyone performs their assigned roles, and I’ve gotten a better handle on the individual accountability part. I don’t seem to be having any more complaints about certain kids doing or not doing their share of the work.

**Common patterns:** Three main themes emerged which were common to all sources of data. These were: teaching and learning **social skills**, planning for and modeling **collaboration**, and broader, more inclusive peer group interaction.

In the area of **learning social skills**, most of the student comments were related to cooperative learning.

Phil: . . . . It helps us socially, too, because we learn to work together and get along . . . .

Ron: . . . . cooperative learning because you get good practice by explaining things and it helps you to learn to resolve conflicts . . . .

Teacher comments on social skills addressed cooperative learning and advisory.
Sarah: In advisory we work on etiquette, skills like mending fences . . . . The kids leave with better people skills.

Barbara: . . . . I think the social aspect is at least as important as academics. I can’t remember much about my own eighth grade year academically, but I can remember the social aspects.

Jim: . . . . Socially, the kids are better prepared because of the interaction that is built in . . . .

Parent comments also indicated an awareness of the planned interactions of cooperative learning.

Adam: . . . . Now there are so many activities that are not just question/answer, question/answer . . . . and the thing I really like is that they have to talk to each other in order to complete assignments and projects . . . . The teachers seem to do a lot of monitoring because they know everyone is concerned about making sure no one gets a free ride . . . . they tell the kids there are no free rides.

Laura: . . . . One thing they seem to be teaching kids is how to give and take compliments. (My son) got a call from a friend after a game thanking him for passing the ball so that he (the other child) could be the top scorer . . . .

Cathy: . . . . They learn life skills in cooperative learning . . . . Monitoring is important to avoid inequities . . . . They need to assume more independence, but at the same time the teacher needs to monitor so that if the kids struggle with the social skills, they can get feedback and assistance . . . .

Documents showed evidence of cooperative activities in lesson plans, as described earlier in this section.

Newsletters contained references to the D.A.R.E. program, in which skills such as giving and receiving compliments or resisting peer pressure are taught.

Speaking of choices . . . . Officer Byrd is speaking to all sixth graders in the next few days about
decision making in the middle school and about personal safety.

... Last week the four types of peer pressure were taught and reinforced, and this week's lesson enabled the students to role-play eight ways of saying "no." They are absorbing and applying the new knowledge to important areas of their daily lives.

... Our sixth grade students practiced giving and receiving compliments this week as an active part of their D.A.R.E. lesson.

On the survey, the main indicator of student awareness regarding social skills was an increase in the number of students who perceived that cooperative learning helps them learn social skills as well as academic skills (Question 7d). One hundred students from Cohort C selected this choice, as compared to 58 from Cohort A.

In terms of planning for collaboration, previously cited comments by students, parents, and teachers about collaborative activities in an out of class, along with lesson plans and cited newsletter excerpts about cooperative activities, community service, and partnerships, serve as evidence of conscious planning on the part of the staff. A comment from the survey also supports this.

... The teachers on our team can get together and plan activities for us ... and it's easy for kids to help each other, too ... we're all together in the same hall and teachers let us move our schedules around.

However, an added dimension found in the teacher interviews was that of teachers modeling collaboration. Barbara: The kids sense that our team likes each other, that we get along and work together ...
George: The kids know we meet and plan together every day. We talk to them about how sometimes we have to work together to reach agreement on what we plan for the team . . . . That way, when the kids work in group situations, they'll know we practice what we preach.

Student and parent perceptions on more inclusive peer group interaction touched on connecting with a broader group and providing opportunities for more students.

Meredith (student): . . . . Everything centers around giving people as many opportunities as possible . . . . There's a lot of emphasis on including a wide variety of people in things . . . .

Sharon (student): . . . . It was the first time we had a picnic . . . . it really helped us connect with the kids in our advisory and on our team . . . .

Mark (student): . . . . You can be with more friends because kids aren't separated by ability . . . .

Cathy (parent): . . . . I think the mixed grouping has made the kids more accepting of each other on both ends . . . .

Adam (parent): . . . . My kids have always interacted with a wide variety of kids . . . . I see them interacting more with their own classmates now because of the nature of the teaching . . . . But they still interact with a wide variety of kids outside of class . . . .

Teachers added comments about how more inclusive grouping practices provided benefits in the classroom.

Ann: . . . . It has brought the "spark" back . . . .

George: . . . . There is less . . . . separating themselves out . . . . The slower kids have perked up because of being exposed to the brighter kids . . . .

A document which highlighted inclusivity was the cheerleading packet. As a result of professional articles and staff presentations at conferences, the cheerleading program attracted a great deal of attention locally and
throughout the state. The sponsors, who were also core teachers, received phone calls almost daily from other schools requesting information or wanting to schedule a visit. Responding to these inquiries became very time-consuming, so the sponsors developed a packet of information to send to schools inquiring about the program. The packet included information on logistics and scheduling, attendance expectations, organization of squads, encouraging leadership in the squad members, and how and when to involve parents.

Due to the volume of the requests (over 125 in one year), it became necessary to charge a small fee to cover printing and postage costs.

The survey results had comments related to being with a variety of students. These comments appeared in the section where students were given the opportunity to comment on teaming. In addition, Sarah’s follow-up comment was indicative of a more inclusive environment due to co-teaching.

Survey: . . . . It’s nice to get to know a big group like this before going to high school . . . .

Sarah: Now that we have co-teaching, I don’t send nearly as many students to the Learning Center . . . because they can get it right here in the classroom . . . .

Targets for growth: Students mentioned that although leadership opportunities did not seem to be tied to grades or academic ability, it did seem to be the same people who always pursued these opportunities. From this perception
one could infer that schoolwide efforts to encourage more students to seek leadership positions might help promote more inclusivity in this area of peer interaction.

Summary of findings for Research Question 2: All of the data sources revealed perceptions that the implementation of key aspects of the middle school concept had produced observable effects on peer group interaction as described in this section. Based on interviews, documents, and the survey, these effects appeared to be a result of the conscious teaching of social skills and collaboration through teaming, advisory, heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, service activities and partnerships, along with the creation of more inclusive opportunities like the cheerleading program.

Research Question 3

The third research question sought to identify perceived effects of changes on teacher attitudes and practices. The same data sources were used. There was overlap between data related to this research question and the first two research questions (perceived effects on instruction and peer group interaction). The third research question was stated as follows:

What are the perceived effects on teacher attitudes and practices produced by implementation of the middle school concept?

Interviews: Students mentioned higher teacher expectations in the areas of student participation and independence, use
of more active learning strategies such as interdisciplinary activities, discussions, and small group activities, and more evidence of caring about students as people (i.e. a more holistic view of the child).

Meredith: . . . . We do more work as a group . . . mostly small groups . . . . And we have more interdisciplinary activities, like the paper we did for history and language arts . . . . It takes a lot of responsibility and independence to carry it out.

Phil: There is more group work now . . . . We get to discuss things ourselves instead of just listening to the teacher talk . . . .

Ron: . . . . Teachers seem to expect more of us . . . They expect a lot of everyone now . . . . We have to take responsibility for picking out the important points and putting them on paper in a way that will help us learn . . . . Teaming is good because it helps us with homework and stuff . . . . Teachers stay in touch with each other so you don’t get bogged down with work, and they act like they care about the kids on their team.

Mark: There is a lot more group work and discussion . . . . It seems like we have more choices about how we learn . . . . And everybody is expected to contribute . . . you can’t just sit back and let others do all the talking like some kids used to . . . . The teams are organized, and they talk about kids. It makes us feel like they care about us.

Sharon: In my AT classes, teachers made everyone participate all the time. Now every kid is expected to do that . . . . Everybody is expected to try their best . . . . The teams especially are very caring . . . . Teachers make you feel like they care enough about kids to talk about them . . . . The fifth grade teachers scared us and said middle school teachers would be mean, but they’re not!

Teachers perceived that their attitudes and practices had changed in ways which were manifested in more active learning, higher expectations, a more holistic approach to
the child and to teaching, interdisciplinary connections as the focus of their instructional planning, and broadened collegial interaction and collaboration.

Sarah: You transcend your own classroom . . . We really approach teaching the whole child . . . you start to see many other dimensions to the child that the teaching process and the evaluation process are broadened . . . We've really broadened our interaction with the faculty, even outside of our team. It's not clique-oriented like it used to be when we were in departments instead of teams . . . We pull in elective teachers for some of our interdisciplinary activities.

Barbara: . . . I couldn't live without my team . . . I do far less "straight teaching" . . . You pick up on things pretty quickly because of teaming, so we can usually sit down with parents before things reach the crisis stage . . . This (advisory) has brought teachers and kids closer together . . .

Jim: . . . (on advisory) It's a time to talk about likes and dislikes, current events, and just generally combining academics with real life . . . (on instruction) . . . a lot more application . . . I do very little memory work now . . . We always map to see what opportunities there are to tie things together . . . (on expectations) . . . Socially, the kids are better prepared because of the interaction that is built in, and I would expect that they are better prepared academically because of the application emphasis.

George: . . . We're emphasizing free reading in advisory . . . It's a great way to get to know the kids better . . . I'm using a lot more essay assignments and tests, so that gets them thinking at a higher level . . . I always coordinate the stories we're reading with science or social studies . . . Our team has time everyday to do things together . . . The kids know we meet and plan together everyday . . .

Ann: . . . It's great to be able to talk to others who know the child . . . We can get more information about how they learn . . . It's more personal . . . you know them better, more like when I had a self-contained class . . . We always look at social
studies and science as the key subjects, and we plan from there . . . .

Parent interviews contained comments about active learning, teacher expectations, connections across subjects, a more holistic and caring approach, more teacher collaboration, and more teacher communication with parents.

Cathy: . . . . There is much more communication . . . . I guess you could call it preventive . . . . I've even had teachers call at times when they sensed that maybe there were difficulties at home . . . . More hands-on activities have crept in . . . . The teachers seem willing to assume kids can assume more responsibility than parents think they can . . . . Teaming has a unifying effect for students and teachers. It minimizes stress and isolation for everyone involved . . . .

Adam: . . . . Everyone is expected to engage in a high level of thinking and participation . . . . I notice more independent thinking and less rote learning . . . . The teachers seem to do a lot of monitoring . . . . they tell the kids there are no free rides . . . . We are constantly seeing evidence of combined efforts of teachers and increased communication with us.

Rachel: . . . . The teachers know the kids better, and they know each other better, too . . . . I've noticed that some of the teachers have started coming to the kids' soccer and football games . . . . There's a lot more rhyme and reason to it all, like the way elementary teachers tied things together . . . . Teachers seem better educated about ways to keep lines of communication open . . . .

Laura: . . . . There's more consistency in expectations within class and from one teacher to another, so it's not confusing to the kids . . . . There is more tying together of things . . . . like putting together pieces of a puzzle . . . . the kids are given more choices and more latitude about what and how they learn . . . . The teachers are all so sensitive and caring . . . . teachers attend outside activities to show their interest . . . .
John: There seems to be more teacher contact with individuals and small groups. Teachers take time to get to know the kids and find out what makes them tick. They take time to go to their concerts and games.

Documents: Newsletters mentioned examples of interdisciplinary activities and active learning strategies such as those mentioned previously in this chapter in the areas of student presentations (the greenhouse effect), pair activities (the battleship game), the Black Plague unit, and multiple intelligences.

Teachers were also recognized for other collaborative efforts.

The Middle School Survey Committee is doing a terrific job. All input from the staff has been invaluable. We will have an important tool when the survey is completed.

A little birdie told me that our teachers were very impressive at the district gifted and talented meeting yesterday. Special thanks to (five teachers' names) for communicating to parents the extra efforts made by this staff to meet the needs of all students.

A special note of thanks to the Staff Development Committee, (nine teachers' names), for all of their hard work, excellent organization and planning which made our Monday staff development one of the best.

Expectations were also set in terms of teacher-student interaction, collegial interaction, and "lounge talk".

How often are you in the halls talking to students and monitoring the activities during passing period? Please make this a top priority.

Respect and Dignity: Students depend on us to teach them many things and often hang on every word we say. Therefore, it is imperative that we are conscientious, not only of what we say, but how we say it. One can never show too much respect for others. Let's all
continue to work hard to protect the respect and
dignity of others.

Hear ye, hear ye . . . the faculty lounges are now
declared "Adult Talking Zones". Enjoy your lunch and
planning times by discussing adult issues. Give
yourself a break by not discussing students and their
problems. You will feel a lot better after your break
is over, promise!

On the second student survey (Cohort C), there was an
increase in the number of students who perceived that
TEAMING offered benefits in the area of communication.
Student comments on the section of the survey dealing with
perceptions about teaming made reference to connections,
communication, consistency, and caring.

. . . . It makes learning mean more because they show
how things relate to each other . . . . Things are
organized because they get together and plan . . . .
You know what to expect from all four teachers . . . .
They all have the same procedures and discipline
. . . . Teacher communicate about their lessons
. . . . It's like a family; they really care . . . .

With respect to other related perceptions which were
also discussed in Research Question 1 (namely more classroom
discussion, fewer optional extra challenge activities, and
fewer students being sent to the Learning Center), follow-
up comments made by the teachers regarding more frequent
use of classroom discussion, the co-teaching program, and
extending challenge opportunities to all students also apply
to this research question.

George: We use a lot more class discussion now, where
two years ago the teachers probably still did most of
the talking.
Sarah: Now that we have co-teaching, I don’t send nearly as many students for reteaching or one-on-one instruction because they can get it right in the classroom. I do still send students who need things like oral testing or textbooks on tape.

George: The Learning Center is open in the morning before school now. If you looked at the total number of kids using the Learning Center, it would probably be pretty close to previous years, except now more of them are there before school instead of during class.

Jim: There are projects and things I used to make available only to gifted kids that I offer to everyone now.

Common patterns: The themes which were common to all data sources were active learning and the expectations related thereto, a more holistic view of teaching and of the child, as well as collaboration and communication, and connections.

Examples of active learning and its accompanying expectations were found in parent and student interviews with recurring mention of more class discussion, small group activities, original work as opposed to prepared worksheets, and higher expectations in the areas of participation, accountability and independence.

John (parent): . . . . I don’t see as many worksheets or book assignments; the kids have to produce more original work with what they learn . . . .

Cathy (parent): . . . . The teachers seem willing to assume kids can assume more responsibility than parents think they can . . . .

Mark (student): . . . . There is a lot more group work and discussion . . . . And everybody is expected to contribute . . . .

Teachers’ comments also made reference to the use of more active learning and less direct teaching.
Barbara: . . . . I do far less "straight teaching" and "straight testing" . . . .

George: . . . . We've done some neat projects where the kids have to assume the role of a character or an author or somehow make their reading connect with the real world . . . .

Newsletters reiterated examples like interdisciplinary units, "Super Days", such as Great Britain Day and China Day, and activities in individual classrooms.

As I was walking through the building and visiting classrooms, I discovered a class where every student was wearing a Walkman radio. Well, the students were not rocking and rolling in their seats like one might imagine. Actually, they were very calm and hard at work correcting their own reports. Here's how the lesson works. The students turn in their research reports. The teacher has a cassette tape for each child, reads the report aloud to a tape recorder at home, and adds specific instructional comments about that child's report at the end of the recording. The written reports and instructional tapes are returned to the students. The students privately read over their own reports in class while listening to the tape. They correct and evaluate their own reports according to the suggested changes by the teacher. Individualized instruction? Immediate feedback? Motivating to students? Quality control? Time efficiency? High tech instruction . . . . BIG TIME!!! Oh, who is this instructional technology creator? (Teacher's name), of course.

Survey comments made reference to team planning for a more coordinated and consistent instructional program.

They get together and plan . . . . There's not a lot of repetition or busy work . . . . You know what to expect from all four teachers . . . .

A more holistic teacher view of children was perceived, as seen in surveys and interviews.

Sarah (teacher): . . . . We really approach the whole child . . . . you start to see so many other dimensions
to the child that the teaching process and the evaluation process are broadened . . . .

Mark (student): The teams are organized, and they talk about kids. It makes us feel like they care about us.

Sharon (student): . . . . Teachers make you feel like they care enough about kids to talk about them . . . .

(Survey): . . . . It’s like a family; they really care . . . .

Parent perceptions, as reflected by citations earlier in this section, are best summarized by comments from John:

John: What it all boils down to is that the teachers are more involved across the board . . . . They plan as a team, they get the kids involved in the learning, and they get more involved with the kids . . . . Teachers take time to get to know the kids and find out what makes them tick . . . . They take time to go to their concerts and games . . . .

Newsletters set expectations that teachers address affective as well as cognitive needs.

Respect and Dignity: Students depend on us to teach them many things and often hang on every word we say. Therefore, it is imperative that we are conscientious, not only of what we say, but how we say it. One can never show too much respect for others. Let’s all continue to work hard to protect the respect and dignity of others.

Our school is a safe place. No one should have to worry about losing their personal possessions here in this building. We are all going to put forth our efforts to ensure that this school remains a warm and trusting environment . . . . Talk to your students regularly about making the right decisions. Emphasize to them that taking something as inexpensive as a Coke is really no different than taking expensive tennis shoes . . . .

Perceptions concerning increased collaboration and communication were seen in examples of team planning,
communication with parents, and professional activities such as committee positions or presentations at conferences.

Jim (teacher): It’s a lot more enjoyable planning with the team . . . . There’s a lot of give and take, and everyone is willing to look for ways to move things around . . . . We always map to see what opportunities there are to tie things together . . . .

Barbara (teacher): . . . . I think we have a good rapport with parents . . . . We’ve done a lot to make the parents feel involved, too, like the open team meetings . . . .

Rachel (parent): . . . . Communication at every level is so much better . . . . the Teacher Hotline is a real plus . . . . We get more phone calls and more newsletters . . . . They’ve started having more parent involvement on major committees . . . .

Survey: They talk to each other and get ideas on how to make things easier or more interesting.

Newsletter: Big time thanks to (five teachers’ names) for so generously sharing their time and expertise with their colleagues from the North Central Texas Area at the conference in Southlake. Also, thanks to those of you who attended . . . .

Newsletter: Staff development day is Monday. Special thanks to (the two co-chairs) and the rest of the Staff Development Committee for planning the day’s activities.

The theme of connections was illustrated by interview and survey comments as well as newsletter excerpts.

George (teacher): . . . . I always coordinate the stories we’re reading with science or social studies . . . . We’ve done some neat (advisory) projects where the kids have to . . . . somehow make their reading connect with the real world . . . .

Sarah (teacher): . . . . I always take into consideration what is going on in the other classes . . . . We move units around very comfortably. The longer you team, the more blurred the lines between content areas become . . . .
Jim (teacher): . . . . We always map to see what opportunities there are to tie things together . . . . (Advisory) is a time (for) just generally combining academics with real life . . . .

Laura (parent): . . . . There is more tying together of things. . . like putting together pieces of a puzzle . . . .

Rachel (parent): . . . . There's a lot more rhyme and reason to it all . . . .

Survey: . . . . It makes learning mean more because they show how things relate to each other . . . .

Newsletter: The sixth grade teams have mastered the integrated units by using social studies as a springboard. Some seventh grade classes are doing a project that teaches Texas geography in conjunction with other subjects as they plan a vacation around the state. Eighth grade teachers are facilitating student planned slide shows; the students are writing and recording scripts to accompany the slides based on different aspects of American history . . . . The beauty of the team is that you are not in this alone . . . .

Targets for growth: There were no indications that teacher attitudes and practices were not adequate or responsive to students' needs, in fact, Laura commented that teachers are "giving all they've got". However, there were three suggestions from parents as to areas for continued development and attention. These included: continued staff and parent attention to developmental issues, always remembering that kids' priorities are not the same as those of teachers and parents, and continued staff development in different learning styles. These are discussed further in Chapter V.
Summary of findings for Research Question 3: All data sources reviewed revealed perceptions that the implementation of key aspects of the middle school concept, especially teaming, had produced observable effects on teacher attitudes and practices. Based on interviews, documents, and the survey, the main areas affected were active learning and the expectations related to this type of learning environment, collaboration and communication, a more holistic approach, and connections.

Research Question 4

The purpose of this question was to determine the perceived effects of implementation of the middle school concept on school culture. Again, there was overlap between the data related to this research question and the other three (instruction, peer group interaction, and teacher attitudes and practices). The research question was posed as follows:

What are the perceived effects of the implementation of the middle school concept on school culture as indicated by roles (teacher and student), rules (professional behavior), relationships (among teachers, parents, administrators, and students), rituals, and traditions?

Interviews: Students discussed features which pointed to a culture of caring, inclusivity, collaboration, and the valuing of active learning. In referring to a culture of caring, students cited team discussions about students, loyalty to teammates, and a family atmosphere in advisory.
Mark: . . . . The teams . . . talk about kids. It makes us feel they care about us.

Sharon: . . . . The teams especially are very caring . . . . Teachers make you feel like they care enough about kids to talk about them . . . .

Ron: . . . . Teachers stay in touch with each other . . . . and they act like they care about the kids on their team.

Mark: . . . . There is loyalty to the people on your team . . . .

Sharon: . . . . We tend to identify with our advisory . . . . This sounds kind of sappy, but we are like one big, happy family . . . .

Evidence of a culture of inclusivity was noted in various forms, such as more opportunities for belonging, recognition, success, or leadership, and less competition.

Ron: . . . . Now . . . kids who weren’t in AT classes feel like they can do as good as the smart kids. No one had to feel stupid or left out.

Mark: . . . . There’s less competition and more cooperating . . . . We can vote for the people who show good effort and interest instead of just the smartest or most popular ones . . . . You can be with more friends because kids aren’t separated by ability . . . . It’s more fair.

Sharon: . . . . Everyone gets to feel like they have good talents . . . .

Meredith: . . . . It helps your self-image because people who weren’t in AT felt excluded before, and people who were in AT felt like they stood out . . . . There are lots of opportunities that weren’t available for most kids before . . . . Lots of girls never would have been a cheerleader because they would have been afraid to try out . . . . Now everything centers around giving people as many opportunities as possible.

Examples of collaboration included references to cooperative group activities.
Meredith: . . . . We do more work as . . . small groups. . . . It gives us a range of opinions and viewpoints, and sometimes different techniques for learning, too.

Sharon: . . . . We do more things in small groups, and everyone gets to feel like they have good talents . . . .

Phil: . . . . There's more emphasis on working together in class and outside of class . . . like on service projects.

Mark: . . . . There is a lot more group work . . . . It makes it easier to have discussions, and you can learn from other good ideas in the group. And everybody is expected to contribute . . . .

Ron: . . . . They call it cooperative groups . . . . In social studies . . . . I think we learned more as a group than we would have by ourselves . . . .

Students cited examples of classroom practices which indicated that active learning had become a valued part of the school culture. Examples of student involvement in learning included cooperative learning (as described above), hands-on activities, expectations of participation by all as well as more responsibility.

Ron . . . . Teachers seem to expect more of us . . . . We do more independent notetaking . . . .

Mark: . . . . Everybody is expected to contribute . . . . You can’t just sit back and let others do all the talking like some kids used to . . . . You just can’t get away with that now . . . .

Sharon: . . . . Now every kid is expected to do that (participate all the time) . . . . Everybody is expected to try their best . . . .

Meredith: . . . . We have more interdisciplinary activities, like the paper we did for history and language arts . . . . It takes a lot of responsibility and independence to carry it out . . . .
Mark: . . . . We do things like skits and projects to help develop a concept . . . .

Rituals and traditions were discussed to a lesser extent.

Ron: . . . . It seems like we do more things as a team . . . picnics, parties . . . .

Phil: It’s the team that has its own customs and traditions like parties to celebrate the end of the six weeks . . . .

Sharon: . . . . It was the first time we had a picnic like that, and it really helped us connect . . . .

Mark: . . . . It seems like most teams have some kind of giving project . . . something to help people who need our help . . . .

Teacher interviews also recognized caring, inclusivity, active learning experiences, and collaboration. Again, rituals and traditions were mentioned to a lesser extent.

A culture of caring was seen in teachers’ references to viewing children more holistically, particularly as a result of the teaming process.

Barbara: The kids sense that our team likes each other.

Sarah: . . . . You start to see so many other dimensions to the child that the teaching process and the evaluation process are broadened. Teaming is a more humane approach . . . . We really approach teaching the total child . . . .

Ann: . . . . It’s great to be able to talk to others who know the child . . . .

George: . . . . (Advisory) It’s a great way to get to know the kids better . . . . (Teaming) At least one teacher on the team has some positive comments and some suggestions for helping to build success for the child.
Teacher comments on inclusivity addressed two areas, namely, inclusion of students and inclusion of colleagues.

George: There is less exclusivity . . . less separating themselves out . . . . The slower kids have perked up because of being exposed to the brighter kids . . . .

Ann: . . . . I can even think back to my own kids in the 70s . . . Lots of kids fell through the cracks, but this way, they are "caught" . . . .

Barbara: Our kids are more protective of the little kids . . . . They love giving them tours and helping them find their way around . . . .

Ann: Having the AT kids back in the mainstream is so nice - it has brought the "spark" back . . . .

Sarah: It's not clique-oriented like it used to be when we were in departments instead of teams . . . . We've really broadened our interaction with the faculty, even outside of our teams . . . . Administrators and counselors have started coming to our team meetings about once a week, and they've even started going along on field trips sometimes . . . .

In terms of a culture of active learning, many teacher comments related to activities and expectations which evolved from the team planning process, as seen in these examples:

George: Since we (the team) decided to focus on free reading (in advisory), we did projects instead of planned activities. We've done some neat projects where the kids have to assume the role of a character or an author or somehow make their reading connect with the real world . . . .

Barbara: . . . . I couldn't live without my team . . . . I do far less "straight teaching" and "straight testing" . . . . There is more map work, more group work, more synthesis . . . . We always talk about who is doing what, and usually math and language arts adjust around social studies and science . . . .
Jim: . . . . We always map to see what opportunities there are to tie things together . . . . I see less facts and more processes and principles . . . a lot more application . . . .

Ann: . . . . We do more field trips because now we can get enough mileage out of them curriculum-wise to justify the time and cost . . . .

Teacher examples indicative of a culture of collaboration revolved around team planning and teacher communication with parents.

George: . . . . The open team meetings have been successful, and we usually have a good turnout of parents . . . . We’ve encouraged parents to schedule team conferences, too . . . . It tends to be more positive because at least one teacher on the team has some positive comments and some suggestions on helping to build success for the child.

Barbara: . . . . You pick up on things pretty quickly with teaming, so we can usually sit down with parents before things reach the crisis stage . . . .

Sarah: . . . . Teaming is a more open approach. It lends itself to PR work with the parents . . . . More parent involvement is encouraged.

Jim: . . . . We have the open pod meetings, and this year we did our own team open house for the parents . . . .

George: We have daily team meetings . . . . The kids know we meet and plan together every day. We talk to them about how sometimes we have to work together to reach agreement on what we plan for the team . . . .

Sarah: We do curriculum mapping, and we’ve become familiar with each other’s curriculum. We move units around very comfortably . . . .

Jim: . . . . We always map to see what opportunities there are to tie things together . . . .

Little mention was made of rituals and traditions, but teachers did make reference to starting the practice of
holding events at students' homes instead of school.

Barbara: . . . . We’ve held some of our team and advisory socials in students’ homes instead of school . . . .

Ann: . . . . We just held our last one (open pod meeting) in a parent’s home instead of at school . . . .

Parents did not mention rituals and traditions but did cite examples of communication and collaboration, caring, inclusivity, and active learning.

Perceptions related to collaboration and communication were reflected in comments about teaming and increased communication.

Laura: . . . . The team cooperates and communicates . . . . The teachers are flexible, and they are well-adjusted to teaming . . . .

Rachel: . . . . Teaming is the major thing that has changed. I think it is a wonderful idea. The teachers know the kids better, and they know each other better, too . . . .

Rachel: . . . . Communication is definitely improved . . . . There are fewer unknowns . . . . We get more phone calls and more newsletters . . . .

Adam: . . . . We are constantly seeing evidence of the combined efforts of teacher and increased communication with us . . . .

John: . . . . They plan as a team . . . . they get more involved with the kids . . . .

Cathy: . . . . There is much more communication now, and most of it is positive . . . .

Examples of a culture of caring included more non-academic interaction with individual students and teacher attendance at students’ outside events. This is the type
of caring that Johnston (1990) refers to as pervasive caring.

Laura: . . . . The teachers are all so sensitive and caring . . . . teachers attend outside activities to show their interest.

Rachel: . . . . I’ve noticed that some of the teachers have started coming to the kids’ soccer and football games . . . .

John: . . . . Teachers take time to get to know the kids and find out what makes them tick . . . . They take time to go to their concerts and games . . . .

Cathy: . . . . They go to games, and they do things like coaching OM teams. They don’t get any money for it; they just do it for what the kids gain from it . . . .

More inclusivity was seen with respect to academic, leadership, and extracurricular activities.

Cathy: . . . . Kids in the AT pod used to look down on others and set themselves apart . . . . I think the mixed grouping has made the kids more accepting of each other on both ends . . . . so there’s not a feeling of being left out . . . . Teaming has a unifying effect for students and teachers. It minimizes stress and isolation for everyone involved.

John: . . . . It seems like more opportunities are more accessible to a greater number of kids . . . . It applies to academics and athletics . . . . There are even co-presidents on the Student Council now . . . .

Adam: . . . . Everyone got what AT classes used to get . . . . It hurt (my oldest child) to be told she wasn’t good enough for AT . . . . That doesn’t happen any more . . . . And I remember how traumatic cheerleading tryouts used to be for the older kids in the neighborhood . . . . But that’s not a problem now . . . .

A culture of active learning was seen in parents' examples of changes in instructional delivery systems and student assignments.
John: ... There are more guest presenters, and the kids have even had to interview family members or community members as part of the learning process. ... I don't see as many worksheets or book assignments; the kids have to produce more original work. ... They (teachers) get the kids involved in the learning. ...

Laura: ... Now there is a sense of wonderment and excitement because the kids are given more choices and more latitude about what and how they learn. ...

Rachel: There are more hands-on things and more field experiences, like the trip to Sea World. ... I see a lot more computer use. ...

Adam: ... I notice more independent thinking and less rote learning. ... Now there are so many activities that are not just question/answer, question/answer. ... There's a lot of "make and do". ... In history they do assignments that involve dressing up as characters, baking things. ... all kinds of hands-on experiences. ...

Cathy: ... I've seen more "skits and fun things". ... There seem to be more expanded experiences like long-term projects with different options. ...

Documents: Once again, newsletters showed evidence of active learning, collaboration, and caring. Often more than one theme appeared in the same article. There was continued public recognition of these themes as valued aspects of the learning environment. It could be predicted that some of the events and programs mentioned might eventually become traditions and rituals.

Last Saturday's Halloween Service project, "Party with a Purpose," for the 300 families at the Dallas Life Foundation was a great success. 96 students and parents participated. As we approach the holiday season, please talk to your advisory about service projects. Last year's donation of coats and toys for the homeless was a huge success, especially for those students who had an opportunity to tour the shelter.
Just how important is love of learning? Well, if you could have seen (science teacher)'s eyes and facial expressions as she described in detail her pond water lab and how intense her students were when they discovered all the paramecia, protozoa, and blood worms under the microscope, you would quickly understand the importance. Nicely done, (teacher's name)! You have made a difference in your students' lives.

Whom do you thank for the special pumpkin surprise on your desk? Our PTA, that's who!!! A little seasonal treat to show their appreciation for all you do for their children.

Thought for your week: There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect. (G.K. Chesterton)

Thought for your week: This is the perfect season to be the salt of the earth. (Anonymous)

Thought for your week: The applause of a single human being is of great consequence. (Samuel Johnson)

(Math teacher) makes many specific, positive phone calls to parents boasting about their child's successes. That makes three people feel good - teacher, child and parent!

The Holiday Party after school on Wednesday ranked right up there on the enjoyable scale. It was heartwarming to see everybody laughing and enjoying the sounds and flavors of the holiday.

Fun and games were in the air this week as the Secret Cupids found their way around the school shooting arrows of clues and prizes. There are several creative and funloving people on staff. All in all, it was great fun and a week of making others feel good. Special thanks goes to the Counseling Department and the kitchen staff for making this morale booster so successful.

A pat on the back goes to (counselor's name) for a well planned Career Day. Herb Kelleher was an excellent choice for the keynote speaker, and the students were exposed to a variety of career choices. It is wonderful to see so many parents involved in our school projects as volunteers and resources.
The Dream Team outdid themselves with Great Britain Day. Students were so proud of their costumes and their projects. The library was decorated to perfection. WHAT FUN!! Thank you, Dream Team, for such an outstanding project.

Lesson plans also showed evidence of a culture of active learning, and collaboration. The planning process itself is an example of a culture of collaboration because instead of each teacher planning for his/her subject in isolation, all of the teachers on the team planned together and did team lesson plans. Examples of active learning included Great Britain Day, guest speakers, computer activities, cooperative activities, science labs, and student presentations in science, social studies, math, reading, and language arts.

There was a question (#8) on the survey which asked students to give examples of ways they felt the "pod" system was of benefit. Student comments related to school culture cited a closeness among teachers and students. This closeness was reflected in collaboration in instructional and social ways.

. . . . It's like a family; they really care . . . . We are like a family . . . . You get to know a group well, and we do activities together in school and sometimes out of school . . . . The teachers talk about everything, so it's all organized and coordinated . . . . What we do in one class almost always relates to other subjects . . . .

Common patterns: The themes which were common to the interviews, documents, and surveys were perceptions of a culture of caring, collaboration, and active learning.
These correspond to the indicators of roles, rules, and relationships which were mentioned in the research question.

With respect to roles, perceptions in the area of active learning portray the student’s role as that of active learner, the teacher’s role as facilitator of active learning, and the parent’s role as supporter and resource person.

Mark (student): . . . . Everybody is expected to contribute . . . . you can’t just sit back and let others do all the talking like some kids used to. You just can’t get away with that any more.

Ron (student): . . . . We used to do a lot of copying . . . . Now we do more independent notetaking.

Sarah (teacher): . . . . I am definitely moving toward being a facilitator . . . .

Jim (teacher): . . . . The lab tests are 100% application . . . .

John (parent): . . . . They get the kids involved in the learning and they get more involved with the kids . . . .

Newsletter: Last Saturday’s Halloween Service project . . . . was a great success. 96 students and parents participated . . . .

Newsletter: A pat on the back goes to (counselor’s name) for a well planned Career Day . . . . It is wonderful to see so many parents involved in our school projects as volunteers and resources.

The term rules as used in the research question applies to professional behavior. The main perception related to professional behavior is that collaboration with one’s team and with parents is the norm.
George (teacher): . . . . We have daily team meetings . . . . We’ve encouraged parents to schedule team conferences, too . . . .

Barbara (teacher): . . . . I couldn’t live without my team . . . . We always talk about who is doing what, and usually math and language arts adjust around social studies and science . . . .

Adam (parent): . . . . There’s always something going on. Usually at least two or sometimes all four teachers tie things together in a unit, like the one on Great Britain . . . . And they keep us informed. The open team meetings are great.

Ron (student): . . . . Teaming is good because it helps with homework and stuff . . . . Teacher stay in touch with each other so you don’t get bogged down with work, and they act like they care about the kids on their team.

Newsletter: The sixth grade teams have mastered the integrated units by using social studies as a springboard . . . . The beauty of the team is that you are not in this alone.

Survey: . . . . The teachers talk about everything, so it’s all organized and coordinated . . . .

The research question also seeks to determine perceived effects on relationships. These effects are seen in the comments that emerged in the theme of caring. Perceptions regarding student-student, teacher-student, and teacher-teacher relationships appear.

Cathy (parent): I think the mixed grouping has made the kids more accepting of each other on both ends . . . .

Laura (parent): . . . . (My son) got a call from a friend after a game thanking him for passing the ball so that he (the other child) could be the top scorer . . . .
John (parent): Teachers take time to get to know the kids and find out what makes them tick . . . . They take time to go to their concerts and games.

Barbara (teacher): The kids sense that our team likes each other . . . .

Survey: . . . . We are like a family . . . .

**Targets for growth:** In the area of culture, one teacher mentioned that there were still too many rules.

Barbara: . . . . I think we still have too many rules and limits. Teams are so on top of things that we anticipate problems and head them off. We know how to set expectations and teach kids to follow them. It doesn't bother me if kids stop at their lockers on the way to morning tutorials. It doesn't need to be so structured . . . .

Two parents mentioned that it still seemed like there was too much competition, either among the teams (pods) or for certain athletic programs.

Cathy: . . . . I think they could afford to be more open and generous with all of the sports like they are with cheerleading and football . . . .

Laura: . . . . I wish they wouldn't do things like announce top scorers . . . . It seems like kids or entire teams are trying to collect compliments . . . . There needs to be a way to make praise as widespread as possible.

These targets will be discussed further in Chapter V.

**Summary of findings for Research Question 4:** The data sources reviewed revealed teacher, student, and parent perceptions that implementation of the middle school concept had produced observable effects on school culture. The main areas of school culture discussed were **caring**, **collaboration**, and **active learning**.
Results of Inter-person Analysis

Two key issues emerged which were common to the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents with regard to each research question. The first issue was active learning and the second was collaboration and communication.

Active learning: After reviewing all data for evidence of perceptions about active learning, four generalizations could be formed:

1) Students, parents, and teachers perceive that instruction is more interactive. Specifically, they perceive the use of more class discussion, more cooperative learning, more collaborative projects or assignments, and expectations that everyone will participate in class as noted in the student, parent, and teacher interview excerpts which appear throughout this chapter and below.

Phil (student): There is more group work now . . . . We get to discuss things ourselves instead of listening to the teacher talk . . . .

John (parent): . . . . They (teachers) get the kids involved in the learning, and they get more involved with the kids . . . .

Barbara (teacher): . . . . More cooperative learning and less paper and pencil stuff . . . . less "lecture-y" stuff . . . .

Adam (parent): . . . . Everyone is expected to engage in a high level of thinking and participation . . . . They have to talk to each other in order to complete assignments and projects . . . .
2) There appear to be more authentic experiences and fewer drill or rote activities, according to the perceptions of the respondents as noted in cited interview excerpts. Examples of projects, outside resources, and opportunities for student involvement and student choice were cited. A decrease in worksheets or other lower level experiences was also noted by all three groups.

Ann (teacher): . . . . We do a lot with guest speakers and book talks during our advisory . . . .

Barbara (teacher): . . . . More map work, more group work, more synthesis . . . more of what they're telling us is part of authentic assessment.

Adam (parent): . . . . There's a lot of "make and do" . . . all kinds of hands-on experiences . . . . I notice more independent thinking and less rote learning . . . .

Mark (student): . . . . We do things like skits and projects to help us develop a concept. It seems like we have more choices about how we learn . . . .

3) More interdisciplinary opportunities appear to be available. Students, parents, and teachers mentioned teacher efforts to connect the learning across the disciplines. Team planning, field experiences, and projects were among the areas mentioned by all three groups of respondents as noted throughout this chapter.

Meredith (student): . . . . We have more interdisciplinary activities, like the paper we did for history and language arts . . . .

Rachel (parent): . . . . There are . . . more field experiences . . . like the trip to Sea World . . . .
4) Greater teacher flexibility is perceived. Moving students, schedules, and curriculum units around, the team planning process, providing students with more choices, and the seizing of teachable moments were cited as evidence of greater teacher flexibility in instruction.

Ron (student): ... Teaming is good because it helps with homework and stuff ... Teachers stay in touch with each other so you don’t get bogged down with work . . . .

Sarah (teacher): ... We move units around very comfortably . . . .

Cathy (parent): ... I see evidence of more flexibility in instruction and more teachable moments based on relevant events . . . .

Laura (parent): ... The teachers are flexible, and they are well-adjusted to teaming . . . . The kids are given more choices and more latitude about what and how they learn . . . .

There was one area which was discussed by students but not by parents or teachers. This was the area of service projects. Team and advisory projects were mentioned. Another program mentioned was TRIBE (Taking Responsibility In Building Esteem), a service club sponsored by teachers and counselors on a voluntary basis.

Mark: It seems like most teams have some kind of giving project . . . something to help people who need our help . . . TRIBE is a good social service experience. It’s a great learning experience in the art of money-raising, and it’s for a good cause . . . .
Ron: . . . . TRIBE is a good deal because you make new friends and help other people all at once.

Phil: . . . . There's more emphasis on working together in class and out of class . . . like on service projects.

Meredith: . . . . TRIBE gives you a feeling of accomplishment and participation in a group effort even if you are non-athletic.

Sharon: . . . . Lots of kids take part in TRIBE . . . . It's a good way to help others, and it's an incentive to keep your grades and conduct up, because you can't be in it if you don't . . . .

In summary, all groups interviewed perceived that instruction is now more interactive, more authentic, more interdisciplinary, and more flexible.

Collaboration and communication: Three generalizations concerning collaboration and communication could be formed from the data from student, teacher, and parent interviews, documents, and surveys.

1) Teaching strategies which encourage collaboration and communication are in place. This refers to cooperative learning activities in class as well as group projects and assignments.

Cathy (parent): . . . . They learn life skills in cooperative learning . . . .

Adam (parent): . . . . They have to talk to each other in order to complete assignments and projects . . . .

Jim (teacher): . . . . Socially, the kids are better prepared because of the interaction that is built in . . . .

Phil (student): . . . . It (group work) helps us socially, too, because we learn to get along . . . .
2) The team configuration serves as a very visible model of collaboration and communication. Students, teachers, and parents mentioned the team planning process and its benefits.

Barbara (teacher): ... The kids sense that our team likes each other ... I couldn’t live without my team ... .

George (teacher): ... The kids know we meet and plan together every day ...

Rachel (parent): ... I think it (teaming) is a wonderful idea. The teachers know the kids better, and they know each other better, too ...

Sharon (student): ... Teachers make you feel like they care enough about kids to talk about them ... They share good ideas just like we do ...

3) Students appear to interact with a broader group of their peers and collegial interaction among teachers appears to be broader as well. This is seen in instructional and non-instructional settings and in the teaming process.

Sarah (teacher): ... You transcend your own classroom ... We’ve really broadened our interaction with the faculty, even outside the team ...

Ron (student): ... It seems like we do more things as a team ... picnics, parties ...

Sharon (student): ... It was the first time we had a (team) picnic like that, and it really helped us connect ...

John (parent): ... It seems like wherever the kids go and whatever they do, they are with a bigger group of their peers. It’s not just their own group of friends or the kids they know from church ...
There was one area mentioned by teachers and parents but not by students, namely, an improvement in teacher-parent communication.

Cathy (parent): . . . . There is much more communication . . . . There are more written explanations of things made available to us, and the staff goes out of their way to provide informational meetings . . . .

Rachel (parent): . . . . Communication at every level is so much better . . . . Teacher seem better educated about ways to keep the lines of communication open . . . .

Adam (parent): . . . . We are constantly seeing evidence of combined efforts of teachers and increased communication with us . . . . They keep us informed. The open team meetings are great.

George (teacher): . . . . We’ve encouraged parents to schedule team conferences . . . . The open team meetings have been successful . . . .

Barbara (teacher): . . . . We’ve done a lot to make the parents feel involved . . . like the open team meetings . . . .

Ann (teacher): . . . . We just held our last one (open pod meeting) in a parent’s home instead of at school . . . .

Thus, all groups interviewed perceived that the teaching of collaboration, the modeling of collaboration, and the broadening of student interaction and teacher interaction were effects of the changes which had been implemented at the middle school.

Summary

In the first section of Chapter IV, the background and history of the study were described. In the next four sections, each of four research questions was addressed by
examining the perceived effects of implementation of the middle school concept on instruction, peer group interaction, teacher attitudes and practices, and school culture. Data were obtained from student, parent, and teacher interviews, as well as documents and surveys. The sixth and final section identified major patterns which were common to the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents.
Chapter Bibliography


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CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary objective of this study was to determine the perceived effects of implementation of key aspects of the middle school concept, as articulated by students, parents, and teachers. A second objective was to extend these data and infer implications for current and future middle school restructuring activities in this and other schools.

Four research questions addressed perceived effects on instruction, peer group interaction, teacher attitudes and practices, and school culture. Informants were asked to respond to questions about differences between their previous and current experiences with the middle school program.

This study used qualitative data collection and analysis procedures. Interview instruments with descriptive, difference, and relationship questions were used to foster elaboration (Drew & Hardman, 1985). Fifteen interviews were completed, with informants representing teachers, students, and parents associated with the middle school under study. Qualitative data collection procedures included collection and transcription of the interview data.
This resulted in over 100 single-spaced typed pages of transcription. Also included were the writing of an expanded account, the writing of journal notes, maintaining a running record of analysis and interpretation, and collection of documents (Spradley, 1979). An existing data set in the form of a student survey also was collected in order to triangulate data.

Data analysis was an iterative process in which categories emerged from the data. Categories were coded and listed as they emerged. This resulted in the creation of three types of matrices. The first set of matrices represented the categories that emerged in each group of interviews, with students, teachers, and parents considered as separate groups. The second set of matrices represented a composite of the main categories which had emerged in each group, with a comparison of the perceptions or observations of each group with regard to each category. Finally, a third type of matrix was created with the four key issues from the research question, and again, the perceptions of each group were compared. Portions of examples of each set of matrices are shown in Appendix E.

This examination of the informants' perceptions revealed two themes which were common to all informants. These themes were active learning and collaboration and communication. Students, teachers, and parents perceived instruction to be more interactive, more authentic, more
interdisciplinary, and more flexible. Students also perceived community service to be a part of active learning. Student, teacher, and parent perceptions relating to collaboration and communication included the teaching of social skills, modeling of collaboration by teachers, and broader peer group interaction on the part of students and teachers. Parents also perceived a significant improvement in the area of teacher-parent communication.

This chapter will discuss interpretations of these findings, along with some differences between the actual findings and other possible results that might have occurred.

Discussion

This is a school community that greatly values high achievement and high expectations. Parents want to ensure that their children have the benefit of every possible opportunity and advantage. Therefore, while other changes associated with the middle school concept met with little resistance, the proposal to discontinue the AT program was an emotional issue which met with widespread and vocal opposition, so much so that the Board tabled the proposal and appointed a committee to study the issue. Even after the committee of parents, teachers, administrators, and Board members presented their findings and recommendations, parents were publicly skeptical and predicted a watered-down program, perhaps aiming for the "middle", which would
yield boredom and frustration for the bright students. They predicted that teachers would not be able to handle a variety of abilities within the same classroom. They feared insufficient challenge for the top students and perhaps an academic struggle for the less-able students.

When the data for this study were reviewed, they revealed that heterogeneous grouping was not seen as particularly decisive from an instructional standpoint. As parents, students, and teachers pointed out in the interviews, everyone now had access to what formerly was reserved for the AT students. They consistently observed that teachers were using new teaching strategies to address a variety of learning needs. As one teacher observed, the answer to dealing with gifted students lies in good teaching rather than in special programs. In addition, parents, teachers, and students commented on the social benefits and the positive effect on self-esteem because no one on either end felt singled out.

How was this achieved in spite of all the predictions of gloom and doom? The answer appears to be connected at least in part to the intensive staff development which was provided prior to the implementation of heterogeneous grouping and the follow-up opportunities which were offered on an ongoing basis. In addition to earlier staff development on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents, preparatory activities included workshops in
cooperative learning, cognitive instruction, co-teaching, modification, and gifted strategies. It was important to include all of these because some teachers had spent the last several years teaching only AT or only "regular" classes. There was also staff development related specifically to content areas, in which teachers were exposed to new ideas using math manipulatives, science labs, research projects, graphic organizers, and process skills. Although the staff development program was beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that much of this staff development occurred at little or no cost to the district through the use of regional service centers and collaboration with professional organizations or with other districts.

Another factor which contributed to the success of heterogeneous grouping was the creation of support measures to ensure success for all students. These included the Learning Center, the co-teaching program, and the gifted program. All of these allowed students to experience success and to have their needs addressed in the least restrictive environment possible.

The researcher was impressed with how well-informed teachers, students, and parents were about the middle school concept and its critical attributes. All three groups were very comfortable with the "language" of middle school. For example, parents referred to hands-on learning, cooperative
learning, advisory, interdisciplinary teaming, and higher level thinking, and their elaboration and examples showed that they understood the meaning of these terms. Students referred to cooperative learning (although they sometimes called it simply "group work"), interdisciplinary activities, transitions, and advisory. A schoolwide effort at better communication with parents, through workshops, newsletters, phone calls, and open team meetings, provided parents with this knowledge base. This emphasis on proactive communication came about in response to the overwhelming resistance encountered when the abolition of the AT program was proposed without providing parents with adequate explanation or opportunity for discussion. In addition, teachers talked to students about how and why they were doing certain activities or using certain strategies, as evidenced by student comments about cooperative learning helping them learn to get along and work out differences.

Furthermore, teachers were reflective and articulate with respect to the change process. References to paradigm shifts, self-renewal, shared decision-making, and being a facilitator of learning were observed throughout the teacher interviews. Again, staff development, along with open communication between teachers and administrators, as mentioned in interviews, could be credited with creating this level of comfort.
Another area worthy of note is how well teachers handled their autonomy as a team. There were no references to team members who did not share equally in the team’s activities and responsibilities. By contrast, teachers portrayed their teams as cohesive units. Teams were comfortable resequencing the teaching of curriculum concepts in order to support interdisciplinary units. Lesson plans showed evidence of frequent reallocation of time within their team block to accommodate special events such as guest speakers. They were also comfortable modifying the advisory program to suit their needs and those of their students.

All of the data sources portrayed teaming as a powerful and decisive element in the success of the middle school program. Teams were perceived as having a positive influence on instruction, social development of students, professional growth, and communication. This confirms Paul George’s assertions and research findings about teaming being the heart of the successful middle school model (1988).

Finally, the catalyst for all of the changes which were implemented was the middle school principal. Teachers were provided with many opportunities to acquire needed knowledge and skills and them empowered to use them in ways that best met their needs and those of their students, but it was the principal who initially set the agenda and created a forum for setting a collaborative vision and defining core values.
In other words, the importance of reculturing as a part of restructuring was recognized (Du Four and Eaker, 1992; Fullan, 1991). It was also the principal who set clear expectations, monitored implementation along the way to ensure that it was congruent with the visions and values, and made decisions about appropriate timing for introducing new changes. Thus, restructuring took place incrementally rather than all at once. Teachers, students, and parents had the opportunity to adjust to a change or set of changes and to internalize them before other major changes were introduced.

Implications and Recommendations

The discussion on implications and recommendations is divided into three sections. The first section deals with implications and recommendations for continued practice at the school under study. The second section includes interpretations and implications for a broader context, and the third section suggests directions for future research.

Implications and Recommendations for Continued Practice at This Site

In addition to identifying aspects of the middle school program which were viewed as strengths, data were reviewed for evidence of suggested targets for growth. Five areas were identified.

1) Advisory was identified by all five teachers and one parent. They perceived that the sets of activities
provided were too limiting and did not allow teachers to maximize their opportunity to interact with and know students in a non-academic context. In response to this, teams developed their own activities. While teachers were pleased with what their teams did, there was no common thread, and advisories throughout the school were more different than alike.

2) Continued attention to developmental issues was mentioned by two parents and a teacher. Specifically, they cautioned that it is important for teachers and parents to remember that students' priorities are not the same as those of the adults in their lives.

3) More teaming with elective teachers was suggested by one parent. This was seen as an opportunity to provide elective teachers with the same network, support system, and synergy achieved by the core teams. Although there was a limited amount of teaming by elective teachers who taught the interdisciplinary art/drama/music course, opportunities for elective teachers and core teachers to connect were limited unless core teachers took the initiative to invite elective teachers to be a part of their activities, as Sarah's team did.

4) The amount of competition was still perceived as too high by two parents. One felt that the school could afford to be more generous and inclusive in all sports
like they were with the cheerleading program. Another felt that more students should be encouraged to run for office or seek out other leadership positions.

5) One teacher felt that there were still too many rules, particularly considering that the teams had such close contact with their students and often were able to prevent discipline problems or redirect them at an early stage. Students also alluded to this in the survey by saying that the administration was too protective and set more limits than necessary.

Based on these targets for growth and on the observations noted earlier in this section, the following recommendations are made:

1) The advisory program could benefit from further development. When it was first implemented, sets of activities were prepared by the counselor with assistance from a small group of teachers. This was done in an effort to make advisory as manageable as possible for teachers, since they were still adjusting to teaming. These activities came from numerous sources and were organized by topics, but there was no common focus or objective. Teams found that the activities were not responsive to the needs of their students. They needed a more open-ended framework which would allow them to take advantage of special talents, resources, or interests which might be unique
to their situation. Each team adapted by developing its own approach to advisory. At the same time, there needed to be some underlying consistency. While the activities and approaches developed by the teams appeared to be successful, there was no consistency among the advisories, so there was room for students’ experiences in advisory to be considerably different depending upon the team.

A recommended strategy would be to have a task force with a representative from each team and from the counseling department develop broad outcomes by grade level for the advisory program. These outcomes might be the same for all three grade levels, or there could be some differences. Staff development could then be held to explain the outcomes to the faculty and to allow the teams to present examples of related activities or approaches which they had found to be successful. Teams would then have the flexibility to develop their own advisory plans as long as they could articulate how they supported the outcomes established. A systematic way for teachers to share advisory ideas, such as faculty or grade level meetings, should also be developed.

2) Staff development should continue to be a priority. This includes ongoing opportunities to examine developmental issues, shared decision-making, learning
styles and multiple intelligences, and the importance of viewing the students in holistic terms rather than strictly academic terms. Another area of focus should be ways to further develop the teaming concept. Teams need continued support in their efforts to be creative problem-solvers, to initiate innovative practices within their teams, and to reach out to other teams and to elective teachers as partners in the instructional process.

3) Student and teacher ownership in development of school rules should be encouraged. This could be accomplished by having Student Council representatives and faculty representatives review the state-mandated Code of Conduct and the school's mission statement and values. This group could then generate a list of expectations representing conduct which is congruent with the Code of Conduct and the school's missions and values. Existing rules which do not serve a specific purpose in supporting the mission and values, such as the rule prohibiting students from going to their lockers on the way to morning tutorials before school, could be revised or eliminated.

4) Ways to further minimize competition and maximize inclusivity should be considered. Since the concern about competition applied mainly to sports, further development of the intramural program could provide
opportunities to a greater number of students. With respect to encouraging more students to seek leadership positions, teachers could integrate activities into classroom instruction or advisory in which students consider the importance of leadership as well as their own individual leadership potential through writing assignments and community service.

5) The focus on proactive communication should be continued. Parent support for the middle school program was evident in the parent interviews. This is made possible by the availability of information and the accessibility of school staff to parents and students. Continued emphasis on school-initiated opportunities like the open team meetings, team newsletters, parenting workshops and awareness sessions, and use of parents as speakers and volunteers will help ensure continued support as the school pursues ongoing self-renewal.

**Interpretations and Implications for a Broader Context**

The findings of this study appear to indicate that schools seeking to implement the middle school concept might achieve the greatest results through careful planning and attention to process and culture. This is consistent with the literature on educational change. For example, Sizer (1991) cautioned that significant school change requires attending to all the consequential parts of a school at once.
because one change touches many areas. Fullan (1991) indicated that while people need pressure to change, they also need a chance to react and form their own position. Deal (1990) emphasized the importance of focusing on context and culture in order to give those affected by change an opportunity to grieve for status or symbols which are lost.

It appears that this attention to process and culture includes setting a collaborative vision and values, articulating the vision and values to the entire school community, and maintaining close communication with parents. This is consistent with the findings of Covey and Farnsworth (1991), who identified trust and a common vision as critical elements to the change process. This was also addressed by Du Four and Baker (1992), who recommended strategies and processes for developing and articulating the vision and values.

In addition, it appears that the change process is supported by opportunities for appropriate staff development. In the case of a transition to a middle school concept, it includes providing meaningful and ongoing staff development for teachers in middle school theory and practice and in shared decision-making to support their efforts toward realizing the vision. According to Turning Points (1989), this encompasses training related to teaming, advisory, instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, and site-based governance.
Furthermore, planning for appropriate support measures to ensure student success is a necessary element. The implementation of teaming, heterogeneous grouping, advisory, and cooperative learning in the school studied are endorsed as support measures to ensure success in the middle grades. Teaming and advisory create communities for learning as described by George (1988), *Turning Points* (1989), and George et al. (1992). Cooperative learning also serves to reduce the size of the learning group to which students belong while providing a way to effectively teach students of diverse ability and different rates of learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Rottier & Ogan, 1991).

The subjects in this study perceived heterogeneous grouping to be more equitable and more motivating, which is consistent with the research of Gamoran (1992), Kuykendall (1992), and Oakes (1985).

In terms of leadership, a principal who is well-grounded in middle school theory and practice as well as group processes and who is committed to creating a student-responsive school despite obstacles and resistance is a must. This is articulated by Gill and Read (1990), Tye (1992), and George et al. (1992), who indicate that the principal must have a well-publicized commitment, along with knowledge of middle level issues, the ability to change the hierarchical mindset, and the willingness to accept and address resistance. This was evident in this study and
would be a driving force in any district seeking to achieve similar results.

**Directions for Future Research**

There is a growing body of research on preservice and inservice for middle level teachers. Middle level teaching certification is a growing phenomenon, as discussed in Chapter II. However, an area which could benefit from further study is that of leadership at the middle level. Just as the role of teacher has evolved from disseminator of knowledge to facilitator of learning, the role of principal has evolved from manager of people and resources to instructional leader and orchestrator of human dynamics. This has implications for administrators at all levels. However, an added consideration is that most preparation programs in educational administration are either generic, without emphasis on a particular level, or they are geared to the elementary or secondary level, with no particular attention given to the middle level. It is possible for an administrator to assume a middle school principalship without any prior experience whatsoever at the middle level.

Further study in the skills and preparation needed for middle level administrators could support the efforts of universities and professional organizations to create professional preparation and professional development models responsive to the leadership needs of middle schools. Such a study might be approached through surveys or interviews
with practitioners to determine their views on what was lacking in their preparation program.

Another research direction which could be beneficial would be ways to maintain the level of parent involvement when students reach the middle level. This refers to actual involvement rather than interest. Typically parents lessen their involvement when their children reach middle school. Often the reason given is that they perceive that the children no longer want their parents to be at school. However, existing research points to improved outcomes and improved communication when there is a high level of parent involvement, as well as financial savings through the use of volunteers (Dunham & Bailey, 1992; Myers & Monson, 1992). Identifying middle schools with high levels of parent involvement and determining the features of their programs would be widely applicable. This could include: how they recruit volunteers, what roles the volunteers perform, what training is provided and by whom, how student perceptions are dealt with (i.e. not wanting their parents at school), how volunteer opportunities are made available to working parents or non-English speaking parents, how volunteers are recognized for their contributions, and how the effectiveness of the program is evaluated.

Conclusion

This study presents perceptions about restructuring efforts in a middle school. In the district under study,
these findings will have an immediate application in that a time of transition is imminent. The middle school principal has retired, and in response to student population growth in the district, a new facility is being built. The new facility will house grades five and six in one wing and grades seven and eight in the other wing. Each wing will have its own principal. This creates a situation involving a new building, new administrators, and a new grade configuration. Integrating the fifth grade teachers, students, and parents into this new environment will require the same attention to process and culture as the implementation of the changes which have occurred over the last decade.

With the current wave of school restructuring, other districts faced with similar circumstances and transitions in their middle schools can consider the findings of this study when developing their restructuring plans. The findings and recommendations from this study could be applied to any middle school; a certain socioeconomic status is not a prerequisite to achieving the same results. The common themes within and across groups in the findings of this study can prove useful to middle level educators in establishing goals, developing implementation plans, and anticipating obstacles throughout the restructuring process.
Chapter Bibliography


APPENDIX A
APPENDIX A

EIGHTH GRADE SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to help us gather data about changes which have been implemented at MMS over the last several years. Your responses will be confidential. Please do not write your name on this form.

1. Place a check in the appropriate space if you are participating in any of these programs:
   a. Resource  b. ESL  c. Explorations

2. Most of your classes in middle school are heterogeneous, which means that students are grouped together instead of being separated by ability. What aspects of heterogeneous classes do you feel have been an advantage to you? Check those which apply, if any:
   ____a. I feel challenged.
   ____b. I enjoy being with a variety of students.
   ____c. Teachers expect everyone's best.
   ____d. Everyone has access to enrichment and higher-level thinking skills, not just the brightest students.
   ____e. Class discussions are more interesting by having a variety of students.
   ____f. Other ________________________________

3. What aspects of heterogeneous classes do you feel have not been an advantage to you? Check those which apply, if any:
   ____a. I do not feel challenged.
   ____b. I prefer being with a students of my own ability.
   ____c. The work seems too difficult.
   ____d. I think only the brightest students should have a challenging curriculum.
   ____e. The teacher has to adjust the pace to accommodate everyone.
   ____f. Other ________________________________

4. Please check the category which corresponds to your approximate overall average this year:
   a. ____90-100  b. ____80-89
   c. ____70-79  d. ____below 70
5. Have your teachers offered any optional activities for extra challenge?
   a. ____Yes, several times.  b. ____ Occasionally
   c. ____I don't know of any.

6. Have your teachers used the Learning Center for students needing extra support?
   a. ____I've been to the Learning Center.
   b. ____I've seen classmates go there.
   c. ____I've haven't noticed students from my classes going there.

7. Many teachers at MMS and other schools use cooperative learning. What is your personal reaction to working in cooperative groups? Check those which apply:
   ____a. I like the group support.
   ____b. I think we learn more as a result of explaining it to each other.
   ____c. I think it makes us more accountable.
   ____d. It helps us learn social skills as well as academic skills.
   ____e. I prefer working alone because _________________.

8. In what ways do you think the "pod" system is of benefit? Check those which apply and give a brief example.
   a. ____ instructional ________________________________
   b. ____ social ________________________________
   c. ____ disciplinary ________________________________
   d. ____ communication ________________________________
   e. ____ other ________________________________

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR FEEDBACK!
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>Cohort C (n=244)</th>
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FOLLOW-UP TO SURVEY

July 1, 1993

Dear ________________,

Many thanks for taking part in the interviews for my study about the middle school. I am in the process of analyzing the data, and I need your assistance and insight in order to interpret it as thoroughly as possible.

Three years ago, (the principal) administered a survey to the eighth graders in our school. At the end of this year, I administered the same survey in eighth grade. As you can see from the attached set of responses, there are a few areas in which students' perceptions appear to have changed over the last three years.

Also attached is a sheet asking you to state briefly your interpretation of why students' perceptions have changed in specific areas. Please include any personal experiences or reflections which might be pertinent.

I need to have you identify yourself on the form, but your name will not be used in the reporting of the results. It would be most helpful if you could return this to me in the enclosed envelope by August 1, 1993. Please do not hesitate to call me at home or at school if you have any questions.

Again, thank you for your valuable input.

Sincerely,

Gail Hartin, Principal

GH/ac enc
Survey Follow-up

Teacher ______________________ Date __________________

Please comment on the following from your perspective as a teacher:

1. For question 2e about class discussions, a larger number of this year’s students identified it as one of the positive aspects of mixed grouping (151 out of 244 students this year as opposed to 62 out of 219 three years ago).

2. For question 5c on challenge activities, 80 students said they didn’t know of any optional challenge activities being offered (as opposed to 40 students three years ago).

3. For question 6c, 100 students said they hadn’t noticed anyone going to the Learning Center. This number was 50 three years ago.

4. You will notice an increase of students for questions 7b and 7d who expressed the idea that cooperative learning helps academic and social skills.

5. For question 8, there was an increase in the number of students who felt that teaming was beneficial from a social standpoint and in the area of communication as well.
APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule For Student Interviews

A. Introduction/Purpose of Interview

B. Preliminary Data: Did you take any A.T. classes in sixth or seventh grade?
Did you take Algebra in the eighth grade?
Who was the language arts teacher on your eighth grade team?

C. Interview Questions

1. After the A.T. classes were discontinued, did you feel there was any difference in the levels of academic challenge? Why or why not? What are some examples?

2. Once students were no longer grouped by ability, do you feel that teachers had higher expectations for everyone, lower expectations for everyone, or varied expectations? For example, were there different expectations for you than for some of your friends? (If applicable) What are some examples which give evidence of this? What seemed to determine how a teacher set expectations? Individual ability? Difficulty of material? Other?

3. Where do you feel the students' social identity was? In other words, who were the students eighth graders were most likely to spend time with outside of school? (Established friends/cliques; students from the same advisory team? . . .) Was it related to academic ability in any way? (i.e., Did "A" students only socialize with other "A" students, etc.)

4. What about cultural identity - the group you tended to belong with at school? Was it mainly advisory, the team, the grade level, or groups of friends from throughout the school?
Did it sometimes change according to the situation? How?

5. In student council, athletics, etc., did ability and achievement play a major role? In other words, were accomplishments and recognition based mainly on grades?
6. Do you feel that the changes (teaming, advisory, mixed ability classes) made students feel better about themselves? Did they make some students feel worse?

If you feel the effect was different for different people, why do you feel that way?

7. Did you notice differences in the way teachers taught their classes before and after the changes? Did you notice some differences between the way things were in sixth grade and the way they were by the time you finished eighth grade?

Specific examples:

Ways students interacted with each other?

Ways teachers interacted with students?

Ways teachers interacted with each other on joint projects?

8. Did you see evidence of growth in traditions, rituals, etc., that were associated with advisory groups and/or teams? Examples?

9. What did you learn that sixth graders ought to know to help them adjust to middle school?

10. What benefits (if any) do you feel came about because of:

   cooperative learning
   advisory
   TRIBE
   mixed-ability grouping
   teaming
   block scheduling

   In your opinion, which change was most beneficial?

11. If you could change one thing about the middle school program, what would it be?
APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Schedule

A. Introduction/Purpose

B. Preliminary Data:

Years of experience in this school?

Total number of years of experience?

Teaching field/grade level?

Enumerate changes?

C. Interview Questions

1. Comparing your approach to your profession before and since the implementation of the middle school concept, do you see any differences in the way you:

   a) plan instruction
   b) evaluate student performance
   c) interact with students
   d) interact with colleagues
   e) interact with parents
   f) interact with administrators

   Specific examples of each?

2. Do you now approach the curriculum for your subject matter any differently? For example, are opportunities for interdisciplinary experiences a consideration?

3. Do you feel the advisory program helps you better relate to your students? If so, how?

4. In your opinion, are the students who leave this school better prepared for the future and/or better adjusted than those who left this school five years ago? Why or why not?
APPENDIX D

Parent Interview Schedule

A. Introduction/Purpose

B. Verification of parent's status as a former and current middle school parent

C. Interview Questions

1. Can you enumerate some of the changes that have occurred as a result of the middle school concept? (What major changes seem to have taken place since your earlier experience with the middle school?)

2. Do you perceive any changes in the way teachers and students interact:
   a) academically?
   b) in non-academic contexts? (such as advisory, between classes, in extracurricular activities, etc.)
   Specific examples?

3. What about changes in the way students interact with each other in the same contexts?
   Specific examples?
   Any polarity by ability level (then and/or now)?

4. Do you perceive any changes in the way instruction is delivered? (What the teacher and students actually do in the classroom)
   Specific examples?

5. Do you perceive any changes in the curriculum? (What is taught, when it is taught, and the depth of the topics)
   Specific examples?

6. Have you observed any changes in the nature of homework and projects? If so, how are they different?

7. Thinking about the elementary level as being child-centered and the high school level as being content-centered, where do you feel the emphasis is at the middle level? Has this emphasis shifted in either direction since your earlier experience?
8. Do you feel the current middle school program gives adequate attention to the developmental needs of pre-adolescents? How does this compare with the former middle level program?

9. Comparing your family’s two experiences with the middle school, is the current experience smoother, about the same, or more difficult than the previous one?

   For you? How?

   For your child? How?
## APPENDIX E

Reproduction of Matrix A (excerpt)

Inter-person Comparison Within Interview Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>1a. Planning instruction</th>
<th>1b. Evaluation of student perf.</th>
<th>1c. Interaction w/students</th>
<th>1d. Interaction w/colleagues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JIM</td>
<td>less long range planning in science due to team planning, mapping to tie things together, less test, more process + principles</td>
<td>mainly essay + interpretation instead of math, choice, more application</td>
<td>more team involvement w/individual kids, more openness to letting kids show their &quot;true colors&quot;, advisory - get to know likes, dislikes</td>
<td>closer knit, good to switch teams periodically, so you get new perspectives, no power struggles or showing off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE</td>
<td>coordinate stories w/SS + science, mapping as a team, opportunities for CL</td>
<td>more essays, projects, connections to real life, higher expectations, more interdisciplinary assessment</td>
<td>more bonding, would like to know what they are thinking, what their interests are, all part of the family</td>
<td>time every day to plan + do things together, kids know teachers work together, celebrate birthdays, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs. (8 yrs. at MHS)</td>
<td>team maps SS + Soc as key subjects for mapping field trips, CL is a priority, definite change in approach</td>
<td>more modifications, more dual assignments (sound for more than one subject)</td>
<td>more personal, more like class, self-contained, team insights, changed way of working in a certain way</td>
<td>plan everything together, positive talk about students, problem solving, emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNA</td>
<td>major paradigm shift, no longer in isolate, team calendar is a focus, always look at what is happening in other subject</td>
<td>no longer evaluate totally in terms of LA program, process is broadened, CL to assess academically + socially</td>
<td>more facilitating, more counseling, you transcend your own classroom, learn from other teachers' interactions w/kids</td>
<td>no longer super-focal or clique-oriented, broader, team-focused, teachers flexible w/each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC. STUDIES</td>
<td>22 yrs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARAH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.</td>
<td>18 yrs. (5 yrs. at MHS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BARBARA</td>
<td>totally different, couldn't live w/o team, usually math, but adjust around SS + Science + CL</td>
<td>less &quot;straight testing,&quot; more maps, oral presentations, essays, synthesis, authentic assessment input from team to address daily needs</td>
<td>less &quot;straight teaching,&quot; like a family, closer feeling</td>
<td>kids sense that teachers like each other, mutual support + celebration</td>
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APPENDIX E

Reproduction of Matrix B (excerpt)

Comparison By Categories

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<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>active learning</th>
<th>adolescent development</th>
<th>advisory</th>
<th>authentic assessment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interviews</td>
<td>less direct teaching, more facilitation, speakers, field trips, projects, interdisc., coop. learning, flexibility, interaction + soc. skills</td>
<td>more holistic approach, less exclusivity, soc. aspects important, planning for soc. skills development</td>
<td>needs refinement, teams created, own activities (current events, reading, soc. skills, guest speakers, book talks)</td>
<td>essays, maps, projects, skills, synthesis, application, interpretation, interdisciplinary, eval. process broadened by team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
<td>more hands-on, guest speakers, coop learning, fewer worksheets, connections, flexibility, soc. skills, more thinking + participation</td>
<td>staff dev., parent edc. + training for T's + parents needs to continue, still too much competition, but better than before</td>
<td>safe haven for kids, needs some refinement, diff. teams approach differently</td>
<td>more original work, interviews, &quot;make &amp; do&quot; + skills, more choices, interdisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews</td>
<td>more participation, independent, experiential, group work, interdisc., team flexibility, social skills, discussion, alive projects</td>
<td>feeling of belonging, fairness, less competition, care about us as people</td>
<td>secure, low pressure, like a family, service proj. + place to solve probs., can interact w/o talking class time</td>
<td>interdisciplinary, skills, projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>lesson plans, interdisciplinary, &quot;Super Days&quot; newsletters, counseling articles, D.A.R.E program (peer pressure, soc. skills)</td>
<td>newsletter-service proj.</td>
<td>lesson plans, interdisciplinary projects, service proj.</td>
<td>lesson plans, interdisciplinary projects, oral reports, newsletters, software, slide shows, research reports</td>
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<td>Surveys</td>
<td>tying subjects together, not a lot of repetition or busy work, flexibility, coordination by team</td>
<td>some things too structured, too protective, traditions, parties</td>
<td>teachers communicate, some things could be more than one class</td>
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**APPENDIX E**

Reproduction of Matrix C (excerpt)

Comparison By Research Questions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>RQ1 instruction</th>
<th>RQ2 p.q. interaction</th>
<th>RQ3 teacher att./practice</th>
<th>RQ4 School culture</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher interviews</strong></td>
<td>more facilitative, less dir. tech.</td>
<td>planning for social skills, older kids help w/ gr.</td>
<td>expectations for active learners, holistic view, interdisciplinary, teamwork, collaborative focus</td>
<td>communicators w/ parents valued, T collab. caring, inclusivity, A/L</td>
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<td></td>
<td>less T-directed, more outside resources, fewer tests, more hands-on flexibility, kids interact,</td>
<td>broader group, more interaction handed to teacher, more accepting of each other, social skills taught</td>
<td>active learning, expectations, caring—go to games, etc., collab w/team, interdisciplinary, commun w/parents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent interviews</strong></td>
<td>active, group, discussion, more indep. participation, less competition in academics, more choices</td>
<td>social idea, team/advisor, cult. idea, team/advisor, leadership not by ability, sec. skills, broader group</td>
<td>higher tech expectations, teachers care about kids</td>
<td>caring—tech. talk about kids, loyalty to team, inclusivity, A/L expectations, traditions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student interviews</strong></td>
<td>lesson plans, mapping, B.E. unit, Win unit, newsletters, family press, classroom visits</td>
<td>lesson plans, class writing, newsletters, partnerships, service proj.</td>
<td>newsletters, interdisciplinary, events, recognizing tech. calls, expecting more positive interaction &amp; language</td>
<td>newsletters—public recognition of A, collab., caring (service proj.), morale boosters, inspirational quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Documents</strong></td>
<td>more class discussion, CL social skills</td>
<td>like a family, easy to get together—team can change schedules</td>
<td>tech communication, connections, team organized, consistency among teachers, caring, like a family</td>
<td>closeness in &amp; out of school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

Reproduction of Interview Record (excerpt)

INTERVIEW RECORD
RESPONDENT  Adam (parent)

CATEGORIES TEXT NONVERBAL

1. How about changes in the way instruction is delivered? Do you see differences in what the teachers and students actually do in the classroom?

A. The biggest changes are cooperative learning and interdisciplinary connections.

Interviewer: How are they different?

A. Well, I notice more independent thinking and seat work learning. And the teachers seem to do a lot more management because they know everyone is concerned about making sure no one gets a free ride. Then all the kids there are no free rides.

1. You mentioned interdisciplinary connections. Are there any specific ones that come to mind?

A. Oh, there's always something going on. Usually at least two or sometimes all four teachers in things together. I URN, like the one on Great Britain. And the kinds of things kids are creating on their teams are great...all our projects for more than one subject... (Pause) ...And what's really neat is that high school teachers are helping out and starting to try it too.

1. Is there anything else you would like to bring up as far as cooperative learning or interdisciplinary connections are concerned?

A. Well, we are constantly seeing evidence of combined efforts of teachers and increased communication with us.

I. How have you seen that?

A. Well, I think there's good communication in scheduling issues, our change to projects, and so on... (Pause) ...And they keep us informed. The open team meetings are great.

1. What happens at the open team meetings?

A. Well, I've only been in two of them, but I hear what goes every time. They give information on what's coming up in the way of academics and special activities. I can tell from what teachers say in the open team meetings that they are using many new methods and that the curriculum is definitely better.
APPENDIX F

Reproduction of Interview Summary

Interview Summary

Respondent: Meredith
(Student)

Responsiveness, Elaboration:
Meredith initiated elaboration in most responses. She sometimes seemed to anticipate details being sought. She usually elaborated without the need for probe questions.

Demeanor:
Meredith was poised and relaxed. She was soft-spoken but confident. She was alert and responsive but not very animated.

Nonverbal behavior:
Meredith maintained good eye contact. She sat on the edge of the sofa leaning forward most of the time. There were very few hand gestures, but she did tilt her head to one side when thinking about her response. She smiled when talking about the issues of particular interest or strong opinion:

Meredith mentioned the new cheerleading program several times. She continually referred to having more opportunities for more people, in contrast to the former environment in which students felt left out or singled out.

Other:
Meredith is very articulate and has obviously thought about these issues before. She seems very aware of what is happening in her school.
APPENDIX F

Transcript of Parent Interview

TRANSCRIPT OF PARENT INTERVIEW

ADAM

Interviewer: I really appreciate your taking the time to meet with me today.

Adam: My pleasure.

Interviewer: As I explained in my letter, the purpose of the study is to see how people feel about the changes in the middle school.

Adam: Since there was so much discussion and emotion about the changes, it's good that someone is looking back to see how it all worked out.

Interviewer: Let's see, you have one daughter that already went through middle school. Is (she) in tenth grade now?

Adam: Yes, and (my other daughter) is in sixth grade.

Interviewer: What major changes seem to have taken place since your earlier experience with the middle school?

Adam: Well, the pods are fairly new, and then there's cooperative learning. There were some curriculum changes, and the gifted program started when (my younger daughter) got here.

Interviewer: Anything else? ...(Pause)...... What about grouping?

Adam: AT classes were eliminated when (my older daughter) was an eighth grader, and they started letting everybody take algebra.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any changes in the way teachers and students interact academically?

Adam: Mmmmm...not really, except for cooperative learning.
APPENDIX F

Transcript of Parent Interview

Interviewer: How is that different from before?

Adam: Well, the teacher talks less and does less - I don't mean that in a negative way - and the kids talk more and do more.

Interviewer: So it seems like teachers are doing less of the talking?

Adam: Yes, and more listening.

Interviewer: What about the way teachers interact with kids in non-academic settings, like advisory, or at games, or just in the halls?

Adam: It does seem like they make more of an effort to greet kids and visit with them when they see them outside of class.

Interviewer: Where would that be?

Adam: Oh, in the halls and in the lunchroom...or even if they run into them at Tom Thumb or Northpark or in church. We often run into teachers on the weekends, and they always stop and take time to visit.

Interviewer: Any other settings?

Adam: Well, I have to say that advisory has been my one disappointment. In (my daughter)'s case, it turned out to be more of an extension of the class (that teacher) taught. I think she (the teacher) missed an opportunity to interact with kids on a more personal level.

Interviewer: Do you get the impression that happens in most advisories?

Adam: I'd have to admit that I really don't know.

Interviewer: What about changes in the way kids interact with each other in both contexts - first, academically?

Adam: Well, my kids have always interacted with a wide variety of
students, not just kids in their classes. I see them interacting more with their own classmates now because of the nature of the teaching methods.

interviewer: Can you think of an example?

Adam: When they have cooperative assignments, they have to contact other people in their group to make sure everyone is up to speed and prepared. But they still interact with a wide variety of kids outside of class.

interviewer: Speaking of outside of class, have you noticed any changes in the way they interact with each other in non-academic situations?

Adam: Not really. It's very necessary that they have some friends who are in their classes, but mine also have many who are not, so we really haven't noticed a change there.

interviewer: Did you notice any polarity by ability level in their interactions - either then or now?

Adam: Well, that probably happened to an extent when we had AT classes because kids tended to be in classes with the same kids all day, so there wasn't much chance for them to meet other kids unless they were social butterflies like my girls!

interviewer: Do you see any evidence of it now?

Adam: Not at all. They are with such a mixture of kids throughout the day, and the teachers seem to really plan it that way.

interviewer: How about changes in the way instruction is delivered? Do you see differences in what the teachers and students actually do in the classroom?

Adam: The biggest changes are cooperative learning and interdisciplinary connections.
Interviewer: How are they different?

Adam: Well, I notice more independent thinking and less rote learning. And the teachers seem to do a lot more monitoring because they know everyone is concerned about making sure no one gets a free ride. They tell the kids there are no free rides.

Interviewer: You mentioned interdisciplinary connections. Are there any specific ones that come to mind?

Adam: Oh, there's always something going on. Usually at least two or sometimes all four teachers tie things together in a unit, like the one on Great Britain. And the kinds of things kids are creating on their teams are great...like joint projects for more than one subject....(Pause).... And what's really neat is that high school teachers are hearing about it and starting to try it out.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to bring up as far as cooperative learning or interdisciplinary connections are concerned?

Adam: Well, we are constantly seeing evidence of combined efforts of teachers and increased communication with us.

Interviewer: How have you seen that?

Adam: Well, they have good co-planning in scheduling tests, due dates for projects, and so on....(Pause)....And they keep us informed. The open team meetings are great.

Interviewer: What happens at the open team meetings?

Adam: Well, I've only been to two of them, but (my wife) goes every time. They give information on what's coming up in the way of academics and special activities. I can tell from what teachers say in the open team meetings that they are using many new methods and that the curriculum is definitely beefier.
APPENDIX F
Transcript of Parent Interview

Interviewer: Curriculum - that's my next question! Do you perceive any changes in the curriculum - content-wise, or as far as sequencing or depth are concerned?

Adam: It seems that there is far less “force feeding” in the curriculum now. Everyone is expected to engage in a high level of thinking and participation. (My older child) used to talk about kids who never volunteered and were never called on to answer in class. Now there are so many activities that are not just question/answer, question/answer....(Pause)...It seems like very student is more accountable, and the thing I really like is that they have to talk to each other in order to complete assignments and projects. Now most classes are like AT classes were.

Interviewer: When you say less “force feeding”, are you referring to the level of the material or to the methods and activities, or both?

Adam: For the most part, the level of the curriculum didn't seem to change just because there was no longer an AT program; instead, everyone got what AT classes used to get. Even though there are new teaching ideas being used, they seem to have more to do with teams than with how kids are grouped.....(Pause).....It seems like the curriculum calls for a lot more thinking from everyone. That's what seems to be reflected in the way teachers are teaching.

Interviewer: So you see less force feeding and more thinking. Do you have any other observations about curriculum?

Adam: Only that I think there must be better communication between middle and high school teachers now. I read in the paper about the report at the Board meeting where they explained about teachers from all the different levels helping to write curriculum.

Interviewer: Let's move into homework and projects. Have you noticed any differences in the nature of assignments?

Adam: Definitely. More independent thinking and less filling in blanks, especially in math. And there's a lot of “make and do”.
APPENDIX F

Transcript of Parent Interview

Interviewer: What is "make and do"? Can you give an example?

Adam: Sure. In history they do assignments that involve dressing up as characters, baking things, doing mock trials. There are all kinds of hands-on experiences.

Interviewer: Sounds like fun.

Adam: For the kids and for us! I've had to make more than one last-minute trip to the store for some urgent prop or ingredient. But that's OK. I'm pleased to see (my daughter) enjoying her work and enjoying learning.

Interviewer: So the assignments seem enjoyable?

Adam: Oh, yes. And original and creative most of the time.

Interviewer: Thinking about the elementary level as being child-centered and the high school level as being content-centered, where do you think the emphasis is at the middle level?

Adam: I'd say it falls in the middle. There's less overt parent involvement because the kids don't want you there as much. But I do see the teachers treating kids less like high schoolers. And I think now there is more emphasis on the whole person as opposed to the academic person.

Interviewer: To what would you attribute that?

Adam: Well, teachers have had a lot of training, and they are more involved in committees that study new ideas and make decisions. I think they are better informed, and they make a better effort at keeping the community informed.

Interviewer: What kind of training have teachers had?

Adam: Well, training in teaming and cooperative learning mainly. And I know they had workshops and seminars on what happens in adolescence.
APPENDIX F

Transcript of Parent Interview

Interviewer: So do you think the current middle school program gives proper attention to the developmental needs of pre-adolescents?

Adam: I don't know of any program that is really adequate, but ours is a lot better than it was.

Interviewer: How is it better?

Adam: Well, I remember how traumatic cheerleading tryouts used to be for the older kids in the neighborhood. It put them under such pressure at such an early age. But that's not a problem now because of the new cheerleading program. We're doing better at letting them be kids.

Interviewer: What would make our middle school program even more responsive to student needs?

Adam: I think more needs to be done on learning styles and how to learn. Kids at this age seem to learn in a lot of different ways, and it would help teachers and parents to understand as much as possible about that.

Interviewer: All in all, if you were to compare your family's two experiences with middle school, would you say the current experience is smoother, about the same, or more difficult than the first one?

Adam: Easier for (my younger daughter) and easier for Mom and Dad, too. It hurt (my oldest child) to be told she wasn't good enough for AT. Even though she got in the next year, she was devastated when she was first turned down. That doesn't happen any more. And we are much more in the know about everything. We don't have to scrounge for information; it's always available.

Interviewer: From whom?

Adam: From the teachers or the counselors of administrators, or even the Board.
Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to share about middle school?

Adam: I think we've covered a whole lot!

Interviewer: I really appreciate your comments. You certainly seem to have a lot of information about what goes on in our school.

Adam: Well, I take time every night to talk with the girls about school, and I read every single thing we get from school. I listened to some of those guest speakers they brought in, too.

Interviewer: Guest speakers?

Adam: Yes, like that Dr. Johnson?

Interviewer: Dr. Johnston?

Adam: Yes. And I could identify with everything he talked about! He sure understands middle school kids!

Interviewer: And thank you for helping us understand a little more about how we're doing with our middle school kids!

Adam: You're welcome. Good luck to you!

Interviewer: Thanks!
APPENDIX G

Chronology of Changes

1985-1986

*Needs assessment conducted.

*Staff development on needs of the middle level student provided.

1986-1987

*Staff development provided in preparation for teaming.

*Parenting sessions held.

1987-1988

*Teaming implemented.

*Elected cheerleader program replaced by Pep Squad.

*Learning Center opened.

*Abolition of AT program proposed but postponed.

*Continued staff development on teaming and development provided.

1988-1989

*Committee formed to study grouping practices.

*Staff development on advisory provided to all staff.

*Advisory program implemented

*Curriculum revised in preparation for heterogeneous grouping.

*Staff development provided in strategies for differentiation.

1989-1990

*AT program abolished; classes grouped heterogeneously.

*State-mandated gifted program started.
1990-1991

*New interdisciplinary electives offered.

*Teams given responsibility for scheduling their students.

1991-1992

*Co-teaching offered in core subjects as alternatives to pull-out.
APPENDIX H

List of Categories

active learning strategies  inclusivity
adolescent development  instruction
advisory  interaction
authentic assessment  interdisciplinary
caring  modeling
collaboration  outside resources
communication  partnership
community service  planning
competition  rituals and traditions
connections  sharing
curriculum  social skills
expectations  staff development
flexibility  teacher attitudes/practices
grouping practices  teaming
holistic, global  technology
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