Introduction to Middle Level Education
Fourth Edition

Introduction to Middle Level Education

Sara Davis Powell
Belmont Abbey College

Pearson
To my husband, Rus, who makes all aspects of our life together a delightful partnership.

To my sons, Jesse, Cody, Travis, and Noah, and their families, who continually give me so much pleasure and many reasons to be proud.

To middle level kids and teachers, who grow and learn together every day.
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Married with four sons, four daughters-in-laws, and three grandchildren, she enjoys watching lakeside sunsets at home with her husband, Rus, and spending time with her sons and their families. When not on her dock, with her family, or writing at home, chances are she can be reached at Belmont Abbey College, 100 Belmont-Mt. Holly Road, Belmont, North Carolina 28012; (704) 461–5059; sarapowell@bac.edu.
Preface

New to This Edition

*Introduction to Middle Level Education* offers a comprehensive and contemporary body of knowledge that speaks directly to teacher candidates in a voice that invites them into today’s middle level classrooms. The fourth edition is a compelling look at a variety of current issues and topics affecting young adolescents, their teachers, and their schools, including discussions of 21st century knowledge and skill requirements such as global awareness, civic engagement, information literacy, and ethical responsibility.

Yet, despite all the changes both students and teachers face, the developmental needs of young adolescents remain predictable. Relevant and challenging curriculum, engaging instruction, ongoing assessment that is growth-promoting, developmental responsiveness, and strategies for creating and maintaining a positive and productive learning environment—all of these and other vital components of middle level education must be firmly in place.

New Chapter

Chapter 11, “Citizenship and Civility in the Middle Grades,” is completely new and extremely timely. Our nation is faced with increasing levels of violence, divisiveness, and rancor never before experienced by the majority of today’s population. Now is the time to promote citizenship and civility among young adolescents who encapsulate the future of our republic. Topics in this new chapter include:

- Civic knowledge across the curriculum
- Current events
- Elections
- Civic skills across the curriculum
- Global citizenship skills
- Civic skills related to the Common Core
- Digital citizenship
- Civic dispositions
- Civic engagement
- Social consciousness and responsibility
- Service learning
- Civility.

An extensive list of resources available to help teach citizenship, civic engagement, and civility in our classrooms is provided.

New Features

*Making the Teaching and Learning Connection* consists of personal letters written directly to readers by outstanding teachers and middle level leaders. All include a photo of the letter writer and most include a video. The topics are pertinent to our relationships with young adolescents. It’s coincidental, yet worth noting, that *Making the Teaching and Learning Connection* includes the initials TLC, often recognized as standing for Tender Loving Care. This is what middle level teachers must provide for young adolescents as we help them grow and become healthy, happy, altruistic, and productive citizens.
• Chapter 1 TLC: John Lounsbury, a legend in middle level circles, and one of the finest gentlemen and teachers I have ever known, tells us about his philosophy of teaching that includes spiritual aspects of our profession.

• Chapter 2 TLC: Dani Ramsey tells us how she uses bio poems as an outlet for young adolescents to explore who they are and how their emotions and social experiences impact them.

• Chapter 3 TLC: Amy Goodwin understands that she teaches the whole child. She tells us how she addresses bullying through literature and class discussion.

• Chapter 4 TLC: Charlie Bull’s devotion to kids raised in poverty is evident as he describes his students and his teaching style.

• Chapter 5 TLC: Traci Peters tells us she thrives within structure and organization and that her middle level students do as well.

• Chapter 6 TLC: Derek Boucher writes about his commitment to teaching students to read with fluency and comprehension.

• Chapter 7 TLC: Macy Ingle tells us that she realized what she had missed in her own science education when she started using the 5E lesson plan—engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate.

• Chapter 8 TLC: Dee Lanier explains his school’s emphasis on solving real-world challenges and how he continually assesses student learning.

• Chapter 9 TLC: Kurt Hansen, an admitted science geek, tells us active engagement in the classroom is vital, as is linking lessons to curricular standards through careful planning.

• Chapter 10 TLC: Kadean Maddix writes about his journey toward the middle level math classroom and his devotion to his students.

• Chapter 11 TLC: Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s dedication to civic knowledge and skills shines through in this chapter’s TLC.

• Chapter 12 TLC: Nancy Ruppert, a true leader of middle level education and former president of the Association for Middle Level Education, gives heartfelt advice about the value and power of relationships.

New Concepts and Emphases

• In Chapter 1, increased emphasis is placed on middle level education philosophy as expressed by the founders of the middle school concept. Their legacy remains a driving force in how we interact with, and educate, young adolescents today.

• In Chapter 2, the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL) is examined. Executive skills, or executive function, comprise a set of mental qualities that help us get things done. These skills are applied to middle level classrooms.

• In Chapter 3, we explore issues revolving around gender and gender identity, including dilemmas involved with childhood gender nonconformity and transgender youth.

• In Chapter 4, statistics concerning young adolescent substance abuse are both updated and enhanced. Sleep, essential to productivity, is a new topic in the societal context of middle level education.

• In Chapter 5, emphasis is placed on common planning time as vital to effective teaching and learning in a middle level setting.

• In Chapter 6, strategies for helping young adolescents increase their memory capacity are included.
• In Chapter 7, an extensive section has been added addressing neuroscience research and implications for middle level teaching and learning. A section addressing the importance of choice and how to include it in the classroom is added.
• In Chapter 8, additional emphasis is provided on formative assessment, common assessments, and response patterns.
• In Chapter 9, the gradual release model has been added, along with the concept of academic language, a component of edTPA. In addition, SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol is addressed not only as beneficial for English learners, but for all learners.
• In Chapter 10, de-escalation strategies of the Crisis Prevention Institute are applied to middle level classrooms to help prevent behavior issues.
• Chapter 11 is entirely new.
• In Chapter 12, a major section addressing professionalism is added, including becoming a reflective practitioner, balancing professional and personal life, and maintaining positive dispositions.

New Accountability
Each chapter consists of three to six major topic sections. Each topic section is followed by four multiple choice items with explanations for each answer choice. Students can use the self-checks to make sure they are grasping the knowledge in the chapters.

New Videos
This fourth edition includes 10 videos from the third edition and 22 new videos illustrating concepts throughout the text. The Instructor’s Manual includes accountability questions for every video that may be used as study guides or as quizzes to make sure students are watching the videos when assigned.

Included in This Edition
To help prepare teachers who will consistently make the teaching and learning connection, the following features from the third edition are retained in this new edition:

• eText Access: As a Pearson eText this edition includes embedded access to websites and video features that invite readers to explore the personal stories of middle level teachers and students, as well as numerous resources that are valuable to teaching and learning.
• Association for Middle Level Education Teacher Preparation Standards: The 2012 AMLE teacher preparation standards are linked to chapter content throughout the text.
• This We Believe: The 16 tenets of effective schools for young adolescents are emphasized throughout the text.
• Goals for Young Adolescent Development (This We Believe): The 13 goals for young adolescent development as stated in This We Believe are prominent in each chapter as the content addresses them.
• Common Core State Standards: An emphasis on the Common Core State Standards that influence teaching and learning in middle level schools is prominent throughout and includes a valuable Q&A feature addressing the development and implementation of the standards.
• The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: Extensive coverage of bullying, those affected by it, and ways to both prevent and respond to it are included in Chapter 4 as we address the societal context of middle level education.
• **Social Media:** Each chapter contains references to the ever-burgeoning technology for teaching and learning, with increased emphasis on cybercitizenship and the avoidance of cyberbullying and sexting.

• **Virtual Field Experiences:** Throughout the fourth edition Pearson eText readers view videos of teacher interviews and room tours, student interviews, classroom lessons, a middle school tour, a principal discussing what she looks for in teachers, and a variety of stories about teachers making a difference.

• **PowerPoint Presentations:** In the Instructor’s Manual, each chapter is detailed in PowerPoint slides for classroom use.

The fourth edition of *Introduction to Middle Level Education* also includes:

**Activities.** Following each chapter are a variety of activities. Group activities require readers to work cooperatively to accomplish particular tasks. Individual activities give readers opportunities to explore middle level concepts on their own. The personal journal section asks readers to reflect on their own experiences.

**Glossary.** An evolving common vocabulary among educators allows us to talk about our profession with mutual understanding. Some words and phrases have specialized meanings and nuances when used within a middle level education context. Many of these terms are explained in the glossary.

**For instructors.** The following are provided electronically: a comprehensive Instructor’s Manual including author suggestions for exploration of text content, PowerPoint slide presentations for each chapter, and a chapter-by-chapter test bank.

**Organization**

*Introduction to Middle Level Education* includes 12 chapters. Separating the body of knowledge of middle level education into discrete chapters seems arbitrary, but it is efficient to do so. Given the limits of the written word, I have chosen to organize this book in a traditional way. Chapter 1 focuses on the philosophy and history of middle level education and the elements that have given it legitimacy and theoretical grounding. Chapter 2 is an overview of student physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and character development. Chapter 3 looks at the diversity among our students from cultural, to socioeconomic, to learning styles, and more. Chapter 4 addresses the societal context of middle level education. Chapter 5 delves into the structures of people, time, and place, including teaming, advisory, flexible schedules, and classroom/school facilities. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the middle level, and Chapter 9 details all levels of planning for instruction. Chapter 10 deals with the important topic of creating and maintaining a positive and productive learning environment. Chapter 11 addresses citizenship responsibilities and ways to promote civic engagement and civility. Chapter 12 explores some of the realities of teaching young adolescents, the relationships that are so crucial to successful teaching and learning, elements of professionalism, and the critical issues of transitioning into and out of middle grades.

**Author’s Note**

*Introduction to Middle Level Education* models the ideals of middle level education in that it is both academically rigorous and developmentally responsive—academically rigorous because it includes a comprehensive body of knowledge, and developmentally responsive because it approaches these topics without intimidating or boring the reader. I am an experienced middle level teacher speaking to other teachers whether they are teacher candidates completing bachelor or master’s degrees; career changers
preparing to take their skills and backgrounds into the middle level classroom; elementary or high school teachers getting ready for the challenges and joys of spending their days with young adolescents; or teachers who desire to dig deeper into their profession, seeking insights and encouragement. Writing a book allows me only to speak, not actually converse. My hope is that readers will talk to each other about middle level education, prompted by my side of the “conversation.”

Teachers are my heroes. They make the minute-by-minute decisions on which student success and well-being depend. If knowledge is power, and I believe it is, the more we understand about the nature of early adolescence, with both its documented predictability and its absurd volatility, the more prepared we are to make the relatively insignificant, as well as life-changing, decisions. Yes, experience is the best teacher. However, opportunities to read, reflect, discuss, and speculate will sharpen our focus on, and widen our peripheral vision of, middle level education and all that is involved in teaching young adolescents. This book provides such opportunities.

The tenets of Turning Points (Carnegie Corporation, 1989), Turning Points 2000 (Jackson & Davis, 2000), and This We Believe (NMSA, 2010); the underpinnings of the Association for Middle Level Education; and the AMLE teacher preparation standards permeate every page. This strong conceptual foundation focuses us squarely on students and learning. As a unique phase of human development, early adolescence deserves continued concentrated research and study that will further deepen our understanding of how best to meet the needs of the students in our charge. The fourth edition of Introduction to Middle Level Education addresses the issues of teaching and learning with young adolescents in commonsense ways that infuse practicality with theory.

This book is a work of non-traditional scholarship—scholarly by way of knowledge base and non-traditional by way of personalization. I believe I best serve teachers, in whatever career stage, by speaking in first person from both a research base and my own and others’ experiences in the classroom. I welcome all readers to the adventure of exploring the landscape of middle level education!

Acknowledgments
I want to thank the teachers, students, and principals who allowed me to wander the halls of their schools, interview the people involved in middle level education, and take pictures of teachers and young adolescents in action.

Special thanks go to my editor Drew Bennett, production manager Yagnesh Jani, and Gheron Lising and Mohamed Hameed of Pearson CSC for their guidance and prompt responses to my questions and requests. I appreciate the time and suggestions given by four reviewers:
Chapter 1
Middle Level Education Philosophy and History

Vision has been viewed as an acute sense of the possible. Research and exemplary practice over the past four decades have provided middle level educators with a strong sense of what is, indeed, possible in the education of young adolescents. Idealistic and uplifting, the resulting vision reflects our best knowledge and lights the way toward achieving a truly successful middle level school for every young adolescent.

THIS WE BELIEVE, 2010, P. 27.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this chapter, you will have knowledge and skills to:

1.1 Define the basic elements of middle level education philosophy.

1.2 Describe the history of middle level education.
Chapter 1

1.3 Explain the function and value of organizations and publications focusing on middle level education.

1.4 Summarize middle level teacher preparation standards and teacher candidate assessments.

1.5 Recognize that while characteristics may vary, effective teachers make the teaching and learning connection.

Dear Future Middle Level Teacher,

Teaching middle level learners is a career filled with exhilaration, challenge, day-to-day (and sometimes life-altering) decisions that affect young adolescents, and a complete absence of boredom. Sound intriguing? If so, this may be your destiny!

Middle level education is referred to in a variety of ways—middle level settings, middle grades education, middle school, schools in the middle, and so on. By whatever name, we are referring to a philosophy of educating young adolescents that is different from elementary philosophy, high school philosophy, or junior high philosophy. This philosophy calls for us to recognize the unique needs of young adolescents and meet them in developmentally appropriate ways.

Young adolescents are eager to grow up, but often frightened by the process. They sense that their bodies are changing due to puberty, and they experience confusing and sometimes conflicting emotions. One minute they may be playing with action figures or Barbie dolls, and the next crying over what a girlfriend or boyfriend supposedly said at lunch. One minute they may appear totally self-absorbed, and the next give away all of their allowance to a worthy cause. The unique set of contradictions displayed by kids in the middle—their curiosity, their quirky ways of expressing themselves, and their determination that life should be fair—both intrigue and inspire middle level teachers.

Middle level education is not for everyone. In fact, your friends may not understand the appeal of spending your days with young adolescents; they may cringe when they recall this stage of life. But that’s exactly the point. Kids 10 to 15 years old need us to remember the difficult times, as well as the good times, and determine to make this puberty-driven roller coaster of emotions and social exploration safe and productive . . . and don’t forget about fun!

Middle level learners, their school settings, the vistas they discover, the depth and breadth of what they know and can do, and the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral growth they experience are influenced by the teachers who choose to spend their days in the middle. Welcome to the adventure!

LO 1.1 Philosophy of Middle Level Education

Before considering the history of middle level education, it’s imperative to explore the philosophy that guides and gives life to successful education of young adolescents, often referred to as middle level/school concept. A philosophy is a system of thought and principles that guide practice. Middle level philosophy is composed of principles based on the needs of young adolescents and our best thinking about how to meet those needs through effective practice. Throughout this text we examine these principles.
Developmental responsiveness requires that we understand the unique nature of young adolescents and continually consider how we can use that knowledge to build a supportive learning environment. All our interactions with, and decisions that affect, young adolescents must be built on our unambiguous determination to be developmentally responsive. The school organization or structure, policies, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher-student relationships must focus on the attributes of young adolescents. Developmental responsiveness is not a “warm and fuzzy” concept as some may perceive it, but rather a research-based component of effective teaching and learning. You will see the word relationships repeatedly in any information discussing young adolescents and middle level schools. There’s no way to overstate the value of healthy, trusting relationships among students and the adults who serve them.

Making the Teaching and Learning Connection is a feature in every chapter. It’s a wonderful coincidence that the title of the feature contains the letters TLC which once stood most prominently in pop culture for Tender Loving Care. This is descriptive of the overall approach that brings the most positive and productive results when teaching middle level kids in ways that lead to their learning. It’s not soft or permissive, but involves the determination to do everything possible to care for the growing young adolescents in our classrooms. In this chapter’s TLC we have words of Dr. John Lounsbury, a name you will read throughout this book. Young adolescents and middle level education have no better or wiser friend than Dr. Lounsbury; he has a history of promoting teaching and learning for more than 70 years. He is the man I consider my most valuable mentor through what he has written, the words he has spoken at meetings and conferences, his leadership of the Association for Middle Level Education, and our personal friendship. Read his words once, and then again, and then again. They are rich and meaningful.

Making the Teaching and Learning Connection

Dr. John Lounsbury continues to positively impact the ways we make the teaching and learning connection with young adolescents. Here he shares his belief that teaching is a moral endeavor with a spiritual dimension. Read his words carefully and internalize them.

“In real estate, the three factors that are tied to success are: location, location, location. While in teaching, the three factors that spell success are: relationships, relationships, relationships.

Teaching is a very human experience—and a moral matter. What teachers inevitably teach is who they are. The content falls to second place. Rudyard Kipling, long ago, penned these lines, my favorites:

“No printed word nor spoken plea can teach young minds what they should be.

Not all the books on all the shelves, but what the teachers are themselves.”

These words are sobering, to say the least, for what teachers teach are who they are as persons—their values, behaviors, and mannerisms—all come across with certainty in a student-teacher relationship, completely independent of any stated material or instructional technique used.

Teacher preparation, then, should give some attention to helping teacher candidates become better persons and sensitive to the enduring impact they have on students, as well as mastering the traditional materials of planning for instruction, assessing student progress, and exploring new approaches.

I believe that teaching includes a spiritual dimension, one seldom openly acknowledged, but which is of enduring importance, especially in the middle
Educational experiences for young adolescents must be challenging, with appropriately high expectations for each individual student. We often hear middle level educators say that the mantra of our work is that we believe in developmental appropriateness and academic rigor. These two concepts are not at all mutually exclusive, but rather completely compatible and complementary. The ability of young adolescents to grasp more complex and abstract ideas increases throughout their middle school years. Because students’ intellectual capacity matures at varying rates, teachers must know students well, continually recognize them as unique individuals, and understand when and how to challenge them based on what Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development, or the level at which a student can almost, but not completely, grasp a concept or perform a skill. Teachers use scaffolding to support student learning as they progress needing help to independently grasp a concept or performing a skill.

Middle level philosophy promotes empowerment of all students, or teaching the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives. “Early adolescence is a time of uncertainty with respect to self-confidence, peer relationships, and independence. To counteract this uncertainty, teachers provide students with a sense of empowerment over their own learning” (Levin & Mee, 2016). Young adolescents are exploring their independence and encountering opportunities to take responsibility for themselves. They are social beings who are learning more about themselves and others as relationships become more complex. Empowerment involves helping them learn how to “address life’s challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge” (National Middle School Association, 2010, p.13).

Carolyn Gomez, a sixth grade teacher in Stillwater, Oklahoma, believes that part of forming relationships with students involves letting students get to know us. She reveals to them her interests and family news, as well as what she enjoys about teaching and what challenges her most.

As a part of fulfilling a moral imperative, middle level philosophy insists on equity, or the quality of being fair and impartial. In middle level philosophy, bias does not exist; we advocate for all students and ensure their rights to learn. When the philosophy is applied, all students matter, and matter equally. We honor individuals and their potential and provide engaging instruction and support for each young adolescent.

Remember the definition of philosophy? A philosophy is a system of thought and principles that guide practice. Particular practices closely align with middle level philosophy and “put legs” on the principles, including teaming, interdisciplinary instruction, common planning time, exploratory courses, and advisory. We will discuss these practices and more throughout this book.

By whatever name—middle level philosophy, middle school concept, This We Believe—teachers dedicated to meeting the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral needs of young adolescents provide education that is developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable.
LO 1.2 Brief History of Middle Level Education

The years involved in the history of middle level education are relatively few, just over a century. The first separate school organization established to bridge the gap between elementary and high school began in 1909. These new schools were aptly named junior highs and were established to be preparatory schools for students going on to high school, where they would enter one of two defined tracks. The tracks had two broad purposes: to provide enriched curriculum for college-bound students, or to provide vocational training for those preparing to enter the workforce.

Elementary schools consisting of self-contained grade level classes were, and basically still are, intended to provide consistency and security for children, as experienced ideally in a family setting. As they are today, high schools at the beginning of the 20th century were basically departmentalized by subject area, with students changing classes four to eight times a day. The junior high resembled the high school in structure in 1909 but generally was smaller to allow for a greater sense of personalization, while still functioning in a departmentalized fashion. Even though there was little written research about the early adolescence stage of life, the junior high concept met a recognized need that made it a widespread and rapidly growing part of public education.

As early as 1945, some educators were troubled by what they observed in junior highs. An early advocate for junior high wrote about what he perceived as persistent problems. His list included the following (Anfara & Waks, 2000):

- Curriculum that was too subject-centered
- Teachers who were inadequately prepared to teach young adolescents
- Classrooms that were teacher-centered and textbook-centered
- Students who were tracked. (p. 47)

By 1960, approximately four out of five high school graduates attended junior high as part of a 6–3–3 grade configuration—six years of elementary, three years of junior high, and three years of high school. By the mid-1960s, variations began to emerge, resulting in middle level schools consisting of grades 5–8 or grades 6–8 (McEwin & Greene, 2010).

In the summer of 1963, William Alexander broke ground for the establishment of what are now middle schools when he presented a “philosophy” of the characteristics needed in a transitional school at the Cornell University Junior High School Conference. Alexander urged the maintenance of the positive contributions of junior highs such as core curriculum, guidance programs, exploratory education, and vocational/home arts, and the elimination of high school practices such as competitive sports and subject matter orientation. He conducted a survey of junior highs whose grade configurations had evolved into grades 5–8 or grades 6–8 from original 6–3–3, 6–2–4, and 6–6 grade structures. The results of this study were published in The Emergent Middle School by Alexander in 1969. This book described middle school as a new concept, not merely a rearrangement of junior high. A brief overview of some of the differences between traditional junior highs and middle level schools based on concepts proposed by Alexander and others is in Figure 1.1. All of the concepts presented in the middle school column are discussed in detail in this text. Although it may seem out-of-date to even discuss junior high and compare its basic concepts to middle school concepts, it’s still relevant to consider why middle level philosophy was developed.
An excellent resource for delving more deeply into the history of middle level education is a research study published by Research in Middle Level Education in 2016 titled *An Historical Overview of the Middle School Movement, 1963–2015* by Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon. The authors examined more than 2,000 documents, research studies, and articles chronicling the development of middle level education beginning with William Alexander’s 1963 speech at Cornell University. They tell us 1963–1979 was a time of beginning the search for identity for what has become the Middle School Movement. In 1968, there were about 1,000 schools labeled as middle schools; by 1980 there were more than 5,000. This tremendous growth spurred advancement and progress in the 1980s, with some of the most important practices recognized including teaming, interdisciplinary curriculum and advisory. As middle level education became more established in the 1990s, some outside the movement began questioning and challenging beliefs and practices of those who embraced middle level philosophy, including advisory, cooperative learning, and teaming. Recognizing the need to validate the middle level philosophy as described for more than 50 years by those close to young adolescents and their education, the first decade of the 21st century saw an impressive increase in research studies, both small- and large-scale. This emphasis on research to support and inform practices both in the U.S. and internationally continues into the second decade of the century.

In 1988, a second major research study following up on Alexander’s 1969 *The Emergent Middle School* was conducted, with a third study in 1993, and a fourth in 2001. The most recent study was conducted in 2009, the results of which will be referred to numerous times in this text. Conducted by professors emeritus Ken McEwin and Melanie Greene of Appalachian State University, this latest study published in 2011 provides valuable comparisons of the practices of middle level schools that excel in teaching and learning.

A ground-breaking study is underway, with results to be revealed in 2020. The study, Middle Grades Longitudinal Study of 2017–18 (MGLS:2017), is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education. It is the first nationally representative study that examines the educational experiences and outcomes of students in 6th grade as they progress through 8th grade. MGLS:2017 attempts to determine factors that predict success for students in grades 6, 7, and 8 while discovering more about student development and influences both inside and outside school. A unique feature of the study is that information will be gathered from multiple sources: students, their parents, school administrators, and mathematics and special education teachers. The study will assess students’ mathematics and reading skills, socioemotional development, and executive functions such as working memory, attention, and impulse control. To learn more about this study and explore findings as they are published, simply access the NCES site and enter MGLS:2017 in the search bar.

There are more than 15,000 middle level schools in the United States, serving students ages 10-15. The most prevalent grade configuration for middle schools is 6–8, but configurations of grades 5–8 and grades 7–8 also exist (McEwin & Greene, 2011). Because

### FIGURE 1.1 Differences between junior high and middle school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junior High</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Subject-centered</td>
<td>Student-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emphasis is on cognitive development</td>
<td>Emphasis is on both cognitive and affective development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizes teachers in subject-based departments</td>
<td>Organizes teachers and students in interdisciplinary teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Traditional instruction dominates</td>
<td>Experiential approaches to instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Six to eight class periods per day</td>
<td>Allows for block and flexible scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Provides academic classes</td>
<td>Provides exploratory, academic, and nonacademic classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Offers study hall and/or homeroom</td>
<td>Offers advisor/advisee, teacher/student opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Classrooms arranged randomly or by subject or grade level</td>
<td>Team classrooms in close proximity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
early adolescence includes ages 10–15, some schools serving grades 7–9 may also qualify as middle schools. The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) continues to set high expectations for what an effective middle level school setting that is developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable should “look like.”

Not all young adolescents attend middle schools. Some districts serve 10- to 15-year-olds in K–8 schools, while others utilize 7–12 grade bands, or even K–12. AMLE strongly endorses the idea of a unique school in the middle (between elementary and high schools), staffed by adults who understand and appreciate young adolescents. However, the organization acknowledges that developmental appropriateness and academic rigor can be accomplished in a school regardless of the name out front or the grade level configuration within. Specific grade configurations and practices may always be controversial. This fact keeps us fresh and on our toes. Controversy stretches us. But remember, it’s all about the kids and our responsibility to do what’s best for them.

Seventh grade focus teacher Traci Peters tells us that she prepared to teach elementary students, but found that her college education prepared her to cross the grade-level divide and be successful in middle school. She now loves spending her days with young adolescents and attending to their developmental and academic needs.

Middle level education is not without its critics. There are those who say public education is failing to meet the needs of young adolescents, especially those who attend middle schools. When middle school national and international test results are weak, the critics’ case is bolstered. Middle level philosophy as espoused by AMLE is blamed. But it’s not the philosophy. Every aspect of middle level philosophy is developed distinctly for the unique stage of early adolescence. It’s not the philosophy . . . it’s the lack of conscientious implementation in many schools that serve young adolescents.

When we consider that most of the educators who invested their careers in the establishment and proliferation of middle level schools are still with us, and are still inspiring our efforts, the history of middle level education comes alive as an ongoing progression of events. The pioneers of middle level education have made, and continue to impact, significant progress. Smith and McEwin (2011) published The Legacy of Middle School Leaders: In Their Own Words. This historical account focuses on contributions of leaders who have shaped the American middle level movement. Included are synopses of the impact of William Alexander and Donald Eichhorn, both of whom died before the legacy project, along with edited transcripts of extensive interviews with 18 influential individuals who, together, encompass the essence of middle level philosophy: John Arnold, Al Arth, James Beane, Sherrel Bergmann, Thomas Dickinson, Nancy Doda, Thomas Erb, Thomas Gatewood, Paul George, Howard Johnston, Joan Lipsitz, John Lounsbury, Ken McEwin, Chris Stevenson, John Swaim, Sue Swaim, Conrad Toepfer, and Gordon Vars. As you learn more about middle level philosophy and practices, you are sure to see these names over and over. Pay attention to what they have to say and what is said about them. They continue to guide and inspire the work of middle level educators.

LO 1.3 Organizations and Publications Focusing on Middle Level Education

Teachers and administrators whose careers focus on young adolescents are fortunate to have national and state organizations to support their work, including the Association for Middle Level Education and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades
Reform. In addition, three publications established middle level education mission and philosophy: *Turning Points* (1989), *Turning Points 2000* (2000), and *This We Believe* (2010). The latter is the position statement of the Association for Middle Level Education. Many more publications have been written to give us guidance on how best to meet the needs of young adolescents, but these three have been seminal in guiding middle level decision making.

**Association for Middle Level Education**

The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), formerly the National Middle School Association, was founded in 1973. This organization is dedicated exclusively to the education, development, and growth of young adolescents. AMLE provides a voice and a professional structure for middle level educators and has grown to include members in all states and dozens of countries. More than 50 affiliate organizations of AMLE sponsor local, regional, and state activities focused on middle level education. The AMLE website is an excellent resource featuring ways to advocate for young adolescents, professional development opportunities, professional teacher standards, the latest research on middle level education, and a publications shopping bonanza for all who are interested in early adolescence.

One very important affiliate of AMLE is the Collegiate Middle Level Association (CMLA), a university student organization with student officers and activities. Each CMLA chapter promotes middle level teacher preparation through group meetings featuring professional development, involvement of CMLA members in local schools above and beyond field experiences, and fundraising to support attendance at state and national conferences. I have been privileged to be a faculty sponsor of a CMLA and can personally attest to what wonderful organizations they can be.

The largest selection of books written specifically for middle level practitioners is available through AMLE catalogs, at middle level conferences, and on the AMLE website by selecting AMLE Store. Five times a year AMLE publishes the *Middle School Journal*, a refreshing and informative compilation of articles that is highly regarded for both its topical and scholarly content. The *AMLE Magazine*, a very practical journal featuring reader-friendly articles, is published nine times a year. Membership in the Association for Middle Level Education is accompanied by subscriptions to both the *Middle School Journal* and the *AMLE Magazine*. AMLE also publishes *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, several online newsletters, and videos. In addition, the website contains AMLE position statements, along with the latest in news items and legislation affecting middle level education. You will also find membership information. College students can join AMLE and enjoy all the benefits of membership, including monthly journals, for only $25 a year.

One of the highlights provided by the Association for Middle Level Education is the widely acclaimed AMLE annual fall conference. This conference draws thousands of teachers, future teachers, principals, central office personnel, university faculty, state department officials, parents, and community members, all vitally interested in the promotion of developmentally appropriate practices. It’s an exciting conference that all middle level teachers should have the opportunity to attend. Lasting three days, the main events include keynote speakers, concurrent sessions on topics of interest to adults who work with young adolescents, and

**Middle School Journal**

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