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NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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The National Middle School Association is grateful to him for his leadership and is pleased to be able to make this important work on curriculum available to the profession at large.

Appreciation is also expressed to Barbara Brodhagen for her assistance in refining the manuscript and Mary Mitchell for her conscientious work in preparing the copy for printing.

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For my great friend and teacher,

Connie Toepfer

who let me into our profession when no one else would.
I often wonder what he saw, how he knew.

8/14/93

Foreword

To date, middle level education, despite all its important and needed organizational changes, has seemed to lack a clear vision of what might be, of what attributes our graduates should possess or a philosophically and educationally valid blueprint that would make it possible to put its rhetoric regarding the developmental needs of early adolescents into reality. The need for such a vision has now been met. In this volume, James Beane has thoughtfully and thoroughly reviewed the past, exposed for analysis the separate subject approach, and outlined a proposal for a new general education program that would truly transform the middle level school. This program would reflect the known needs of early adolescents, and it would also deal forthrightly with the equally important needs of contemporary society.

The first edition of this book proved to be something of a catalyst for the middle level curriculum movement that is now well under way. It seemed as if progressive middle level educators were just waiting for such a scholarly assessment, such a sound proposal, and such a clarion call. This second edition will extend the influence of this work of enduring importance. To those who read the first edition, I urge another reading. There is nothing in here but that which warrants a re-reading — and there is here much highly significant new material. In the Preface to the Second Edition, Beane identifies the major new features, features which will make the volume far more functional. In addition, the Preface

provides a needed perspective and a more complete context for the chapters that follow.

It is a radical proposal, make no mistake about it. On first reading one may have difficulty conceptualizing it fully. His proposals are beyond the experiences of most everyone. His critique of past and present practices, although fair, may make some readers defensive, for as Francis Bacon reminded us "most people prefer to believe what they prefer to be true." But this treatise deserves and should be given full consideration by every serious middle level professional. The theses presented herein, though they may make educators uncomfortable, need to be understood, analyzed, and discussed. The middle level movement will soon be in danger of losing its steam, of becoming faddish, if it doesn't grapple with the curriculum issues presented here.

We who claim proudly our commitment to kids and to this vibrant movement cannot pass up the opportunity that is ours in the decade of the 90s to seriously reconstitute our schools for young adolescents. This book gives us a vehicle for engaging in dialogue on the critical questions concerning curriculum that we have not confronted adequately.

If the middle school is an idea whose time as come, as we often claim, and the conditions for reform are as ripe as they appear to be, then these cogently presented ideas warrant full consideration. I implore educators to read and ponder what I believe to be a momentous publication.

John H. Lounsbury
Editor, NMSA Publications

Preface to Second Edition

The first edition of this small book appeared in June 1990, not a very long time ago. When I handed over the manuscript to John Lounsbury, the Editor of NMSA Publications, I thought there might be a small audience of interested professors and progressive teachers. I never imagined that raising the middle school curriculum question would strike such a resonant chord among middle level educators in the U.S. and elsewhere. Apparently concern for the curriculum was not buried quite as deeply as I had thought.

This second edition retains most of what was included in the first. But I have also added a good deal. There is a new section on curriculum guidelines that invites people to invent other ways of seeking the broad purposes my own proposal sought to achieve. I have also added material on (1) finding themes, (2) planning with young people, (3) democratic uses of knowledge, (4) getting started with curriculum reform, (5) scheduling around integrated activities, and (6) needed research regarding a new curriculum. In other cases, previous points are elaborated and references added or up-dated. Some material that I now realize was inappropriate or unwise has been dropped.

These revisions did not result from simply sitting in an armchair and thinking. Over the past three years I have had the privilege of visiting with concerned teachers and administrators in a variety of places —

educators who have decided to take action or, happily, to come out from behind closed classroom doors to speak of their many years of experience with integrated, student-centered, democratic curriculum. I see now that legitimating the work of the latter was just as important as encouraging action by the former. I am thinking here of the teacher who has taught in a block-time, integrated core program in Kansas for twenty-six years, of the two in Oregon who told me about their plans late one night when they could just as well have been off enjoying their vacation, of the teams in New Hampshire and Kansas and Arizona and Maine who were carrying on serious curriculum conversations, of the team in Milwaukee, working under adverse conditions to make a curriculum that would make a difference, and of those dazzling teachers in Vermont who have told their stories in *Dancing Through Walls* (Stevenson and Carr, 1993).

Meanwhile, back on the home front in Madison, Wisconsin, I have spent considerable time in seventh and eighth grade classrooms alongside teachers who decided to try an almost literal implementation of the curriculum version I had proposed. To watch these teachers create and carry out an integrative, thematic curriculum, planned from scratch with their students, has been breathtaking to say the least. Sometimes I have felt like a student teacher, at other times I felt thrown back to my own public school teaching days. But having been with these teachers and young adolescents, I surely feel that I know a lot more about curriculum than I did before.

I also learned a great deal as a participant in the Middle Level Curriculum Project, a group of teachers, administrators, state department personnel, and university professors that met several times to discuss possibilities for the middle school curriculum. The collaborative paper we developed (Middle Level Curriculum Project, 1993) emerged from intense and sometimes heated exchange that clarified and sharpened ideas for all of us. Widespread interest in the group's work is certainly a sign that such a curriculum conversation could easily have involved a much larger group.

I am not so naïve as to think that we have yet made a large dent in the curriculum arrangements we seek to change. On the other hand there is clearly room for some optimism: the National Middle School Association's commitment to take on curriculum issues, the special

issues of the *Middle School Journal*, the talk about curriculum integration emerging from some subject area associations, the interest shown by some state departments of education and school districts, and so on. Even a few high schools are beginning to ask questions about what is going on at the middle level.

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The middle level now appears to be the likeliest site for serious conversations about the prospects for fundamental curriculum reform.

This last point is of particular interest. I have been asked many times why I wrote for middle schools when the general theory of integrative curriculum applies to all levels. The answer is really quite simple: middle level educators seem more willing to talk about this topic than others. Perhaps this is because we have become accustomed to thinking about change in our middle schools. Perhaps it is by living with the incredible diversity of early adolescents that we see the need for change more clearly etched. Whatever the reasons, the middle level now appears to be the likeliest site for serious conversations about the prospects for fundamental curriculum reform.

A line of work that matters

Some readers of the first edition apparently had the impression that I invented the curriculum theory it proposed. Perhaps they did not check the dates for some of the references. If they had, they might have correctly seen that the present work is part of a long line that stretches back more than a century. However, the strongest roots, particularly at the middle level, are in the those parts of the progressive movement from the 1930s on that advocated a problem-centered “core” and social reconstruction curriculum. There we can locate calls for such arrangements as a thematic curriculum based upon profound social issues, teacher-student cooperative planning, democratic structures, and a variety of others that we are now trying to revitalize.

Other readers have tied the present work to general trends in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They are right to the extent that we are attempting to be more “child-centered” and are willing to sacrifice some

beloved institutional features. However, I suspect that there was something far less coherent about the range of possibilities that were popularized at that time. In some ways we are now much less tempted to throw away the schools than to reconstruct them toward a renewed sense of their most important purposes.

The curriculum version I have proposed adds to earlier work in several ways. First, the concept of self and social meaning, what I elsewhere called "affect" (Beane, 1990), is made the central theme for the entire middle school curriculum rather than simply combining with other interests. Second, what were known as the "problems" and "emerging needs" approaches are merged in the identification of themes at their intersection. Third, the critique of the separate subject approach has a more political edge, especially with regard to culture and power. Fourth, given the progress made in the middle school movement, I have been able to work from some assumptions about climate and organizational structures that are more common in middle level schools now, to say nothing of the rhetoric that has surrounded the movement itself.

Though these additions to earlier efforts should not be construed as a claim for "inventing" a new view of the curriculum, I want to say something here about how I came to make the proposal when and how I did. Early in my career I was fortunate to study with Professor Conrad F. Toepfer at the State University of New York at Buffalo. As most people who have followed the middle school movement know, Toepfer was and is one of its earliest and most forceful advocates. He introduced a group of us to initial work on middle schools and also to important sources from the junior high school movement, several of which can be found in the references for this volume. We professionally "cut our teeth" on that work.

I was particularly enamored with progressive curriculum work like the "problem-centered" and "experience-centered" core curriculum, the work from which my own draws so heavily. In the intervening years though, my own interests also focused on the issue of how schools influence the self-concept/esteem and values of young people. That focus resulted in two volumes with Richard Lipka (Beane and Lipka, 1986, 1987). At about the same time, Toepfer, Samuel Alessi, and I published a book on general curriculum in which we sketched out "classical" curriculum alternatives in a contemporary context (Beane,

Toepfer, and Alessi, 1986). A few years later, I brought these two lines of work together in a volume entitled *Affect in the Curriculum* (Beane, 1990) and extended them in a political and cultural direction by emphasizing the themes of democracy, human dignity, and cultural diversity.

While the last of these was in press, I realized, with the help of Barbara Brodhagen, that all of that previous work might come together and be focused on the middle school curriculum. By that time I was increasingly frustrated by the curriculum talk of the middle school movement which seemed unable to move beyond relatively simple "multi-subject" correlations, the separation of affective topics into isolated "advisory" programs, and the tendency to avoid significant issues like democracy, social problems, and political concerns. Meanwhile, talk about national and state curriculum mandates and testing was accelerating to the detriment (sometimes unnoticed) of the middle school philosophy.

It was also becoming increasingly apparent that middle school educators who had done just about everything recommended to that point were still struggling with some unnamed gap in the movement itself. Among others, Richard Levy of Virginia came right out and named the curriculum. So did the series of "shadow studies" conducted by Lounsbury and others. As if all of this was not enough, the final straw was a statement by a speaker at a middle school conference who said, "it doesn't matter what we teach early adolescents, only how we teach them."

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Early adolescents, their teachers, their parents, and others want a curriculum that is about something of great significance.

Imagine that! Could it be that we attach no importance to the actual content, knowledge, attitudes, predispositions, skills, values, and so on that we bring to early adolescents during this time in their lives? Could it be that early adolescents themselves don't care either? Could it be that there is nothing of compelling value beyond climate and process that

middle schools ought to be about? Could it be that curriculum is nothing more than an afterthought in our middle schools? I hardly think so! And I think that early adolescents, their teachers, their parents, and others want a curriculum that is about something of great significance.

In the epilogue of the first edition, left intact for this one, I named the larger purpose for the current curriculum work: "It is to open the hearts and minds of young people to the possibilities for a more just and humane world — a world in which human dignity, the democratic way of life, and the prizing of diversity are more widely shared and experienced." Certainly that says something about how we teach. But it also says something about what we teach. And I think that matters.

A word about language

Disenchantment with the "traditional" curriculum has led educators and others to begin moving away from the strict subject-centered approach. Many now talk about replacing subjects as organizing centers with "themes." But this does not tell us what those themes or their sources might be. Some speak of finding themes from the existing curriculum that will encourage correlation across two or more subjects — what I refer to as a *multidisciplinary* approach. Others speak of finding themes in social problems or in the issues facing young people in relation to development. In either case, some still use a multidisciplinary planning approach ("What can each subject area contribute?"), while others are willing to ignore subject area lines and instead draw from any subject area without regard for boundaries or identification, while focusing on the problem or issue at hand. This is what I would call *curriculum integration*, although that term has also been used with regard to "integrating" things like thinking, health, and writing across the subjects.

A few teachers (not enough, I think) are interested in planning the curriculum with young people in terms of questions and concerns they have about themselves and their world. In this case knowledge and skill are integrated naturally and by the young people themselves as they carry out their work. Experiences are integrated into present schemes of meaning and new ones are constructed. This I would call an *integrative curriculum* since the purpose is to help young people integrate their experiences on their own terms rather than those of adults.

In the current talk about curriculum these terms are used rather loosely. "Thematic" is used to cover everything but really means nothing without saying what the themes are about. "Integration" is often used to refer to "multi-disciplinary" experiences, which sidesteps the issue of whether the latter are more than mere tinkering with the separate subject approach. In this sense "multi-disciplinary" is not used enough since it is the most widely used of the approaches that are not strictly subject centered. "Integrative" has been less commonly used than any and though it is gaining prominence, it too is being used to cover less than it really means. And worst of all, "interdisciplinary" has come to mean little more than whatever a multi-subject team of teachers wants to do.

In the first edition of this book I simply called my proposal a "new" curriculum. I have tried in some of my other writing and lectures to tie that "new" curriculum to those terms just discussed, perhaps in some ways contributing to the language confusion. In preparing this present version, therefore, I have been faced with the question of now naming my proposed curriculum. Frankly I wish I could call it "core" as that term was properly used in earlier days or even "integration" or "integrative," the more recent terms. But each of these has been appropriated to mean so many things and I am not inclined to invent a new term that would likely be appropriated as well.

To avoid all of this I have decided to again call it a "new" curriculum. Besides, it is "new" given what we have had for too long. Some people have called it "Beane's curriculum" but they are wrong about that, especially in the historical sense. Imagine if they called it "the middle school curriculum" implying thereby that any other would be inappropriate and therefore not eligible to be attached to the middle school. But if "new" is not enough and if "the middle school curriculum" is too dangerous, I wish people would call it "a curriculum for early adolescents." After all, that is what I meant it to be.

Prologue

The purpose of this small volume is to open up the middle school curriculum question. Put simply, that question is this: What ought to be *the* curriculum of the middle school. By italicizing the word “the” in this question I mean to be clear that I am not asking about various parts of the typical middle school program, like academic or “special” subjects, but rather about the broad and underlying conception of the whole curriculum at this level.

Put this way, the middle school curriculum question is an intriguing one. Over the past three decades efforts to improve schooling at the middle level have made considerable progress. However these efforts have mainly addressed better understanding of early adolescents and the organizational structures of the middle school. To a lesser degree, and with less success, they have sometimes spoken to the correlation of subject areas through “interdisciplinary” instruction and the modification of teaching methods to accommodate the characteristics of “kids.” Meanwhile, the broader “curriculum question” has received far less attention. Yet it is hard to imagine an authentic school improvement project at any level that does not involve rethinking the curriculum since the curriculum is a central and crucial factor in the life of a school. Thus the curriculum question has been an “absent presence” in the middle school movement.

My own sense of this dilemma is that entering such territory is very risky business. For example, many middle level educators have deep loyalties to particular subject areas and subject matter and their professional self-concepts are partially defined by them: teachers are not just "teachers;" they are "English teachers," "music teachers," "math teachers," and so on. Moreover, the education field as a whole is largely organized around these subject distinctions, including the language it uses to describe its work.

I want to suggest that the work on middle school organization and teaching methods has succeeded partly, and perhaps mostly, because it has focused on better ways of transmitting the usual subject matter without questioning that subject matter or the subject area curriculum organization that surrounds it. The difficulty often experienced in promoting even modest subject correlations through interdisciplinary teams certainly supports this criticism as does, for example, the hot debate over heterogeneous grouping, an arrangement that many see as interfering with academic achievement. Taken this way, the "absent presence" of the broader curriculum question could partly be accounted for by fear that explicitly asking it might just cause a rift in what has mostly been a gentle and friendly reform movement at the middle level.

Yet I do not see how we can continue to progress in that reform work without taking on this question. Middle school advocates have claimed from the beginning that their primary concern is with the characteristics of early adolescence. If those characteristics are extended into a discussion of the curriculum, it becomes apparent that the persistent organization around a collection of academic and "special" courses, with emphasis on the former, is not a developmentally appropriate nor genuinely responsive approach to the curriculum. Surely there must be a different and better answer to the curriculum question, an answer that more closely matches the curriculum with ongoing rhetoric about middle schools.

Chapter 1 of this volume opens up the middle school curriculum question by looking back at the beginning of the so-called "middle school movement" to see where the curriculum fits in, as well as the pressures that are exerted on the curriculum both inside and outside the school. Chapter 2 involves a look at how the curriculum question has been addressed in middle school theory and practice over the past thirty

years. Here some of the major texts of that period are reviewed as well as what goes on in middle school in the name of "curriculum."

Chapter 3 presents an admittedly unkind critique of the separate subject, academic-centered approach to the curriculum. If we are going to take on the curriculum question in a genuine way, then we must recognize how that approach has so seriously failed the middle schools and so frequently helped to create a deadening effect on teaching and learning. Chapter 4 presents a theory of what I think the middle school curriculum ought to be and how it ought to be organized. The major idea behind this approach is that the middle school ought to be a "general education" school whose curriculum is formed around the emerging and common developmental concerns of early adolescents and the widely shared issues that face people in the larger world, regardless of the individual paths their lives take. It is in the intersection of these personal and social concerns that I will propose we find the themes around which the curriculum ought to be organized.

Chapter 5 will involve a look at some of the tasks that lie ahead if we are to carry out curriculum reform. Clearly we will need some serious discussion of the middle school curriculum before taking specific action, but just as clearly we will have to be willing to rethink many policies and procedures if the curriculum itself takes on a new form. In Chapter 6 I will summarize the case I have made and its implications for the future of middle level schools.

I am acutely aware that when we speak of "curriculum," we ought to mean the totality of learning experiences in the school and that the processes we use and the institutional features of the school constitute a part of that meaning. However, in this proposal I will speak to the planned curriculum and particularly its content. Much has already been said about the "hidden curriculum" of the middle school in the work on climate and structural organization. How my proposal fits with that work is partly shown in Chapter 5 and should otherwise be implicitly clear to anyone who has followed the middle school movement over the past few decades.

Those of us who have been involved in the middle school movement in the United States should also understand that the dilemma I am addressing here is not unique to this country. Indeed, it is one that has

marked such work in other countries as seen, for example, in comparing proposals by John Burrows (1978) and Andy Hargreaves (1986) regarding middle schools in England and in the multinational descriptions presented in an issue of the *Middle School Journal* (September, 1989) devoted to that purpose.

Finally, I hope that those who have been involved in the middle school movement will take my critique of their work in good spirit. Like so many others, I recognize that the progress toward reform has been remarkable in many middle schools. Indeed, it is often at the middle level, more than at others, that we can look today for examples of school practices that clearly lean toward the best interests of young people. Moreover, it would be foolish not to recognize the significant contributions made by middle level theorists to that progress. In many ways, the congruence between theory and practice is closer at this level than at any other. Yet I also firmly believe that the possibility for extending this success story cannot be realized apart from the central curriculum question that has been avoided for too long.

In developing the ideas in this work I called upon several friends for help. They included Michael Apple, Ken Bergstrom, Barbara Brodhagen, Peggy Burke, Gail Burnaford, Ray Johnson, David Chawszczewski, Jim Ladwig, Richard Levy, John Lounsbury, Lee McDonough, Ed Mikel, Allison Mudrick, Joyce Shanks, and Gordon Vars. The infamous Friday Group at the University of Wisconsin was especially helpful in thinking about curriculum guidelines and the democratic uses of knowledge. Needless to say all of these people did not agree with my view of the way things ought to be, but their questions, comments, and suggestions forced me to clarify many issues and to think more deeply about the curriculum. And so do the continuing conversations with colleagues in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at National-Louis University, especially Mary Manke. I take full responsibility for what is written here, but I hope they will understand how much their assistance was appreciated. Finally, I want to thank the teachers and administrators at Marquette Middle School in Madison, Wisconsin for letting me into their school and allowing me to be a colleague.

1.

The Middle School Curriculum Question

Efforts to reform middle level education have made considerable progress in the thirty years of the middle school movement, particularly with regard to developing more widespread awareness of the characteristics of early adolescence and reorganizing institutional features, such as school climate. Important as these are, the movement has largely come to be seen as limited to them. Indeed, as more and more school districts become involved in middle level reorganization, the most pressing questions seem to revolve around an effort to replicate what has become the standard list of middle school features — interdisciplinary team organization, block scheduling, advisory programs, student activities, and so on. Largely obscured in this search for improved middle level education has been what is probably the most critical question in this or any other kind of authentic school reform:

What should be the curriculum of the middle school ?

Joan Lipsitz (1984, p. 188) put this succinctly in her classic work, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*: “translating philosophy into curriculum is the most difficult feat for schools to accomplish...the translation to climate and organizational structure appears to be much easier...” Five years later, Edward Brazee (1989) echoed this frustration in saying that, “curriculum development has not kept pace with overall

middle level program development, in spite of the many successes of middle level education in the past twenty-five years.”

This condition was foreshadowed when in comparing the 1977 shadow study of the eighth grade with the 1962 shadow study of the seventh grade, the authors commented: “The major differences between 1962 and 1977 may be in climate rather than curriculum, in the atmosphere more than the course of study.” (Lounsbury, Marani & Compton, 1977, p. 65)

Again in the 1989 shadow study of the eighth grade this generalization was reconfirmed. The data led the authors to conclude:

Progress in climate is more apparent than progress in curriculum. Positive attitudes toward students, genuine concern for them and their developmental needs is evident, but the curriculum of content remains largely unchanged, even in many teamed situations. Schools have instituted recognition programs, developed fun activities like a dress-up day, organized interdisciplinary teams, established special classes or arrangements for students with unusual needs — all to the good — but the curriculum of content, the bread and butter of the school program, still is not reflective of what is known about the nature and needs of early adolescents. (Lounsbury and Clark, 1990, p. 133)

The importance of the fundamental but bypassed “curriculum question” cannot be overestimated since it opens the way to several key issues that supposedly guide the middle school movement but are only partially addressed by organizational reform. For example, if early adolescence is a distinct stage in human development and if the middle school is to be based on the characteristics of that stage, then presumably the curriculum would be designed along developmentally appropriate lines and would thus look different from that at other levels. If “reform” means that the relationship between schools, including teachers, and early adolescents are to be reconstructed, then the curriculum, as one of the powerful mediating forces in that relationship, would presumably be changed.

Quite likely many inside the middle school movement perceive that curriculum change has taken place. They might, for instance, point to different instructional procedures, interdisciplinary teaming, improved guidance through advisory programs, efforts to expand school-sponsored activities, and the like. However, asking “how to teach” is not the same as asking “what to teach.” Nor is the matter of simply adding onto existing programs necessarily the appropriate response to new curriculum expectations. I do not want to separate “curriculum” and instruction here or to suggest that broadening conceptions of what the school ought to offer is not a curriculum issue. Rather I want to recognize that these are only part of a more comprehensive question about curriculum.

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The movement has succeeded partly because it has not taken on substantive change that would touch deep subject matter loyalties.

In opening up the question about what ought to be the middle school curriculum, we face what is sure to be a more perilous journey than the one the movement has taken to date. That movement has, no doubt, succeeded to the extent it has partly because it has not been attached to any larger social or political reform efforts that might bring it into conflict with dominant, powerful interests and partly because it has not taken on substantive curriculum change that would touch the deep subject matter loyalties held by educators both inside and outside middle schools.

To understand how this could have happened, we must return to the initial days of the movement and realize how it was launched. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, elementary schools faced severe overcrowding as the “baby boom” moved through the schools. Relieving this pressure might have been accomplished in several ways, not the least of which would have meant building new elementary schools. However, the prohibitive cost of such an undertaking was hardly attractive. On the other hand, it was also possible to move some of the children out of the overcrowded schools if a place could be found for them.

Here, then, was a more acceptable plan: if an addition was built onto the high school or a new high school or middle school constructed, then ninth graders could be moved to the high school and fifth and/or sixth graders moved to a middle level school. Certainly, this option would be more acceptable to the taxpayers who would have to foot the bill. At the same time, the matter of moving some children out of the elementary school offered an important possibility in metropolitan areas. The neighborhood elementary school had long been the bastion of *de facto* racial segregation. Reorganizing grade levels in the middle meant that those elementary schools would contain fewer years in the school sequence and children would thus move out of them sooner and into a more integrated middle level school.

Meanwhile, the junior high school organization had come under serious criticism from a quite different direction. For one thing, many commentators raised persistent doubts that what had become simply a junior version of the high school was appropriately serving the characteristics of early adolescents as it had been intended to do. For another, research by J.M. Tanner (1962) and others had suggested that the decreasing age for achieving puberty ought to redefine the ages normally associated with early adolescence; that is, instead of ages 12 to 14, ages 10 or 11 to 13 now appeared more accurate from a physiological perspective. Primarily in light of these two factors a number of educators began to speak of a new configuration of grades five or six through eight for the middle level and simultaneously of a renewed spirit of experimentation within that level.

It is in the convergence of these two strands, overcrowding and desegregation on the one hand and research about early adolescence and dissatisfaction with the junior high school on the other, that we can begin to see the emergence of what would become the middle school movement. During the 1960s books and journal articles about "middle schools," some of which will be reviewed in Chapter 2, began to appear and professional organizations, such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, began to take an interest in early adolescents and their schools. From the standpoint of school practice, it must have been somewhat confounding to principals and teachers who attended "middle school" sessions at conferences expecting to hear about grade level reorganization to hear instead that changing grade levels was only a part of the story being told.

As the 1970s unfolded this trend continued with a proliferation of workshops and institutes about middle schools, the founding of the National Middle School Association, the Center for Early Adolescence in North Carolina, the National Middle School Resource Center in Indiana, and several state and regional middle school associations. With the increasing numbers of publications about middle schools, the growing body of research about early adolescence, and the organization of professional educators interested in the middle level, observers of the scene could see all of the signs of a "movement." And certainly there was no decrease in the level of activity regarding middle schools in the 1980s. Indeed, that decade culminated with the wide dissemination of *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), a publication that turned the spotlight onto the middle level.

Early literature about the new middle schools suggests that several themes guided the beginnings of the movement and hints at how curriculum considerations fit into that scene. One persistent and very proper theme was developing understanding about and sensitivity to the characteristics of early adolescents — new information about the stage was appearing at an impressive rate. A second theme was elevation of the middle school out of the second-class status the junior high had come to hold in school organization. A third was to differentiate the junior high school from the high school, a task that historical efforts had failed to accomplish. A fourth theme centered around structural change including the organization of some teachers into interdisciplinary teams, the inclusion of activities (or interest-centered) programs, and the use of block scheduling.

And what of the curriculum? Unlike the other themes, this one had a somewhat confusing and contentious place in middle school talk. Theorists who served as leaders in those early days were largely those who continued from the junior high school movement: William Alexander, Conrad Toepfer, John Lounsbury, Gordon Vars, Gertrude Noar, Mauritz Johnson, William Gruhn, and others. As such, they brought to the new middle school movement the same disagreements and range of ideas about an appropriate middle school curriculum that were the source of debate in the junior high school movement. While some advocated use of a "core" program organized around emerging

adolescent characteristics and social problems, others favored only organizational changes at the middle level with continuation of a subject centered, largely academic curriculum. With all of the "change" talk at the middle level, it was undoubtedly very reassuring for local educators to hear a key "middle school" figure remark, "such grade reorganization does not necessarily involve any change in the instructional program...the departmentalized schedule and the same program of activities may carry over into the new school..." (Alexander, 1966, p. 31).

It is also important to remember that the 1960s saw a reemphasis on the subject area curriculum following the launching of Sputnik. For many junior high schools, that turn of events had meant that block-time, problem-centered core programs died the day Sputnik went up. Much of the general curriculum rhetoric of the decade that followed was, of course, basically the same as that heard in the 1980s from classical humanists and social efficiency advocates who claimed their position as a response to the "Japanese economic threat," the contemporary version of the "Russian space threat."

In retrospect, we may now see that the curriculum question was a problematic one from the very beginning of the middle school movement. Moreover, we can begin to sense how it has been that the themes of understanding early adolescents and creating structural changes in the school, important as they may be, have obscured the critical curriculum question. And we can fairly imagine how those themes have given those who want to avoid the curriculum question a safe place to hide in the middle level "reform" movement. Yet I do not want to imply that confronting this question, let alone responding to it, presents an easy or comfortable situation. Quite to the contrary, the myriad of pressures on the middle school curriculum make this a very difficult one.

Pressures on the middle school curriculum

The planned curriculum of the middle school, like that of any other level, is subject to and created by a number of forces. In the rhetoric of most middle school theory, the primary force is the characteristics of early adolescence. As we have seen, understanding of and sensitivity to these characteristics has been a continuing theme from the early days of the middle school movement. Indeed, with the grade level argument generally put to rest, we might now define the middle school as one that

may take diverse forms in particular locations, but is consistent in being developmentally appropriate to early adolescence. Presumably, this view would apply to the curriculum of the middle school as well as other features.

In reality, of course, that is only one of several forces that loom at least as large in middle schools. Another is the curriculum mandates that are handed down to schools through federal and state legislation, state board policies, as well as district regulations, including often specific accompanying standardized tests. Most recently this pressure may be found in the general trend toward increased centralization of curriculum and other policy decisions and the loss of local control in schools. Nowhere is this pressure more vividly portrayed than in the flood of state mandates following the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education).

Ostensibly directed toward high schools, that report and many of the subsequent state mandates nevertheless seriously affected the middle school inasmuch as the proposed increases in high school graduation meant that advanced placement and introductory high school courses were pushed into the middle schools. As a result, many middle school educators saw important pieces of their programs, such as multidisciplinary units, block schedules, and heterogeneous grouping, chipped away.

Given the fact that almost all of the talk about middle school reform was carried out only among middle level educators, it is possible that this situation might not have bothered the authors of that Commission report or the mandates since they probably knew little about what had been happening at the middle level. On the other hand, the appearance of "academic rigor" in this report was undoubtedly welcomed by many middle level educators who felt that the movement was too "permissive" in its emphasis on sensitivity to early adolescent characteristics. Of course as the 1990s unfold, all of this may seem "small pickings" compared to the ominous possibility of a national testing/curriculum system largely constructed out of the same misguided intentions.

This pressure is extended, and the next one reinforced, by the media and academicians who prey on the fears of parents by insisting that nothing less than more and earlier academic pressure will put their

children on the path to college and career success. As a result, almost any talk about curriculum change is liable to be lumped in with trading state secrets and other seditious acts.

A third pressure is the expectations of parents and the society as a whole about the education of their children. Most adults experienced middle level education within the "junior version of the high school" model and no doubt expect the same for succeeding generations of early adolescents. On the other hand, the adult society also interprets youth "needs" in light of contemporary social problems at any historical moment. In this sense, expectations beyond the subject program of the school are formed and become ones to which the schools are expected to respond (although they may not be directly asked to do so). These expectations include development of "desired" work skills and attitudes, prevention of substance abuse, pregnancy, crime, and so on.

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The dominant version of the middle school has had two major features, the separate subject approach and separate programs for different purposes.

A fourth pressure is the structures of tradition that arise out of the historic curriculum orientation of the middle level school. As we have already seen, that orientation has been contested by various alternatives but the dominant version of the middle school has had two major features. One of these is the use of a separate subject approach. The other is the definition of separate programs for different purposes such as academics, "exploration," guidance, and interest-centered activities, with the academic portion seen as the most important. One cannot overestimate the power of these structures of tradition or the very deep loyalties many middle school educators have to them. It is quite likely that many simply cannot conceive of any other way of organizing the curriculum let alone any other way of doing so.

A fifth pressure, and one related to that just described, is the interests of subject area specialists at all levels who seek to define what is

appropriate for their own area. Here we may place the interests of professional subject area associations, university academics, state department and district curriculum officials, and subject teachers within middle schools as they engage in continuing discussions about what ought to be taught and in what way. At the same time, one cannot help but notice that such discussions also have the side effect of limiting curriculum thinking to the subject approach and thus marginalizing any other form.

A sixth pressure is theories and proposals about middle level reform itself. While several of these will be taken up in Chapter 2, they generally fall into two positions. One focuses on finding ways of making traditional subject areas more agreeable to early adolescents, mainly through use of improved instructional techniques such as cooperative learning and multidisciplinary correlations. The other position advocates some type of curriculum reform such as block-time "core" programs. As we will see, the former is clearly the more popular.

A seventh pressure is concerns and interests of local educators within and outside the middle schools. While I have already commented on the general trend toward centralization of curriculum planning, it is still the case that when the classroom door closes, teachers have a certain degree of control over the curriculum in terms of what they emphasize or de-emphasize. This is particularly true in states where mandates leave substantial room for local interpretation. Moreover, teachers at the high school level expect that certain things will be learned in the middle school and frequently make their wishes known with vocal force. Such hand-me-down expectations (and accompanying criticism) form what is almost a cliché in education and one that is not always strongly resisted.

Finally, though very important, pressure is brought to bear on the middle school curriculum by the expectations of particular early adolescents in local schools. As teachers and other adults seek to implement the planned curriculum, early adolescents respond in varying ways from enthusiastic engagement to outright resistance (Apple, 1982). Within the context of such interactions, the curriculum itself is frequently modified to reduce resistance or, occasionally, to digress on paths of student interest. While external curriculum officials often fail to comprehend this reality, it is well known to those who work within

the school. And the everyday life of the curriculum as teachers experience it sometimes inclines them to believe that this is the most powerful pressure of all.

The simultaneous presence of these forces creates a problematic situation for the middle school curriculum inasmuch as there are very real conflicts among them. For example, the interests of adults and those of early adolescents are notoriously different as are the perceptions of important issues held by state officials from those of local educators. Likewise, advocates of middle level reform are continually troubled by the persistent presence of those who cling to the "junior high school" version of middle level education. Such conflict is exacerbated by the fact that those loyal to any particular force or pressure take their views very seriously and are not necessarily ignorant of other alternatives, as much as advocates of those alternatives might insist they are. The configuration of these various forces and pressures form a not-so-peaceful coexistence among competing interests and, as a result, help to create contradictions and tensions in the everyday curriculum of the middle schools and in the lives of the adults and young people who are a part of them.

Deciding what ought to be the basis for the middle school curriculum involves making choices from the array of possible interpretations about what is important to learn. To avoid choosing and thus to try to include all interpretations may appear to be politically wise, but such action can only lead to a momentary and false equilibrium in the middle school. If all positions appear in the school to be equally legitimate while their advocates continue to think otherwise, tensions and contradictions will surely continue and a "showdown" is inevitable.

Likewise, if the middle school simply drifts with whatever position is politically popular, then the curriculum will be continually subjected to the whims and fancies of whoever speaks loudest at any given moment. This can hardly be a defensible version of the middle school curriculum, particularly since those whims and fancies are often at odds with the best interests of early adolescents — interests that the middle school movement ostensibly cherishes.

The present state of the middle school curriculum represents something of a failure of nerve in this regard. That is, the planned curriculum

of a growing number of middle schools consists of a collection of specific programs intended to meet all expectations, interdisciplinary teams to create subject area correlations but still based on subject identities, "exploratory" courses to cover technical and aesthetic concerns (and to provide planning time for "academic teachers"), advisory programs to address personal-social development, activities programs to serve individual interests, and so on. While such a plan helps to maintain a kind of equilibrium among competing interests, it also creates a fragmented collection of curriculum pieces without any coherent or broadly unifying theme.

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The middle school curriculum is not really a "curriculum" in the sense of having some clearly identifying purpose or theme.

In other words, the middle school curriculum is not really a "curriculum" in the sense of having some clearly identifying purpose or theme that grows out of a widely held definition of what middle level education ought to be about. In this sense it is what it has been from the beginning of the middle school movement and, for that matter, what it had become in the junior high school movement. But the latter is less open to criticism since it never quite made the claims for "reform" that the advocates of the middle school movement have. Yet those advocates must know that the movement to date has only taken us so far toward the realization of what is rhetorically called a middle school. And the movement is bound to stagnate unless it makes new progress. The most obvious direction is to finally take on the middle school curriculum

Creating guidelines for a middle school curriculum

Middle schools included, asking what the curriculum of any school ought to be is a very tricky proposition. Beleaguered by the exigencies of school life and seeking advice from presumed "experts," educators often desire an answer in the form of some document or package that is, for them, "a" curriculum. And certainly there are many outside the school who can't wait to deliver an answer in exactly that way. Remember, for example, the "teacher-proof" curriculum packages of

the 1960s and the current "programs" for self-esteem or character education as well as the subject-centered ones that are so frequently advertised in professional journals.

In responding to this version of curriculum thinking, I want to speak very bluntly: there is no such "curriculum." Persons outside of the school, no matter what their credentials, cannot possibly account for all of the diverse aspects of local places that loom so large in the prospects for creating a valuable curriculum. Worse yet, a "curriculum" developed apart from the teachers and young people who must live it is grossly undemocratic in the ways it deprives them of their right to have a say in their own lives and to learn and apply the skills and understandings associated with making important decisions. In the area of curriculum planning and development, we ought to have learned this lesson by now: distance breeds contempt.

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A curriculum developed apart from the teachers and young people who must live it is grossly undemocratic.

So it is that in answering the middle school curriculum question there is no recipe, no detailed map — nor should we want one. What we need instead are serious conversations in local schools aimed at opening up possibilities for teachers and young people to create a curriculum that is significant for and makes sense in their own lives. While there is no precise map, I believe that there is a compass to guide our thinking. That is, we can imagine what those curriculum conversations might be about.

Imagine a conversation that follows a kind of parallel structure. Along one line are ideas about what we want for our young people as well as the characteristics or qualities that a responsive curriculum might have. Along the other line are the varieties of practical curriculum activities or forms. Our conversations, then, are about the interactions between these two lines of thinking: how can what we want be brought to life in practical situations and how do those situations inform continued thinking about what we want?

Contrary to what many of us learned in school, quantum physicists now tell us that parallel lines do meet (somewhere out there). In the sense of the parallel structure I am suggesting, it is at that (or those) point(s) stories emerge which offer practical responses to the curriculum question. Again, though, those stories cannot tell others exactly what to do since each story is created out of local conditions. On the other hand, such stories may well serve to inspire people who want to do something about the curriculum but have a hard time imagining new possibilities. They cannot "do" the same story, but perhaps they can do something like it and thus create their own stories and enlighten their own conversations.

Guidelines for a middle school curriculum

Although recognizing the necessity of local planning, I now want to sketch out several qualities that I believe should be brought to life in the middle school curriculum. As such they serve as guidelines for thought and deliberation; they present what I believe is "desirable" regardless of the practical obstacles that may interfere with their realization. Later I will make a proposal for a "curriculum" that does bring them to life. But mine is only one voice. Surely there are others who might take the same guidelines and create a quite different version of practice. In fact, curriculum practices created out of these guidelines may well be as many as there are classrooms and schools. My proposal is meant to illustrate a possibility; it is not meant to be "the" version everyone must do. This is what the conversation is about. And it should also be about the guidelines themselves: Are they desirable? What do they mean? Are they enough? Are they clear?

1. The middle school curriculum should focus on general education.

Such a curriculum would be concerned with common learnings for all rather than learnings that are differentiated by special interests or student labels. The kind of curriculum differentiation that has characterized so many middle level schools (and programs) begins the unfortunate process of "sorting and selecting" young people, a process that is detrimental to all, but particularly harsh for those who are "non-privileged." Moreover, neither early adolescents nor the adults who work with them are in a position to predict what paths individual lives may follow in the future.

Specialization tends to overemphasize individualism and fracture the sense of common purpose that often emerges in early adolescence. This does not mean that the curriculum should ignore the interests of individuals, but rather that the primary focus should be on a widely shared experience of the kind that we would want all early adolescents to have together regardless of who they are or what they may do in the future.

2. **The central purpose of the middle school curriculum should be helping early adolescents explore self and social meanings at this time in their lives.**

The middle school is not a “farm system” for the high school, the university, or the interests of business and industry nor is it simply another distribution point for “high-culture capital.” Certainly there are many pressures on the curriculum that cannot be ignored, including legislated mandates, subject area interests, and parental expectations. But these must be taken as secondary to the more compelling concerns of what is going on in and around the present lives of early adolescents.

3. **The middle school curriculum should respect the dignity of early adolescents.**

Most early adolescents as well as adults who care deeply about them are tired of hearing these young people characterized by demeaning, insensitive metaphors like “hormones with feet,” “brain-dead,” and “range of the strange.” Worse yet, even the presumably sensitive litany of “characteristics of early adolescence,” typically ignores such issues as culture and tends to freeze early adolescents within that socially constructed “stage” as if there is nothing more to their lives (Brazee and Dibiase, 1992).

Those who really listen to early adolescents know that at both personal and social levels many are concerned about the environment, prejudice, injustice, poverty, hunger, war, politics, violence and the threat these issues pose to the future of our world. Clearly these are not the superficial concerns one would expect to hear from “hormones with feet.” To ignore or trivialize these concerns by pressing on with the usual curriculum fare or repackaging it in “cute” activities degrades the dignity of early adolescents and helps block their access to critical knowledge and skill (Arnold, 1980).

4. **The middle school curriculum should be firmly grounded in democracy.**

We ostensibly live in a democratic society and there are no reasonable grounds that suggest why the democratic way of life should not be extended to early adolescents or into their schools. The democracy I mean, though is not simply a matter of individuals selecting alternatives from a menu of limited choices nor the pseudo-democratic “engineering of consent” around predetermined possibilities. In short, it is not simply whatever someone wants to do or whatever someone can get them to do. Rather I mean that the curriculum ought to be democratically conceived through collaborative planning with involvement of early adolescents — they should have a say and their say should count for something. The voices of teachers are not meant to be silent here but neither are they the persistently dominating source of power and authority over young people. The key concept is “collaboration,” the building of communities in which the interests of all people, adults and the young, are sources of curriculum concern.

Furthermore, in a democratic curriculum, information or “facts” brought into the classroom should be open to critical analysis rather than presented for passive assimilation. After all, knowledge is socially constructed by people; it does not spring forth from some mysterious source. Critical questions — “Who said this? Why did they say it? Why should we believe it?” — should permeate classroom life. And out of these kinds of questions, early adolescents ought to be invited to construct their own meanings as active participants in the democratic way of life. Middle school advocates have long spoken of the search for value and moral reasons among early adolescents, a “characteristic” that cries out for a democratic curriculum.

5. **The middle school curriculum should honor diversity.**

While the notion of general education calls for “common learnings,” early adolescents are a diverse group. The curriculum ought to honor this diversity with respect to both content and meanings that are constructed in relation to culture. Considerable progress is being made with respect to inclusion of resources and viewpoints that are multicultural. The middle school curriculum, like others, should seek to expand this progress. So too should it respect diversity of learning styles

and other personal factors. And among the cultures and styles that we seek to recognize, we should not forget those that are produced by young people themselves, both individually and collectively.

But honoring diversity means more than just adding a story or two, a display case for ethnic artifacts, or celebrating minority achievements for a day or month. We live in a culturally diverse world. The lives, histories, and contributions of diverse people are not different stories of the human community. Rather they are unique parts of the same story. A curriculum that honors diversity prizes differences but integrates those into a unified understanding of our interdependence. Such a curriculum offers a glimpse of a transformed human community in which both unity and diversity have a secure place.

6. The middle school curriculum should be of great personal and social significance.

Those who work at the middle level enter into the lives of early adolescents for a relatively brief period of time. That time ought to be spent wisely. The curriculum in these years ought to center on powerful themes that enlighten the search for self and social meaning. Many adults have favorite units and activities — the ones on “ancient Egypt” or “baseball” — that they love to do each year. These units may often appeal to young people, especially if they involve fun or exciting activities. However, even with evidence of teacher and student enthusiasm we must still ask whether the school time we have with early adolescents should be spent on topics having questionable personal and social significance.

7. The middle school curriculum should be lifelike and lively.

Significant learning in real life involves having experiences which are integrated into our present scheme of meanings about ourselves and our world so that those meanings are refined, extended, and expanded. Moreover, when confronted with problems or puzzling situations, we typically call forth whatever knowledge and skill we have to resolve them, and if the problem is significant enough, we seek pertinent knowledge and skill we do not already have. Thus a life-like curriculum would call our attention to problems, draw upon relevant, integrated knowledge and skill, and take us further toward self and social meaning.

It is also important to note here that the idea of having all the knowledge and skills necessary to resolve significant problems or situations is impossible. In the real lives unfolding before our very eyes, knowledge is expanding at such a dazzling rate that we simply cannot keep up with it all. A real life curriculum, then, must emphasize ways of gaining access to knowledge and skills as the need for them arises. In this sense, the curriculum ought to be one in which we are all learners regardless of our age or position in the school.

Beyond this, though, the middle school curriculum ought to be lively. Focusing on the serious matter of self and social meaning should not mean reducing activity to “talking heads.” Instead, the curriculum should be full of wonder and curiosity. Opportunities should abound for making, doing, and creating things through multiple and creative forms of expression. While helping early adolescents to clarify and refine questions and concerns, we should avoid discouraging those that may seem odd or far-fetched to adults but which are nonetheless a source of curiosity for the restless minds of youth. And when questions or concerns point to injustice in the larger world, we must set aside our own fear of controversy and make way for young people to strengthen their own courage by speaking out and taking action.

8. The middle school curriculum should enhance knowledge and skills for all young people.

Important knowledge and skills are necessary for extending self and social meaning. Thus the curriculum must promote such knowledge and skills lest it work against the best interests of young people. On the other hand, if the curriculum is life-like, knowledge and skills would enter in insofar as they support self and social meaning. This condition means that we will likely be dealing with some knowledge and skills that have not surfaced in the past while deleting some that have, but which are trivial or overly abstract.

However, we must be very careful in making decisions about knowledge and skill. Historically, some so-called “progressive” or “child-centered” curriculum plans have given short shrift to knowledge and skills which are needed for access to various places or positions in our society. While “privileged” young people may acquire these anyway, such plans, exciting as they may be, may backfire on those who are

“non-privileged” and whose cultures and environments may not automatically pass on this kind of cultural capital. Furthermore, “official” knowledge and skill must be visible in the curriculum lest we appear to be moving the target, especially for non-privileged groups that have spent years trying to figure out just what it is they must do to succeed in schools. Curriculum reform proposals that ignore this issue are, incidentally, neither progressive nor child-centered since they work against the very people they are intended to serve.

This last guideline may appear to contradict others. How is it that I can simultaneously call for serving the interests of young people and democracy while also insisting that we enhance those skills that are required by external and sometimes undemocratic sources? Given my argument about non-privilege and the denial of access, the problem here is not one of contradiction, but of tension. That is, so long as those external pressures maintain their power, we are faced with the “tense” need to facilitate self and social meaning without inhibiting future possibilities for early adolescents. Teachers and other educators thus face the problem of striving for balance between these two sources of the curriculum, an uneasy balance that is, incidentally, one among the many concerns of those who are working toward curriculum integration.

These guidelines are intended to sketch out what might be characteristics or qualities of a middle school curriculum. Although there are clear implications for such things as student participation in curriculum planning and the use of themes to organize the curriculum, the guidelines do not present a technique or a method. Nor do they say what the actual curriculum ought to be. The point is that in any particular middle school we might see a curriculum in action that is different from that in other places. But whatever that curriculum is, it would bring these guidelines to life.

Before leaving the guidelines I want to make two more points about them. First, notice that I have not called them characteristics of a “good” middle school curriculum. If we think about it, a curriculum that ignores these guidelines is quite simply not a “middle school” curriculum. It may be a curriculum for some other purpose or group, but not for the middle school. We do a disservice by talking of a “good” middle school curriculum since we thus imply that some other curriculum, even though it may be not as “good” or even outright inappropriate, may still

be considered a middle school curriculum. Why would we want to be working with or even considering anything that is not good?

Second, these guidelines imply that middle school curriculum conversations ought to involve more than just middle school talk. While the middle school movement has been partly about reclaiming the historically degraded self-esteem of those who work at this level, we must be careful not to isolate ourselves from the larger purposes of schools or the issues that confront them. For example, conversations about democracy, human dignity, and cultural diversity belong in the middle school but are more than just “middle school” talk. The same goes for issues like testing, national curriculum, school legislation, subject area pronouncements, and the like.

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We must be careful not to isolate ourselves from the larger purposes of schools or the issues that confront them.

In the end, though, it is the guidelines that I have sketched that drive the rest of this volume, just as they do the many middle school curriculum conversations that are emerging and the work of concerned middle school educators in a growing number of places. For those who read through this entire book, I recommend coming back to this section in the end to remember what our curriculum conversation is meant to be about.

Summary

Despite the progress made in the thirty years of the middle school movement, it can be viewed in some ways as very contradictory. Persistent claims about the need for sensitivity to the characteristics of early adolescence have resulted in important organizational changes, but little has been done to answer the crucial question of what ought to be the middle school curriculum. This situation probably had more than a little to do with the fact that the middle school was originally seen

primarily in terms of school reorganization and secondarily as a comprehensive school reform effort.

* The problem of curriculum reform in middle schools is compounded by the fact that they, like other schools, are subject to many pressures: external curriculum mandates, expectations of parents and the society, the structures of tradition, the interests of subject area specialists, theories and proposals about middle school reform concerns and interests of local educators, and the expectations of local early adolescents. Difficult as curriculum reform may be under any circumstances, the fact that these pressures present competing and conflicting interests makes the matter of rethinking the middle school curriculum thoroughly problematic.

Many middle schools have reacted by framing a fragmented curriculum that attempts to respond to all of these interests in one way or another. In doing so however, it has failed to conceptualize a broad and coherent answer to the question, "what should be the middle school curriculum?" Surely middle school educators must sense in their work a persistent tension between the school and early adolescents that sensitivity and organizational changes have failed to resolve. While this tension may well reside in complicated issues involving the society and schools in general, it is also likely that it is at least partially located in that curriculum question.

Progress toward creating a genuine "middle school" curriculum must begin with serious conversations about the curriculum questions as well as classroom adventures to bring those conversations to life. This is not, however, work in which "anything goes." While there is no specific map, there is a compass to guide us. This compass amounts to guidelines that suggest a middle school curriculum ought to have certain qualities: a focus on general education, the exploration of self and social meanings, respect for the dignity of young people, grounding in democracy, prizing of diversity, personal and social significance, life-like and lively content and activities, and rich opportunities for enhancing knowledge and skill. How the actual curriculum looks may be as diverse as there are middle schools and classrooms. Wherever we go and whatever we may see in the name of "curriculum, though, we ought to see those guidelines brought to life in the school experiences of early adolescents.

2.

Curriculum Views in the Middle School Movement

The question of what "ought" to be the middle school curriculum has not been entirely neglected in theory and research associated with the middle school movement. In the relatively short history of the movement, a few theoretical proposals have been advanced and some local reports made indicating occasional progress in middle schools themselves toward seriously rethinking the curriculum. However, in this chapter we will see that for the most part the proposals have been framed within the separate subject area tradition while the overall curriculum picture in many middle schools remains confused. To explore this situation we will turn first to theoretical statements supplied by some of the leaders in the movement and then go inside the schools themselves.

Curriculum ideas

Donald Eichhorn, one of the early advocates of the middle school movement, worked out a proposed curriculum organization that attempted to deal with the movement's persistent claim that the curriculum ought to be based upon the characteristics of early adolescents. In *The Middle School* (1966), a classic work reprinted by the National Middle School Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Eichhorn concluded that a study of those characteristics suggested a "two curricula" model in which all middle school