

**THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCEPT**

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The purpose of this study is to clarify the issue, "What are the real differences between the middle school and the traditional junior high school?" The concept of the middle school is a new approach to providing a unique set of experiences which are designed around the needs of the early adolescent. It is an attempt to develop a curriculum around the child, recognizing that his needs are special at this age and that they require a special knowledge and understanding.

Whether or not the needs of the children are being met in the best possible way through the middle school concept as opposed to the traditional school is kept in mind by the author. The study discusses in depth the rationale for the middle school, its strengths and weaknesses, the problems involved in realizing its purposes, and the trends in its development, including a study of New York City's middle schools.

The study was achieved through both library research and a field study of the middle school concept. A study was made of literature available on the subject; interviews with middle school administrators and visits to selected middle schools.

As the study progressed, several problems became evident. For example, who will teach the middle school children?

Will future teachers specialize in elementary, junior high school, or senior high school education? Who has the experiences to give courses in middle school technique? What grades should be included? What subjects should be taught?

From the literature read and the interviews conducted, the author of this paper feels that there is little difference in theory and actuality between the junior high school and the middle school. It would seem that the same concepts such as flexibility, team teaching and non-graded classes could be practiced in the junior high schools as well as in newly created middle schools. However, the primary differences between the middle school and the junior high school might not be in the administrative changes and the implications inherent in them; rather it might be in the attitude with which these changes are approached. With the building of new edifices called middle schools and addition of new personnel, it is probably easier to implement change than in an older structure with the same establishment.

Whether or not the needs of the children are being met in the best possible way through the middle school as opposed to the traditional schools is a question that the author feels remains unanswered at this time. Any logical way of dividing the school organization can be made to work, each has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the best answer is an individual matter, depending on fine teachers and quality education.

Despite the enthusiasm of its practitioners, there is yet no documented evidence that the middle school has solved the problems of educating the early adolescent or meeting their needs any more successfully than has the junior high school. Years of research will probably be required for accurate comparisons.