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# Overview

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## **The Philosophy of Effective Middle Years Programs:**

- It is based on the unique needs and characteristics of the young adolescent. These needs encompass physical, psychological, intellectual, social, and moral and ethical needs. The entire program is developed around these needs.
- It is student-centred rather than subject-centred.
- It includes provision for both external and school-based teacher training to meet the widely-varying exceptionalities in interests, abilities, and experiences of students in transition.
- It accepts and respects each student and teacher as an individual of worth and dignity in his or her own right; it celebrates differences and encourages creativity and freedom of expression in keeping with ethnic genealogy and background experiences.
- It works best if there is continuity in teaching staff with less room movement.

## **Advantages of the middle school organisational pattern:**

- Articulation between the primary school and the middle school is enhanced through increased communication and a student-centred focus. Articulation between Years 7–10 and senior high school is also an important aspect of the program.
- Flexible block timetabling allows for varied learning activities, grouping and regrouping students for instruction, and common planning time for teachers.
- Interdisciplinary approaches in all disciplines are encouraged. This provides for integration of the curricular areas.
- A varied range of exploratory opportunities for students is presented.
- Opportunities for focusing on affective education are built into the daily timetable.
- An emphasis is placed on in school rather than inter school athletics. Co-operation and participation, not just winning, are stressed.
- The educators have been especially trained to work with middle level students and are committed to the education of the young adolescent. They have knowledge of needs and characteristics of the age and have mastered varied teaching strategies which promote active rather than passive activities.

## **In Summary:**

The successful middle years program is forward thinking, outcome-based, and devoted to excellence in classroom instruction, student motivation, and the quest for life skills, broad-based learning, and creative thinking.

# Questions

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1. How should the physical resources best be arranged to facilitate the middle school philosophy and program?
2. What are the unique needs and characteristics of the middle year student?
3. What are some guidelines for establishing a student-centred rather than subject-centred middle school mission statement?
4. What advantages are afforded through flexible block timetabling?
5. Why are interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum and instruction desirable?
6. How can successful practices and strategies in effective middle school classrooms be identified and how can teachers, students, and administrators work together to nurture and maximise these characteristics for the good of all students?
7. What are some ways that parents and caregivers can be involved in the decision-making and day-to-day operations of the middle school program?
8. What is a good definition of a mini-course? Give two or three good examples of interesting mini-course titles and descriptions.
9. How would you define an authentic elective offering? Give examples of five to ten content areas in which elective offerings could be developed.
10. What are some ways to differentiate instruction? Give one good example.
11. What are some ways middle year teachers can save time and reduce stress, and what are some time-wasters and stress-producers to avoid?
12. What are some steps middle years teachers can take to be more effective as positive rather than negative disciplinarians?
13. Why have young adolescents in our society today been labelled as “Kids Caught In The Middle”?

# Terms For Success

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**Home Room Time:**

A regularly-scheduled period each day/week in which students interact with peers/teachers about both personal and school-related concerns.

**Block/Flexible Timetable:**

Organisation of the school day into large units of time that may be utilised in varied and productive ways by the school staff.

**Common Planning (Team Duty) Time:**

Regularly-scheduled time during the school day during which a given team of teachers who are responsible for the same group of students is available for joint planning, parent conferencing, and/or lesson preparation.

**Core Curriculum:**

The basic subject areas of maths, science, social studies, and English.

**Early Adolescence:**

The stage of development between ages 10 and 15 when the student begins to reach puberty.

**Elective:**

Regularly-scheduled curriculum experiences designed to help students discover and/or examine learning related to their changing needs, aptitudes, and interests. Often referred to as the “wheel” or mini-classes.

**Heterogeneous Grouping:**

Grouping of students that does not divide learners on the basis of ability or academic achievement.

**Homogeneous Grouping:**

Grouping of students that divides learners on the basis of specific levels of ability, achievement, or interest. Sometimes referred to as streaming.

**Interdisciplinary Program:**

Instruction that integrates and combines subject matter ordinarily taught separately into a single organisational structure.

**Interdisciplinary Team:**

An instructional organisation of two to five teachers representing varied disciplines who pool their resources, interests, expertise, and knowledge of students to jointly take the responsibility for meeting educational needs of a common group of students.

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**Inter-school:**

Athletic activities or events the primary purpose of which is to foster competition between schools and school districts. Participation usually limited to students with exceptional athletic ability.

**House or In-school:**

Athletic activities or events held within the school day, or shortly thereafter, the primary purpose of which is to encourage all students to participate regardless of athletic ability.

**Mini-Courses:**

Special interest activities of short duration that provide learning opportunities for students based on student interest, faculty expertise, and community involvement.

**Metacognition:**

The process by which individuals examine their own thinking processes.

**Transescence:**

The stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence.

# Key Findings

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## 1. Alexander and George state:

Regardless of what we call middle-schoolers, there are common developmental tasks that each one will encounter, is currently encountering, or has just encountered. Usually a middle-schooler will become involved with most if not all of these tasks while in the middle school, but not necessarily at the same time. Thornburg's designation of seven developmental tasks is a useful one to note as we turn to a brief identification of some major characteristics of the age group:

1. Becoming aware of increased physical changes
2. Organising knowledge and concepts into problem-solving strategies
3. Learning new social/sex roles
4. Recognising one's identification with stereotypes
5. Developing friendships with others
6. Gaining a sense of independence
7. Developing a sense of morality and values

Reference: Alexander, William M. and George, Paul S. *The Exemplary Middle School*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981, p. 5.

## 2. Donald H. Eichhorn emphasised:

More and more professional literature is offering evidence that the present school structures are being seriously challenged. Usually, however, the suggested remedies take the form of treating the ills of the present structure rather than proposing an attack at the root causes of the problem. Substantiated assumptions of this study indicate that the root of the problem be attacked through an altered school organisation pattern. One way would be to initiate a new pattern: an primary unit of Prep to Year five, a middle school grouping of Years six to eight, and a high school unit of Years nine to twelve.

Reference: Eichhorn, Donald H. *The Middle School*. National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia, and National Middle School Association, Columbus, Ohio, Special Printing, 1987, p. 104.

## 3. John H. Lounsbury writes:

There is considerable consensus about the educational ideas and ideals that are inherent in the so-called middle school concept, all of which grow out of the unique nature of this age group and their needs. While there is no single model, no "right" curriculum, no complete orthodoxy, there is widespread agreement on the basic principles of transescent education and the conditions which gave rise to it. Some of these views and conditions are summarised as follows:

- The focus on the middle years is an educational response to the needs and characteristics of youngsters during transescence and, as such, deals with the full range of intellectual and developmental needs.