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## Foreword

Are'n't all young adolescents diverse? Is it redundant to talk about the diversity in and among middle years students? After all, young adolescents develop tremendously in several critical areas between the ages of 10 and 15, most visibly in their physical development, but as importantly in their social, emotional and intellectual development. This diversity is the middle years story, but it extends far beyond these characteristics.

Young adolescents are also diverse in many other ways, some are obvious, such as race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and some less obvious but equally powerful ways including family structure, gender bias and a variety of exceptionalities. In *Diversity and Young Adolescents*, Elizabeth Dore explores the nature of diversity in young adolescents and its implications for schools and teachers in their classrooms. This down-to-earth examination of the factors that make young adolescents diverse is written in an easy to understand style, drawing on the significant experiences of Dr Dore as teacher and university professor.

In addition to background information on the various types of diversity presented at the end of each section, the author provides a number of useful strategies for classroom teachers as they respond to the unique needs of all students. These strategies provide specific activities, possible assignments and resources for each of the major concepts presented. The savvy teacher will also recognise that many of the strategies are appropriate and engaging for students – as well as other teachers. An excellent annotated bibliography of professional resources, organised by category, is available at the end of the book. This will be used by many teachers to identify outstanding trade books for their students.

In life there are the doers, the people who always get things done, and the talkers who recognise what needs to be done but never seem to get around to doing it. Betty Dore has always been a doer. She cuts through the details of life and goes directly for what needs to be done. Just a few years ago, this educator was a classroom teacher, fine-tuning her classroom for her students and helping to make the middle years in her school into a functioning middle school.

## Diversity and Young Adolescents

All the while she was also completing a master's degree in middle years education; then, without losing a beat she was off to complete a middle years doctoral program.

Betty's years as a classroom teacher and continuing work with her undergraduate students have prepared her well for writing this book. She knows a great deal about young adolescents, and she has worked with a variety of middle years students in diverse settings over the years. These experiences with real kids are reflected throughout this book.

Yes, all middle years students are diverse – even those who do not appear to be. Read this book, savor it and use the excellent ideas presented here as you continue to work with this special population we call young adolescents.

Edward N. Brazee  
Orono, Maine





## Introduction

Classroom teachers today are faced with a multitude of diverse conditions. No longer can they expect to face a group of children who are homogeneous in any way. Rather, they must be prepared to understand their students who may reflect a variety of cultures, traditions and backgrounds. Every classroom will challenge teachers with these very interesting and diverse groups of youngsters. This book will be a stepping-stone to that understanding. It is intended as a supplement to other texts in middle school teacher preparation courses, but it may also be used by veteran classroom teachers looking for effective strategies to reach new and diverse classroom populations. It is a compilation of ideas old and new, concepts from middle years gurus, as well as from newcomers. Pre-service teachers, first-year teachers, and veteran teachers will find it useful in helping to develop lesson plans and in providing information about diverse classroom settings.

This is also a book for parents, guardians and anyone interested in young adolescents. It is for anyone confused about their thoughts or actions, and for those who want to understand and find ways to help 10 to 15-year-olds become successful young adults.

In its position paper on diversity, National Middle School Association (n.d.) says it this way:

- The success of our nation and humankind itself depends on our collective ability to have mutual respect and appreciation of others.
- Schools must model a community that is based on justice and the celebration of similarities and differences among its members.
- Organizations must encourage diversity as they design policies and standards.
- Organizations are strengthened by continued involvement of under-represented populations that may vary over time. ([www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org))

## Diversity and Young Adolescents

Webster's *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1993) describes diversity as '(1) the condition of being different, variety; (2) an instance or a point of difference'. When one thinks of middle school and middle school students, 'a condition of being different' certainly comes to mind. There are, however, a multitude of 'differences'. Four categories, *physical*, *intellectual*, *emotional* and *social*, are often used when describing young adolescents; and these terms may be used to discuss diversity in the middle years and middle years students.


Included in *physical diversity* are physical exceptionalities, stereotyping, racial, gender and geographic differences. Learning styles and abilities, family expectations and language (body language, cultural differences, voice, geographical accents and word or phrase connotations – based on geographical localities) are all included in *intellectual differences*. *Emotional characteristics* include values, ethnicity and religious preferences. Finally, *social diversity* includes sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, students at risk, family makeup such as one parent male, one parent female, divorce, death, adoption and cultural issues.

Miller-Lachmann and Taylor (1995) emphatically state the importance of learning to get along with all people:

The realities faced by all members of this global society mandate that we learn how to live and work together. At stake are the progress and survival of all inhabitants of the earth. Through knowledge and appreciation of our different cultures and by valuing every group's contributions to the national and international societies, we can cooperatively find solutions to the major problems that confront us. In our nation we need to prepare all children to become confident, independent, participating and contributing members. We cannot afford the cost of failure. (p. 1)

As early as 1895, psychologists including Hall, Gessell and Terman discovered that children from 10 to 15 undergo different physical and psychological changes that required different educational opportunities than were provided in traditional elementary and secondary schools (Hall, 1904). In the 1960s, William Alexander, known as the father of the middle school, advocated that American high schools make changes in order to meet the unique needs of young adolescents and introduced the term *middle school*.





George and Alexander (1981) report that the cognitive and intellectual skills that make their appearance in the lives of many middle years students not only influence the manner in which they are able to deal with academically oriented abstractions and orientations; these same skills also provide young adolescents with new abilities to use in examining their sense of self with their families, friends and teachers. Middle years students become increasingly aware of themselves and of relationships with others. Indeed, these human beings may be more aware of others during this period than during any other time of life. Not only are ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Am I normal?’ persistent as questions, but also ‘Who do you think I am?’ dominates much reflection and many relations (pp. 6–9).

More recent research also notes the unique nature of early adolescence. ‘The emerging adolescent is caught in turbulence, a fascinated but perplexed observer of the biological, psychological, and social changes swirling all around’ (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 6). Middle level students are acutely aware of the smallest differences between their peers and themselves; therefore differences in lifestyles, gender, race, culture, socioeconomic status and ethnicity, to name a few, would seem to be antecedents to diverse and distinct complications for these young adolescents. ‘Young people undergo more rapid and profound personal changes between the ages of 10 and 15 than at any other time in their lives’ (NMSA, 2003, p. 3).

‘The big lie’, an idea conceptualised by Charletta Phillips, a teacher and clinical psychologist, is that ‘virtually all young people are told that they are inadequate because they are different ... it is during this time that middle level students compare themselves to others in almost every dimension of their development’ (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988, p. 21).



## I. Who are middle years students?

The old and oft used cliché, ‘It is the best of times – it is the worst of times’ defines the lives of young adolescents. *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) reports that young adolescents ages 10–15 face a period when their lives are surrounded by confusion, disorder, turmoil, chaos and steady change. Middle years students are acutely aware of the smallest differences between their peers and themselves. Have you ever noticed that every time middle years students walk down the hall they constantly jump to touch the top of the doors or ceilings? As Jim Garvin (1988) tells it, ‘It [is] important for them to see if they can touch something today they couldn’t reach yesterday. More than anything else, young adolescents need to develop a view of themselves as valuable, able, and responsible people’ (p. 26).

Peter Scales (1991) contends that young people move through early adolescence establishing group identity that serves as a cocoon and that young adolescents, like the ‘terrible twos’ of infancy, also have ‘terrible toos ... too much, too little, too slow, too fast’ (p. 9). Young adolescents want too much, believe they have too little and think their world is moving too slowly, while they are intent on moving too fast – not only through their developmental stages, but in maturing from a happy-go-lucky, wanting-to-please young child to a serious, many times isolated or isolating young person. One day that young person may be absolutely sure of everything and the next day not sure of anything. Young adolescents find themselves in situations where they are neither treated as children nor as adults. They find themselves wanting to identify as individuals yet routinely conform to dress, attitude and activities of their peer groups. In conjunction with this newfound responsibility comes the ability to begin to reason about future life choices, develop respect for other human beings and reflect on one’s own thoughts and actions.



### **Characteristics of young adolescents**

- They are bright and curious.
- They are sensitive and aware of how they are perceived.
- They struggle with issues around ethnicity, race and gender.
- They respond to support and exhortations to improve.
- Many assume tremendous responsibilities in their families and church communities, causing them to be more adult-like than many adults expect.
- They have high aspirations and want well-paying jobs; they do not know the instrumental steps to reach their goals.
- They are loyal, care about what significant others think of them and do not want to disappoint these people.
- They respond to discipline, structure and consistency.
- They respond to caring, firm, friendly adults they trust and respect and by whom they feel cared for and respected.
- They work when what they are doing has meaning in their daily lives and will help them achieve a goal or a dream.
- They learn and achieve when taught as if this is expected.
- Their parents and families are concerned and will use suggestions and respond to coaching from teachers.
- Their parents and extended families are proud when they do well and will support their efforts and achievements.

(King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997, p. 209)

