



## *Rationale for*

**C**URRICULAR innovation would seem to us to be the most cogent rationale for the development of the middle school organization. We believe that the purposes of education appropriate to the emerging adolescent are so varied and so broad that a reorganization of instructional practices into a systematic plan for such an innovation is necessary. We hold that the optimum growth of every student, and the balance between the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual areas of development of the pupil, can be achieved within such a system.

Many rationales for the middle school place a considerable stress upon those facets and purposes which are *unique* to the middle school, while accepting some facets and purposes of both elementary and secondary school purposes. *The primary emphasis in the middle school program should be upon the total personalization of purposes and standards for the pupils in such a program.*

### **Purposes of the Middle School**

*Differential education derives from different personal developmental needs.* The development of a plan for instruction to take into account the extreme range of individual differences evident in these groups of emerging adolescents is an absolute essential for the middle school. These differences in individual students and in their stages of maturation must be reflected in the purposes, methods, and objectives in education for emerging

adolescents in the middle schools. Different youngsters may have different personal needs when attending a school. They certainly will have differing sets of values due to background, intellect, physical development, and other related concerns. With this focus, the use of normative standards and grade level rankings is less appropriate than individual progress reports.

The major purposes of personalization in the middle school are derived from the three areas of general education, learning skills, and exploratory experiences. General education which all children should experience is and should remain the central focus of education in the middle school, with specific content developed as necessary to support this area. Extensive effort in seeking an appropriate balance among the areas of the total curricular and educational patterns is necessary.

The stress on general education requires a reassessment of the various subject matter areas with a view to more effective structuring of learning experiences. An emphasis on development of key concepts and modes of inquiry is also recommended. Less emphasis on the learning of facts as a product of learning is necessary with this concern for appropriate modes of inquiry. Further, interdisciplinary approaches and a synthesis of content are recommended to counteract fragmentation, and to render possible a greater applicability and use of new concepts and structures.

# *Instruction in the Middle School*

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Learning skills sufficient to enable the student to become an independent learner should be assessed and emphasized to the point of mastery. These are the skills which the pupil utilizes in mastering the higher, more abstract levels of cognitive processes. Full utilization of the learning resources center would require appropriate general learning skills. Skill in the application of fundamental tools such as reading, writing, and arithmetic is necessary to enable the individual pupil to go beyond his current knowledge, and to achieve mastery of library techniques, technological devices, and a range of study methods. Because of the extremely uneven development in these areas of skill, pupils must be allowed to progress at their own optimal rates in the mastery of such learnings.

The third area of focus in the middle school curriculum is exploration. Exploration is the learning which takes place when the pupil exercises his own initiative in seeking experiences in which his interest arises from his own unique personal needs, desires, or purposes. It is appropriate in any subject area, and it is essential that the school systematically and regularly free the pupil for some set portion of time to develop his unique talents, both in areas within the regular curriculum, and in those areas not ordinarily covered in a traditional school program. Exploration as a concept derives from the purposes and initiative of the individual pupil rather than from the purposes of society; and,

as such, it is crucial among the educational purposes of the middle school.

## **Instructional Imperatives**

The changes in instructional demands inherent within the above-named purposes will require different capabilities of teachers. Teachers will need to become, first, diagnosticians of learning needs; second, resource persons to guide instruction; and third, assessors of the effectiveness of learning experiences and activities in the achievement of special purposes for individual students.

To perform the role of diagnostician, the teacher must ascertain the level of development of a pupil on a number of different dimensions in learning within the particular subject matter with which the teacher is concerned. A more specific type of evaluation will be required than those with which we are currently functioning. Specific learning processes and particular problems within given subject areas will have to be sequenced in such a way that a student's progress can be plotted on a cluster of related learning tasks. With specific learning processes evaluated, the teacher can then begin to diagnose the status and learning of the youngster, and to prescribe the next steps to be selected for

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forward movement along the learning path for the pupil.

The teacher must develop a thorough understanding of the school's curriculum development, learning sequences, scope, and syntheses possible between subject areas in order to best guide pupils in their growth. In determining next steps for individual learners, there must be a variety of opportunities for possible learning experiences so that pupils can select different opportunities according to their varying growth needs. The teacher must know what resources are available to students to facilitate pupil growth and to further develop capabilities. In other words, the staff must develop viable alternatives from which the pupil may choose to provide the most effective learning experiences in terms of individual needs. Staff differentiation and in-service education may become essential aspects of an organizational framework to implement these goals most effectively.

The teacher must study the efficacy of these methods and resources for different

types of purposes and different types of youngsters. Teachers must understand the implications for curriculum and instructional decision making and must be prepared to work with students individually to assist each in his progress toward achieving the educational objectives set for this comprehensive plan.

Teachers must be prepared to ascertain where each student is currently working and how he may proceed for continuous growth toward mutually accepted objectives. The variety of instructional acts, no matter what their modes, must be multiplied in order to achieve the desired purposes. Familiarity with unusual processes, modes of inquiry, structure of subject areas, and resources will be required. Nature of key concepts, generalizations, principles, and laws which create structure in parent disciplines must also be understood. Further, knowledge and ability to organize these so they are understandable and learnable by students are vital if the instructional practices in the middle school are to be most effective.

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