

Your Middle School Must

THE term "middle school" has suddenly become a part of our ever-growing educational jargon. Much like the terms "individualized instruction," the "needs of children," and the "open school," the concept of the "middle school" has a variety of meanings to different people. Students in "middle schools" vary in age from 10 to 14, and are grouped in several ways for clustering students.

The Madison, Wisconsin, schools group the students by grades in school, ranging from sixth grade students to eighth grade students. Another area school near Madison chose the grades 4 through 6 and termed itself a "middle school." Other schools in the Madison area have clustered students from grades 5 through 8 and grades 6 through 8 into a "middle school" structure.

The McFarland Community Schools group children nine years of age to twelve years of age into one school, which has now become known as a "middle school" primarily because students attend the "middle school" midway during their schooling.

The manner of clustering students is far less significant than the program available to students. Students older or students

younger could very easily be incorporated into the "middle school," providing an appropriate program is designed for those students. The success of a "middle school," or any school, does not depend entirely on the age range of students; much of the success depends on the program provided by the staff and the school district.

Some 60 years ago, at the onset of the junior high movement, three needs were seen for students of the pre-teenage period of development:

1. Something different from self-contained classrooms with people trained in special subject areas, especially in the fields of science, math, and the related arts
2. Exploratory courses to help students decide on a more concentrated high school program
3. Adult guidance to help the child understand himself and to understand something about his potential.

What has resulted from the junior high movement is a "mini" high school program including such things as competitive sports and organizations based on high school students' needs.

Have a Revised Program!

DONALD E. BARNES*

The name "middle school" means nothing without a thorough program. The R & D Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, provided a model for McFarland Community Schools.

The Conrad Elvehjem School in McFarland could easily absorb students from grades 7 and 8 into the existing program by means of extending the program, using the same concept established for the younger students. The basic model used in McFarland is adapted from the model established by the Research and Development Center at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The model is termed "Individually Guided Education/Multi-Unit School-Elementary (IGE/MUS-E)". The model is now being extended into the upper grades to grade 12. When this model is properly implemented the clustering of students by grades or age levels will have little or no significance. The necessities will be well-trained staff members, sufficient materials, and appropriate facilities. The education of the youngsters will be continuous, progressive, and meaningful.

The model for IGE has been successful in elementary schools throughout the nation, and will be successful for "middle schools" and high schools, if the schools follow the suggestions of the R & D Center. The model is based on seven components:

1. An organization for instruction
2. A model for instructional programming for individual students
3. A model for developing measurement tools and evaluation procedures
4. Curriculum materials, related statements of instructional objectives, and criterion-referenced tests and observation schedules
5. A program for home-school communications
6. Facilitative environments in the school building
7. Continuing research and development to generate knowledge and to produce test materials and procedures.

Material for training staff members is available through the Research and Develop-

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Photo courtesy of the author

Learning stations enhance individualized instruction.

ment Center and through many departments of public instruction throughout the nation. The model may be adapted to local situations; however, caution must be given to those who deviate from the model to any great extent.

One unique factor helped the Research and Development Center with the implementation of the IGE concept: the Center developed curricular programs to enhance the concept. The Wisconsin Design for Reading Development is one such program. The Wisconsin Design includes Word Attack, Reference Skills, Study Skills, and Comprehension. Continuous progress for each student is ensured because of pre- and post-testing along with a record-keeping system. Tests are scored by a computer and recorded on an easy-to-read label for each child's McBee card.

Developing Mathematical Processes is a mathematics program being developed by the Research and Development Center and soon to be published. Student interest is high because students learn the concept by "doing" and the concept is then transferred to the abstract.

The R & D Center has other programs available, or soon to be available. McFarland has been part of the program development for the two programs mentioned. R & D Center programs used in the McFarland

IGE/MUS-E schools have enhanced the individualization of instruction.

The concept of IGE provides an opportunity to offer nongraded instruction to multi-age clusters of students. The organizational structure finds an age span of three years in one unit. The current structure is four units: Unit I (kindergarten-grade 1), Unit II (grades 2 and 3), Unit III (grades 4 and 5), and Unit IV (grade 6). The structure could change at any time and would be extended to include grade 7, then grade 8, and on into the high school. Unit lines are not tight and can be flexible, with children attending classes in two different units within one day.

Potential for the extension of this type of structure is endless and is now being explored by the Research and Development Center in Madison. The concept of IGE in the multi-unit organization provides an opportunity to try many innovations: multi-aged instruction, team teaching and team planning, continuous progress, youth tutoring, differentiated staffing, and working closer with teachers in the related arts area.

The "middle school" concept has provided educators with an opportunity to correct the errors of 60 years of junior high school development. To change the name of the approach from junior high to "middle school" affords the opportunity to make changes faster.

Universities throughout the nation should recognize that professional staff members need to be trained for the "middle school" level as a single entity. The present approach of borrowing staff members trained for elementary school or high school has been inadequate. The former bring the atmosphere of the elementary school to the "middle school," and high school teachers force "mini" high school programs upon the pre-teenage child.

A magic cutoff age has never been determined and should never become a factor. A continuous program of individualized instruction, based on individual students' progressing and developing at different rates, is drastically needed. The focus needs to be on the curriculum offering rather than on the organizational structure. □

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