

PERHAPS one of the most encouraging features of American education today is that we who advocate the middle school no longer feel we must devote an inordinate amount of time to justifying its existence. We have long urged the establishment of a segment of school organization which reflects the unique nature of youngsters who are in transition between childhood and adolescence. This kind of school now seems to have won acceptance.

Eichhorn (1966) has coined the term "transescence" to identify a transitional stage of development during which youngsters differ from younger children in the elementary school and from the high school's full-fledged adolescent. These youngsters are generally within the age range of 10 to 14. Growth of the middle school as a promising alternative to other organizational patterns for meeting needs of transescents has been phenomenal.

As a result of the wide acceptance of the middle school, attention has been diverted, to some extent, from the earlier controversy over which grades or ages should be housed in these schools. Interest now centers on what kinds of curricula are particularly suited to the needs and interests of transescents. Emphasis has been placed on a pluralistic curriculum, varying from one school district to another and from one school to the next within districts. This is fortunate inasmuch as facilities, materials, school populations, and teachers vary so greatly among schools.

Needed: Teacher Education for the Middle School

Most school administrators realize that, regardless of the motives of the school's establishment, the most modern facilities and materials and the best planned curriculum are of no avail unless the staff is prepared to work with transescents. Teachers make the difference in any school. The better prepared the staff is to work with youngsters of this age, the greater the likelihood that the middle school will be successful. Unfortunately, however, this is often not the case in

How Do You

The preparation program for middle school teachers needs four elements. A program at the University of Georgia seeks to exemplify these factors.

the traditional junior high school. Teachers selected for junior high school faculties have generally been prepared to teach in highly departmentalized senior high schools or as subject-matter generalists in the elementary school. Therefore, most junior high school staff members are recruited from the ranks of those prepared for a different level of education (Clarke, 1971; Brown and Howard, 1972).

If the middle school is to fulfill its function of providing a program suited specifically to the needs of the transescent, programs of teacher education must be developed that are aimed at the specific competencies needed by middle school teachers. Unless this is accomplished, the middle school may evolve into little more than a "junior-junior high school" or a "senior elementary school."

Characteristics a Teacher Needs for the Middle School

Perhaps it would help to look at a functioning middle school preparation program at the baccalaureate level. This writer has been actively involved in the development and implementation of the middle school

Prepare To Teach Transescents?

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program at the University of Georgia. Following is a description of that program.

● *Early Opportunity To Make Realistic Professional Choices*

The teacher education program at all levels—elementary, middle school, and secondary—includes field experiences in the public schools on a regularly scheduled basis. These experiences are provided initially during the sophomore or junior years as a part of the orientation to teaching.

Through this early experience, prospective teachers can decide if they want to continue in the program designed for a specific educational level, transfer to another program, or pursue a career *other* than teaching. Students, therefore, are given the responsibility for making their own choices, and they are not locked into a program from which there is no retreat.

● *Content Field Preparation*

Once a student has elected to pursue a program leading to preparation for middle school teaching, he selects two fields of subject specialization. Alexander and his associates (1969) have stated that greater specialization is needed by middle school teachers than by those preparing for elementary teaching and on a different basis than that required of secondary specialists. Two fields of specialization are required in order to broaden the perspective of the teacher and

enable him to demonstrate the relationship between the various subject areas.

The program makes possible the combination of several subject fields, such as language arts and social studies, mathematics and science, art and music, physical education and science. Experiences in the teaching field component are selected by the student with the assistance of an advisor in each of his selected content areas. About 30 percent of the total program is devoted to this specialization.

● *General Education*

Approximately half of the middle school education program is comprised of general education. This component includes work in the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, science, and physical education. From within broad parameters determined by the university system, the student and his advisors may elect within each area specific courses which serve the student's needs.

General education in this program is viewed as a means of preparing the well-rounded individual whose profession is middle school teaching. It is recognized that preparation should be just as individually tailored for the prospective teacher as the program of the middle school is for the transescent it serves.

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● Professional Preparation

This preparatory program is based on the premise that prospective teachers need early and extended opportunities to work directly with transescent in the classroom. Thus, the program is field-based and will eventually be competency-based as the university moves toward a total competency-based teacher education program. Four professional phases are provided—a total of 40 weeks in middle schools.

During the first professional phase the focus is on the nature of the learner. Students are assigned to an interdisciplinary team and work for the most part in one of two areas of content specialization they have selected. Instruction is provided by university personnel in methods and materials with particular emphasis on this field of specialization.

The second phase concentrates on the child as a learner, with an emphasis on the helping relationship of the adult model. Experiences are provided here for the student to work in his second area of specialization with its methods and materials. Communications skills are also emphasized during this phase, particularly the teaching of reading.

The third phase is designed to integrate the two areas of specialization, to acquire competencies in the development and use of instructional media, and to develop skills in diagnostic teaching strategies.

Student teaching is the fourth and final phase, and this internship represents the capstone of the professional preparation program.

The phases of the professional sequence are planned as developmental. No student is permitted to enter the second phase, for example, until he has successfully completed the first. Each phase is staffed by an interdepartmental team of university specialists who not only are aware of the kinds of curricular and instructional strategies required in middle school but who, themselves, have been teachers of transescent. The university staff is responsible for supervising students in the portal middle schools, conducting seminars, advising students, and designing experiences which will meet student needs during each phase of the program.

The middle school program is individualized to the extent that no two student programs are identical. The 45 quarter hours devoted to the professional education component do not include specifically required courses. The middle school education team, therefore, has the freedom to design an individualized program for each student.

In summary, a flexible program of middle school teacher education has been instituted at the baccalaureate level at the University of Georgia. This program includes an opportunity for early professional choice based on experiences with transescent. This field-based program is individually tailored to meet the needs of the prospective teacher of these youngsters. This departure from a highly structured program of course requirements gives the prospective teacher a certain flexibility. Hopefully this flexibility will carry over into the planning of programs for transescent in which the teacher will later become involved.

The middle school teacher education staff at the University of Georgia does not feel that it has "arrived," nor has it "invented the wheel" in middle school teacher preparation.

There is still much work to be done. The staff does feel assured, however, that some important steps have been taken toward providing programs specifically designed for a unique group of professionals—the teachers of transescent.

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