

# Middle School Research 1968-1974: A Review of Substantial Studies

JON W. WILES  
JULIA THOMASON

---

*Findings indicate little evidence by which to evaluate middle school education. A systematic approach emphasizing qualities distinctive to middle school education is greatly needed.*

---

**A**FTER nearly a decade of existence, the middle school has firmly established itself as a legitimate and acceptable model of intermediate education in America. While exact figures are unavailable due to the rapid growth of middle schools, somewhere between one-third and one-half of all intermediate schools in the United States now bear this label.

During the past six years, research studies have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the middle school according to a variety of criteria. Most such research has been comparative in nature, as it should be, assessing the merits of the middle school in relation to other forms of intermediate education.

The purpose of the present review of middle school research was to identify and summarize studies of substance which sought to evaluate middle schools in a systematic way. Particular emphasis was given to comparative studies, and the search was restricted to sources readily available in the

literature. A total of 27 studies were reviewed, of which 13 were found to be substantial in terms of research design, number of subjects assessed, and usable findings.

### Research Limitations

Existing research on middle school education is of remarkably low quality. Most of the studies to date have been either the result of dissertation work or studies by junior high and middle school advocates. For this reason alone, the objectivity of such studies is questionable. This review utilizes seven dissertation studies and six school-sponsored research studies.

Another problem with existing research is that it comes from a limited number of states and regions of the country. Most of the existing middle school research has been done in Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, although this review utilizes studies from a total of seven states.

Finally, most existing research on the middle school has been concerned with only four areas: academic achievement, attitudes, self-concepts, and facilities. While these areas of concern will serve as organizers for providing a summary, it appears that other equally important questions have been ignored by researchers.

In particular, the studies reviewed were limited in value because they did not precisely define middle schools, because they did not consider how long such schools had been in existence, because they did not indicate how long pupils in such schools had experienced the middle school program, and because they did not indicate the reason for the establishment of such schools. All of these factors, we believe, would significantly affect the findings.

## Research Findings

The findings of the studies below are limited to the category in which they are listed. Nearly all of the studies cited looked at other categories and had other findings as well as those mentioned.

*Achievement*—Six studies were found which looked at academic achievement in middle schools and compared such achievement to other forms of intermediate education. Most of the studies were based on national standardized tests. Three studies (Eholich and Murray, 1969; Glissmeyer, 1969; and Mooney, 1970) found no significant differences in achievement for middle schoolers when compared to equivalent students in other forms of intermediate education. One study (Trauschke, 1970) indicated more achievement for middle school students, but only after at least two years of treatment in middle schools. Two studies (Howell, 1969; and Case, 1970) found middle school pupils achieving higher in some academic areas than their counterparts in other forms of intermediate education.

*Attitudes*—Two kinds of attitudes were addressed by the studies reviewed: attitudes of students toward school and attitudes of parents and teachers toward the middle school program. Two studies (Eholich and Murray, 1969; and Wood, 1973) found no significant differences in student attitudes toward school. Three studies (Elie, 1970; Schoo, 1970; and Bryan and Erickson, 1970) found a significant difference in the positive attitudes middle schoolers had toward school. The Elie study also revealed a greater con-

cern of middle school students with social and emotional questions.

Three studies (Howell, 1969; Trauschke, 1970; and Bryan and Erickson, 1970) found a significant difference in the positive attitudes of classroom teachers toward school in middle schools. The Bryan and Erickson study also found an increase in favorable attitude among parents toward the middle school program.

*Self-Concept*—In the area of self-concept and self-perception among students, four studies (Case, 1970; Eholich and Murray, 1969; Elie, 1970; and Trauschke, 1970) found no significant difference between middle school students and control students studied, while two studies (Schoo, 1970; and Soares, Soares, and Pumerantz, 1973) found middle school students having significantly *lowered* self-concepts when compared to students in other forms of intermediate education.

*Facilities*—Two studies (Davis, 1970; and Gatewood, 1970) looked at facilities in middle schools and other forms of intermediate education and found no significant differences.

## Other Findings

The review of other studies on the middle school revealed some findings worthy of mention. A study by Krinsky and Pumerantz details that little is being done at present to prepare middle school teachers in colleges and universities. A study by Bough, McClure, and Sinks documents that less than one-fourth of middle schools in the midwest are including the fifth grade in middle schools despite the human growth and development rationale of the middle school. Other studies (Howell, 1969; and Mooney, 1970) indicate that middle schools have increased attendance and (Howell) lowered discipline problems.

After nearly ten years of existence, there is little evidence available by which to evaluate the merits of middle school education. This condition, however, is not unique to middle schools. Poor research procedures,

a narrow and biased focus, and the failure to clearly define the subject of study have contributed to this condition.

There is need for a systematic study of middle school education, emphasizing those qualities which are distinctive to middle school education. Particularly needed, at this time, is a method of identifying middle schools which, in their practices, follow the guidelines of the middle school literature.

### References

M. Bough, J. McClure, and T. Sinks. "The Middle School—A Five State Survey." *Clearing House* 47 (3): 162-66; November 1972.

C. Bryan and E. Erickson. "Structural Effects on School Behavior: A Comparison of Middle School and Junior High School Programs." Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grand Rapids Public Schools, June 1970.

D. Case. "A Comparative Study of Fifth Graders in a New Middle School with Fifth Graders in Elementary Self-Contained Classrooms." Doctoral dissertation. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1970.

E. Davis. "A Comparative Study of Middle Schools and Junior High Schools in New York State." Doctoral dissertation. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1970.

V. Eholich and K. Murray. "New Curriculum Activities in the Pilot Intermediate Schools of New York City." New York: Center for Urban Education, October 1969.

M. Elie. "A Comparative Study of Middle School and Junior High School Students in Terms of Socio-Emotional Problems, Self-Concept, Ability To Learn, Creative Thinking Ability, and Physical Fitness and Health." Doctoral dissertation. East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1970.

T. Gatewood. "A Comparative Study of the Functions, Organizational Structure, and Instructional Process of Selected Junior High Schools and Selected Middle Schools." Doctoral dissertation. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1970.

C. Glissmeyer. "Which School for the Sixth Grader: The Elementary or the Middle School?" *California Journal of Educational Research* 20 (4): 176-85; September 1969.

B. Howell. "The Middle School, Is It Really Any Better?" *The North Central Association Quarterly* 43 (3): 43-44; Winter 1969.

J. Krinsky and P. Pumerantz. "Middle School Teacher Preparation Programs." *Journal of Teacher Education* 23 (4): 468-70; Winter 1972.

P. Mooney. "A Comparative Study of Achievement and Attendance of 10-14-Year-Olds in a Middle School and in Other School Organizations." Doctoral dissertation. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1970.

P. Schoo. "Students' Self-Concept, Social Behavior, and Attitudes Toward School in Middle and Junior High Schools." Doctoral dissertation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970.

L. Soares, A. Soares, and P. Pumerantz. "Self-Perceptions of Middle School Pupils." *Elementary School Journal* 73 (7): 381-89; April 1973.

E. Trauschke. "An Evaluation of a Middle School by a Comparison of the Achievement, Attitudes, and Self-Concept of Students in a Middle School with Students in Other School Organizations." Doctoral dissertation. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1970.

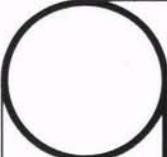
F. Wood. "A Comparison of Student Attitudes in Junior High and Middle Schools." *High School Journal* 56 (8): 355-61; May 1973.

—JON W. WILES, Assistant Professor of Education and JULIA THOMASON, Doctoral student; both at George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee.

Edited by  
Charles W. Beegle  
Richard M. Brandt

Stock No.: 611-17948 96 pp. \$3.50

Order from:  
Association for Supervision  
and Curriculum Development  
Suite 1100  
1701 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20006



Observational  
methods  
in the  
classroom

Copyright © 1975 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.