

5-1998

Teachers' Perceptions of Middle School in Two Rural Districts: A Companion to the Crowe Study

Dana M. Taurisano
The College at Brockport

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**Teachers' Perceptions of Middle School in Two Rural Districts:
A Companion to the Crowe Study**

THESIS

**Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the Department of Education and Human
Development**

State University of New York College at Brockport

by-

Dana M. Taurisano

**State University of New York
College at Brockport
Brockport, NY
May 1998**

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the middle school concept, what is happening in their school, and what actually should be happening. The findings of this study were compared to the Crowe study, which focuses on administrators' perceptions.

In this study, a researcher developed survey was administered to 51 rural, middle level teachers in two rural districts in Western New York. The school districts involved consisted of one that included 28 middle level teachers, 321 middle level students, and three administrators. The other district consisted of 42 middle level teachers, 500 middle level students, and 8 administrators. The administrators included 7 principals, 3 assistant principals and a superintendent of schools. The respondents to this study were asked to fill out the survey and choose the response that best reflected their perceptions about the statement provided both currently and ideally. Responses ranged from "agree" to "disagree." A space for teacher comments was also provided.

The findings reveal that though teachers seem to have a good understanding of what the essential elements of the middle school concept are, only 69% of them agreed or somewhat agreed that this concept was being fully implemented in their schools. Furthermore, there were very few elements in which 90% of teachers could agree were presently practiced in their middle schools. Therefore, though many of the teachers understood the ideal elements of the middle school concept, many also recognized that their middle school did not fully meet the ideal standards of it.

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CHAPTER I

Need for the Study

The controversy between advocates of the middle school concept and the advocates of the junior high school concept has been on-going since the middle school began emerging in the early 1970s. Many junior high schools have restructured their schools to follow the essential elements of the middle school concept; while others claim to, but actually have not.

As a result, a conflict between the philosophy of the middle school concept and the practice of it has seemed to emerge recently, sparking miscommunication between teachers and administrators. “Of special concern was an awareness that although middle school teachers tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than are junior high teachers, they perceive that their school’s implementation of the middle school concepts exists at a low level” (Henson, Buttery, and Chissom, p.22).

Teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of the middle school concept and what they believe is actually happening in middle level classrooms are not congruent. Since “Research efforts are reported to be low quality...” and “Most often, the research was conducted by someone who advocated some particular aspect of middle schooling,” research is needed to provide school districts with information as to whether or not the middle school concept is being successfully implemented in middle level classrooms. (Kenneth et al., 1986, p.22).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the middle school concept, what is happening in their school, and what actually should be happening. The findings of this study were compared to the Crowe study, which focuses on administrators' perceptions.

The purpose of investigating what should be happening according to the middle concept and what is actually happening in the rural districts researched, was to determine how accurately the two rural districts involved follow the middle school concept.

Research Questions

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school?
- 2) What are teachers' perceptions of what a middle school should be doing?
- 3) How do teachers' perceptions compare with administrators' perceptions?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The middle school movement caused many school districts across the country to begin to restructure their junior high schools. In the past, junior high schools focused on preparing students for high school. In other words, junior high schools served as a bridge between the elementary school and the high school, placing emphasis on departmentalization and subject specialization (Alexander, 1995). On the other hand, those in favor of middle schools argue that adolescents have unique developmental characteristics that need to be considered when creating programs. “The middle school is a philosophy and belief about children, their unique needs, who they are, and how they grow and learn” (DeVita, Pumerantz, & Wilklow, 1970, p. 25). This controversy continues to separate advocates of the junior high school philosophy from advocates of the middle school philosophy. As a result of this debate, many school districts have restructured their junior high schools without truly adopting the middle school philosophy. There are several schools that are calling themselves “middle schools” when, in fact, they are only implementing selected elements of the middle school concept.

The Junior High School

The emergence of the junior high school occurred due to a variety of societal factors. “The origin of the junior high school is usually attributed to dissatisfaction with the two level 8-4 plan...” (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 25).

In other words, people were not satisfied with kindergarten through eighth grade as one level and ninth through twelfth grade as another level. In addition, Van Til, Vars, and Lounsbury (1961) pointed out that colleges were concerned about getting students that were better prepared, and colleges felt that students should be exposed to college preparatory courses before ninth grade. A third factor that attributed to the junior high school movement was the increased birth rate after World War I, which led to overcrowded schools. In order to alleviate this situation, many districts moved grades 7-9 into a separate building (George & Alexander, 1993).

As a result of organizational changes, improvements were sought to be made in educational programs. Tye (1985) in George et al. (1992) reflects this in the following statement:

The school was to be based on the characteristics of young adolescents and concerned with all aspects of growth and development. It would be a school designed to provide continued work in learning skills while bringing more depth to the curriculum that had been the case in the elementary schools. It would emphasize guidance and exploration, independence and responsibility. The junior high school would provide the final portion of education and offer a transition to the high school years. (p. 3)

The Emergence of the Middle School

The decline of the junior high school and the emergence of the middle school began after several dissatisfactions from the junior high school concept developed. “Various individuals, including many spokespersons, began expressing dissatisfaction with and possible alternatives to both the junior high school and the earlier, still continuing 8-4 elementary-high school organization. The 6-3-3 and the 8-4 plans were both considered by many as unsuitable to the needs and interests of early adolescents”(George & Anderson, 1993, p.25). For adolescents, departmentalized or specialized subject areas were considered too “abrupt” a change from the typical elementary self-contained classrooms. Also, it was believed that the adolescent’s interests and the subject areas in the departmentalized junior high school lacked a relationship (George & Anderson, 1993).

According to Williamson (1995), another dissatisfaction with the junior high school concept that led to the emergence of the middle school was that, “In many cases the junior high school was nothing more than a “junior” version of the senior high school program. Frequently, classes were organized into content specific departments, students were assigned to classes in similar ways, and many of the curricular and co-curricular offerings were identical to those offered in the comprehensive high school (p.378). Also , George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane (1992) found that the programs imitated high school programs, leaving no room for individual growth, and putting unnecessary pressure on young learners. In

other words, the junior high school did not have its own identity, since the programs and subject matter were ultimately controlled by the high school's needs.

Along with the dissatisfaction of the junior high becoming a mini-high school, other factors led to the emergence of the middle school concept. One such factor was the junior high school's failure to meet its population's needs according to the physical development of its youngsters. Recent studies showed that the average age in which students reached puberty had dropped. Since the rationale of the junior high school was to serve children who entered pubescence at a particular age, and evidence about adolescent growth changed significantly, the junior high school concept, which addressed the modern adolescents physical growth, was no longer accurate. This realization led up to one of the strongest reasons for developing a new school for the middle grades (Williamson, 1995).

Finally, another factor that precipitated the emergence of the middle school was, "The Sputnik induced obsession with academic mastery, particularly in mathematics and sciences..." (Lounsbury, 1992, p.10). Due to this obsession, people were becoming increasingly concerned that American children were not being sufficiently prepared for the new technological advances occurring. As a result, dissatisfaction occurred with the junior high schools because research evidence showed that students at the middle levels were more capable of thinking on a more abstract basis than they were previously thought to. The need to restructure and reorganize curriculum at the middle level was a concern of many who wanted to emerge into a new, more modern middle school (DeVita et al.,1970).

Eventually, junior high schools began to be replaced with middle schools. This movement was driven by factors that had little to do with education and the needs of adolescents, yet educators started to understand the characteristics of adolescents better because of this movement. It became evident that middle school programs should not imitate high school programs, nor should they exist solely to provide a holding place between elementary school and high school (George & Alexander, 1993).

Essential Elements of a Middle School

As a result of the middle school movement, many school districts have changed their junior high schools to middle schools. However, every school that is called a middle school is not always a middle school. Lounsbury (1990) pointed out that even though more schools are implementing characteristics of a middle school, there is still a long way to go. He also stated that, “The middle school concept is still more promise than practice.”(p.10)

Alexander and McEwin (1989) conducted a national survey which suggested that the middle school concept is becoming more evident in schools, yet not as widespread as the number of middle schools that exist. George and Alexander (1993) point out that the literature on the middle school movement does not always provide desirable characteristics of a middle school for educators to learn from. Therefore, many educational leaders have been forced to interpret the literature their own way. However, listings of desirable characteristics began to increase through the publications of various professional journals.

The National Middle School Association provides a list of essential elements of a middle school in their publication of *This We Believe*. This list of elements is widely accepted as a working definition of a middle school. In fact, the list often serves as a benchmark for middle level educators to measure their schools against (Irvin, Valentine, & Clark, 1994). The essential elements include:

- Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory
- Varied teaching and learning approaches
- Assessment and evaluation that promote learning
- Flexible organizational structures
- Programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
- Comprehensive guidance and support services

Irvin et al. (1994) point out that the authors of *This We Believe* recognize that there may be other characteristics of a middle school that are valid and important. In fact, there are many publications which list the desirable characteristics of a middle school. George and Alexander (1993) state that, “Although there were differences among the various listings, most stressed the same matters of curriculum, instructional organization, teacher guidance, instructional methodology, and middle school orientation and articulation that had been persistent in the sources already cited.”(p.7)

George and Oldaker (1985) surveyed 160 middle schools that were identified as exemplary by judges, inquiring about the characteristics of their school. The

features that schools had in common included a flexibly scheduled day, interdisciplinary team organization, advisor-advisee teacher guidance program, a favorable school learning climate, curriculum provisions for student personal development, and so on.

Similar findings were reported in a national study conducted by Cawelti (1988) for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Cawelti conducted a national survey of 672 schools and he concluded:

...middle schools are much more likely to use a teacher-advisor program, provide transition and articulation activities, use interdisciplinary teaching and block schedules, and provide staff development activities that extend the range of teaching strategies appropriate to their students. (p. 4)

Along the same lines as the previously mentioned studies, the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents presented its findings in *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century* (1989). This task force made several recommendations which parallel the findings of the other studies:

- Create small communities for learning... schools-within-schools or houses, students grouped together as teams...
- Teach a core academic program...
- Ensure success for all students...
- Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about middle grade students...

- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents...
- Improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents...
- Reengage families in the education of young adolescents...
- Connect schools with communities... (1989, p. 9)

Other studies that reported the elements of a middle school are the national surveys conducted by the Effective Middle Grades Program at the John Hopkins University Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS). Both Epstein (1990) and MacIver (1990) identified elements of a middle school that were being implemented or planned to be implemented. For example, advisory programs, interdisciplinary team organization, school transition programs, flexible scheduling, exploratory courses, parental involvement, cooperative learning, and variations of long-term teacher-student relationships. Irvin et al. sum up the condition of the middle level schools:

Middle level education came of age during the 1980s. To be sure, much maturing is still ahead, but the difficult developmental steps have been taken that can ensure a rewarding maturity... While middle level education certainly has come of age and developed a unique identity in the realm of K-12 education, much has yet to be accomplished before the typical middle level school across the country has positively addressed each of the ten essential elements (p. 58)

CHAPTER III
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the middle school concept, what is happening in their school, and what actually should be happening. The findings of this study were compared to the Crowe study, which focuses on administrators' perceptions.

The purpose of investigating what should be happening according to the middle school concept and what is actually happening in the rural districts researched, was to determine how accurately the two rural districts involved follow the middle school concept.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There were three major questions explored in this study.

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the current practices in their middle school?
- 2) What are teachers' perceptions of what a middle school should be doing?
- 3) How do teachers' perceptions compare with administrators' perceptions?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study included 51 middle level teachers from two rural districts. One school district consists of 28 middle level teachers, 321 middle level students, and 3 administrators. The other school district consists of 42 middle level teachers, 500 students, and 8 administrators. The subjects have various years of experience and diverse teaching backgrounds. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary and all respondents' names were kept anonymous.

Materials

A researcher-developed survey (see appendix) was utilized to obtain information about teachers' perceptions of what their middle school is like and their concept of what a middle school is. The survey was developed by the authors of this companion study.

In this survey, teachers were asked to respond to 15 statements. Space was provided for any additional comments. The participants were asked to circle the response that best reflects their feeling about the given statement. The five response choices were: agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and not sure.

This survey was designed with the intention of gaining insights into the perceptions teachers have of the middle school concept, what is happening in their

schools, and what actually should be happening. The findings of the responses to this survey will be compared to the Crowe study, which focuses on administrators.

Procedures

After obtaining permission from the administrators of both schools involved, the researchers of this companion study distributed surveys to both teachers and administrators in both schools.

Teachers from the first school district received white surveys, while teachers and administrators from the second school district received pink surveys. Though the content of both surveys were exactly the same, surveys were color coded so that both researchers in this companion study could determine what district they were obtained from. The surveys were also color coded to prevent any biases that could have potentially occurred if participants in the study had to indicate what district that they were from.

A cover letter was attached to each survey requesting the voluntary participation of teachers and administrators in this study. They were instructed to fill out the survey anonymously and place it into the researchers' mailboxes located in the schools' main offices. A two week time limit was given. The researchers then collected the surveys from their mailboxes and recorded the survey data.

Analysis

A quantitative form of descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data collected from both teacher and administrator surveys. The Crowe study was a companion to this study. All responses were kept separate through color coding and then recorded. Individual teacher responses as well as administrator responses were recorded and then converted into percentages.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the middle school concept, what is happening currently in the schools, and what ideally should be happening. The findings of this study were compared to the Crowe study, which focuses on administrators' perceptions.

A total of fifty-one middle school level teachers from two rural districts, responded to a researcher designed survey. Both descriptive and statistical analyses of each statement were completed.

Results of Middle Level Teacher Survey

The statistical analysis of the Middle Level Teacher Survey is contained in tables one and two at the end of this chapter. The percentages computed have been calculated precisely in these tables. These percentages will be rounded off to the nearest percent for the descriptive analysis portion of this chapter. The raw data for this survey is contained in Appendix B.

Statement 1: Middle school teachers pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents (physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual).

Table 1 reveals that 35% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently middle level teachers in their schools pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents in their school, while 63% somewhat agreed. In contrast, only 2% somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed or weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 shows that an overwhelming 92% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally middle level teachers should pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents, while 6% somewhat agreed. In comparison, only 2% somewhat disagreed with this statement and 0% disagreed or weren't sure.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 98% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, Table 1 reveals that currently 98% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 2: The middle school curriculum is based on both academic and personal need of the middle level students.

Table 1 reveals that 20% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently the middle school curriculum in their schools is based on both academic and personal need of the middle level students, while 49% somewhat agreed. In comparison, only 22% somewhat disagreed, while 8% disagreed, and 2% weren't sure.

Table 2 indicates that 80% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that ideally the middle school curriculum should be based on both academic and personal need of the middle level students, while 14% somewhat agreed. In contrast, only 4% somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed, while 2% weren't sure.

Table 2 shows that 94% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 reveals that currently, 69% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 3: In the middle level classes, teachers experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student need.

Table 1 indicates that 18% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently teachers in their schools experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student need, while 55% somewhat agreed. In comparison,

16% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 10% disagreed, while 2% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 shows that 80% of the middle level teacher respondents agreed that ideally middle level teachers in their schools should experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student, while 24% somewhat agreed. In contrast, 0% of the respondents somewhat disagreed and 2% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 99% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 reveals that currently 72% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 4: In the middle school, students have the opportunity to use many different methods of learning.

Table 1 shows that 24% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently students in their schools have the opportunity to use many different methods of learning, while 45% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 24% of the respondents somewhat disagreed and 8% disagreed, while 0% were unsure about this statement.

Table 2 reveals that 78% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that students should ideally have the opportunity to use many different methods of learning according to the middle school concept, while 20% somewhat agreed.

In contrast, only 0% somewhat disagreed and 2% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 98% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 reveals that currently 69% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 5: Middle school teachers teach interdisciplinary units.

Table 1 reveals that 25% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently teachers in their schools teach interdisciplinary units, while 41% of the respondents somewhat agreed. In comparison, 24% of the respondents somewhat disagreed and 10% disagreed, while 10% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 shows that 78% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that ideally teachers should teach interdisciplinary units, while 20% of the respondents somewhat agreed. In contrast, 0% somewhat disagreed and 2% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 98% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 66% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 6: The middle school program provides many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests.

Table 1 shows that 6% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently the middle school program in their schools provide many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests, while 22% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 32% of the respondents somewhat disagreed and 41% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 reveals that 33% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that ideally the middle school program should provide many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests, while 49% somewhat agreed. In contrast, 14% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 4% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that 82% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that only 28% of the respondents somewhat agree of agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 7: The middle school program provides many hands-on learning experiences for students.

Table 1 indicates that 45% of middle level respondents agreed that currently their schools provide many hands-on learning experiences for students,

while 41% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 12% of the respondents somewhat disagreed and 2% disagreed, while 0% were unsure of this statement.

Table 2 shows that 80% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally the middle school program should provide many hands-on learning experiences, while the remaining 20% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement.

Table 2 reveals that an overwhelming 100% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 86% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 8: Within the middle school, students have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through and advisor/advisee program.

Table 1 reveals that only 4% of middle level teachers agreed that students have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through advisor/advisee programs currently in their schools, while 31% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 25% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 35% disagreed, while 4% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 shows that 69% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally students should have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through advisor/ advisee programs according to the middle school

concept, while 27% somewhat agreed. In contrast, only 4% somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 96% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 35% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 9: Instruction in the middle school is accommodated to the varied learning styles of the student.

Table 1 indicates that 8% of middle level teacher respondents currently agreed that instruction in the middle school is accommodated to the varied learning styles of the student in their schools, while 53% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 25% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 10% disagreed, while 4% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 shows that 65% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally instruction in the middle school should be accommodated to the varied learning styles of the student, while 31% of respondents somewhat agreed. In contrast, only 2% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed, while 2% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 reveals that an overwhelming 96% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools.

In comparison, table 1 shows that 61% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 10: Grading and reporting procedures in the middle school involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress.

Table 1 shows that 27% of middle level respondents agreed that currently Grading and reporting procedures in their schools involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress, while 43% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 16% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 10% disagreed, while 4% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 reveals that 69% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally grading and reporting procedures in the middle school should involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress, while 27% somewhat agreed. In contrast, only 0% somewhat disagreed and 2% disagreed, while 2% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 96% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 70% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 11: In the middle grades, teachers meet in teams to plan instruction.

Table 1 reveals that 51% of middle level teacher respondents agreed

that currently teachers in their schools meet in teams to plan instruction, while 29% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 10% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 10% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure.

Table 2 shows that 88% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally teachers should meet in teams to plan instruction, while the remaining 12% of the respondents somewhat agreed with this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 100% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 81% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 12: The middle school climate is warm, caring, and conducive to learning.

Table 1 reveals that 35% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently the middle school climate in their schools are warm, caring, and conducive to learning, while 59% somewhat agreed. In comparison, only 6% somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure.

Table 2 shows that 82% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that ideally the middle school climate should be warm, caring, and conducive to learning according to the middle school concept, while 16% somewhat agreed. In contrast, 0% of respondents somewhat disagreed or disagreed, while 2% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 98% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 94% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 13: The extra-curricular activities in the middle school are set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest.

Table 1 shows that 41% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently extra-curricular activities in their schools are set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest, while 31% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 14% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 12% disagreed, 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 reveals that 80% of middle level respondents agreed that ideally extra-curricular activities in the middle school should be set up so that all students could find at least one activity to meet their interest, while 18% somewhat agreed. In contrast, only 2% somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 98% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 72% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 14: Teachers in the middle school enjoy working with students at this age.

Table 1 reveals that middle level teacher respondents agreed that currently 37% of middle level teachers in their schools enjoy working with students at this age, while 53% somewhat agreed. In comparison, 10% somewhat disagreed and 0% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure.

Table 2 shows that 88% of middle level teacher respondents agreed that ideally teachers in the middle school should enjoy working with students at that age, while 10% somewhat agreed. In contrast, 0% of the respondents somewhat disagreed or disagreed, while 2% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 98% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 90% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Statement 15: The middle school has fully implemented the middle school concept.

Table 1 reveals that 14% of middle level teacher respondents currently agreed that their middle schools have fully implemented the middle school concept, while 55% somewhat agreed. In contrast, 20% of respondents somewhat disagreed and 12% disagreed, while 0% weren't sure about this statement.

Table 2 shows that 82% of middle level teacher respondents, ideally agreed that the middle school concept should be fully implemented, while the remaining 18% somewhat agreed with this statement.

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming 100% of the respondents surveyed somewhat agree or agree that this statement should be happening in their schools. In comparison, table 1 shows that currently 69% of the respondents somewhat agree or agree that this is actually happening in their schools.

Teacher Comments

At the end of the teacher survey a space was set aside for respondents to express their comments and concerns regarding the middle school concept, what is happening in their schools, and what they think should be happening. The following comments were made:

“The middle school teachers at our school are an excellent group of educators. No middle school will ever meet all of the concepts of the ideal middle school.”

“We have team meetings, but not to discuss instruction.”

“Our schedule does not allow us to implement the middle school concept fully. We teach in forty minute blocks, and our students are grouped heterogeneously. It is impossible to integrate classes because we never have the same classes of students. Also, we only have one free period for planning. It is

not possible to meet with colleagues and plan instruction. There is simply just not enough time to plan. Our planning periods are usually used to discuss our neediest students or our inclusion students. Parent conferences are also scheduled during these times.”

“ We have an Advisor/Advisee Program, but no time is allotted for it during our daily schedule. Teachers in our district use their own time after school to try to meet with their advisees. Unfortunately, many advisees don’t come in to meet with their advisors after school. It is sad that we don’t have time set aside during the school day to meet with these children.”

**TABLES OF TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' SURVEY
RESPONSES**

Table 1
Percentages of Current Middle School Teachers' Responses

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<u>Statements:</u>					
1.	35.29%	62.75%	1.96%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	19.61%	49.02%	21.57%	7.84%	1.96%
3.	17.65%	54.90%	15.69%	9.80%	1.96%
4.	23.53%	45.10%	23.53%	7.84%	0.00%
5.	25.49%	41.18%	23.53%	9.80%	0.00%
6.	5.88%	21.57%	31.37%	41.18%	0.00%
7.	45.10%	41.18%	11.76%	1.96%	0.00%
8.	3.92%	31.37%	25.49%	35.29%	3.92%
9.	7.84%	52.94%	25.49%	9.80%	3.92%
10.	27.45%	43.14%	15.69%	9.80%	3.92%
11.	50.98%	29.41%	9.80%	9.80%	0.00%
12.	35.29%	58.82%	5.88%	0.00%	0.00%
13.	41.18%	31.37%	13.73%	11.76%	0.00%
14.	37.25%	52.94%	9.80%	0.00%	0.00%
15.	13.73%	54.90%	19.61%	11.76%	0.00%

Table 2
Percentages of Middle School Teachers' Ideal Responses

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<u>Statements:</u>					
1.	92.16%	5.88%	1.96%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	80.39%	13.73%	3.92%	0.00%	1.96%
3.	74.51%	23.53%	0.00%	1.96%	0.00%
4.	78.43%	19.61%	0.00%	1.96%	0.00%
5.	78.43%	19.61%	0.00%	1.96%	0.00%
6.	33.33%	49.02%	13.73%	3.92%	0.00%
7.	80.39%	19.61%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
8.	68.63%	27.45%	3.92%	0.00%	0.00%
9.	64.71%	31.37%	1.96%	0.00%	1.96%
10.	68.63%	27.45%	0.00%	1.96%	1.96%
11.	88.24%	11.76%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
12.	82.35%	15.69%	0.00%	0.00%	1.96%
13.	80.39%	17.65%	1.96%	0.00%	0.00%
14.	88.24%	9.80%	0.00%	0.00%	1.96%
15.	82.35%	17.65%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Table 3
Percentages of Teachers' Responses:
Currently vs. Ideally

	<u>Currently</u>	<u>Ideally</u>
<u>Statements:</u>	A or SA	A or SA
1	98%	98%
2	69%	94%
3	72%	99%
4	69%	98%
5	66%	98%
6	28%	82%
7	86%	100%
8	35%	96%
9	61%	96%
10	70%	96%
11	81%	100%
12	94%	98%
13	72%	98%
14	90%	98%
15	69%	100%

Table 4
Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions: Currently vs. Ideally

	<u>Teachers:</u> <u>Currently</u>	<u>Administrators:</u> <u>Currently</u>	<u>Teachers:</u> <u>Ideally</u>	<u>Administrators:</u> <u>Ideally</u>
<u>Statements:</u>	A or SA	A or SA	A or SA	A or SA
1	98%	73%	98%	100%
2	69%	64%	94%	100%
3	72%	73%	99%	91%
4	69%	73%	98%	100%
5	66%	82%	98%	100%
6	28%	36%	82%	100%
7	86%	91%	100%	100%
8	35%	18%	96%	100%
9	61%	82%	96%	100%
10	70%	55%	96%	100%
11	81%	91%	100%	100%
12	94%	91%	98%	100%
13	72%	91%	98%	100%
14	90%	100%	98%	100%
15	69%	64%	100%	100%

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the middle school concept, what is happening currently in the schools, and what ideally should be happening. The findings of this study were compared to the Crowe study, which focuses on administrators' perceptions.

A total of fifty-one middle school level teachers from two rural districts, responded to a researcher designed survey. Both descriptive and statistical analyses of each statement were completed.

Conclusions

This study supports prior research that indicates that though many schools call themselves "middle schools," in essence, they are not fully implementing the middle school concept. The findings from this study suggest that this may be true of the two, rural districts surveyed in this study.

In the two, rural schools surveyed that call themselves "middle schools," data suggest that both of these schools seem to be heading in the right direction to implement the ideals of the middle school concept. Though teachers agreed that many ideals of the middle school concept had not been fully implemented or

developed in their schools, an almost perfect percentage of teachers surveyed seemed to have a good understanding of what the middle school concept actually is. Furthermore, an overwhelming number of respondents agreed that all of the essential elements of the ideal middle school should be implemented.

Fortunately, almost all of the middle school teachers (98%) surveyed agreed that middle school teachers pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents, including physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual aspects. An almost perfect percentage (98%) also recognized that this was an essential element of the middle school concept that should be implemented in their schools. Table 4 shows that, in comparison, the Crowe study indicated that though administrators also believed overwhelmingly (100%) that this was an essential element of the middle school concept, only three quarters (73%) agreed that this was actually happening in their schools. Though this is consistent with teachers' ideal perceptions of what should be happening in their schools, it contrasts what teachers and administrators agree is actually happening.

Data from this study also indicated that an overwhelming percentage of the middle school teachers surveyed (94%) agreed that currently the middle school climates in their schools were warm, caring, and conducive to learning. An even greater percentage of teachers (98%) agreed that ideally this should be happening in their schools according to the middle school concept. In comparison, table 4 shows that the Crowe study indicated that administrators

surveyed (91%) strongly agreed with teachers about the current climates in their middle schools. Administrators surveyed (100%), like teachers, strongly agreed that the climates in their schools should be warm, caring, and conducive to learning.

According to this study, data suggest that less than three-quarters of the teachers surveyed (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that their middle school curriculums are currently based on both academic and personal needs of the middle level students. An overwhelming percentage of teachers (94%) agreed that curriculums should be. Interestingly enough, the Crowe study suggests that a similar percentage of administrators surveyed (100%) also agreed with teachers in that this element should be practiced in their middle schools. However, only a little more than half of the administrators (64%) agreed that this was currently happening in their schools.

Data also revealed that an average percentage of teachers surveyed (72%) agreed or somewhat agreed that teachers in their schools currently experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student need. Also, an almost perfect percentage of these teachers (99%) agreed that ideally this element should be implemented in their schools. The Crowe study revealed (see table 4) that administrators surveyed (91%) also agreed or somewhat agreed that this concept should be implemented, however, only about three-quarters of the administrators surveyed (73%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this was

happening in their schools. Teachers and administrators both seemed to agree that this element should be incorporated into their middle schools, however, currently it has not been fully implemented in their schools.

According to this study, data indicated that an overwhelming percentage (98%) of teachers agreed or somewhat agreed that students should have the opportunity to use many different methods of learning. Currently, almost three-quarters of the teachers surveyed (69%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening in their schools. Administrators surveyed (100%), as with teachers, also agreed or somewhat agreed overwhelmingly that this element of the middle school concept should be implemented. However, only about three-quarters of administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was currently being practiced in their schools. Both teachers and administrators seem to suggest that this element should be implemented, yet realized that it is not being fully implemented in their schools.

Data from this study also suggest that most of the teachers surveyed (98%) in this study agreed or somewhat agreed that middle school teachers should teach interdisciplinary units. However, only over half of the teachers surveyed (66%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening currently in their schools. Though administrators, like teachers, overwhelmingly agreed (100%) that this element of the middle school concept should be happening (see table 4),

administrators agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was currently being practiced in their schools almost 16% more than teachers did.

In this study, data suggest that over three-quarters of the teachers surveyed (82%) agreed or somewhat agreed that their middle schools should provide opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests. However, though teachers agreed this should be happening, only about a quarter of the respondents surveyed (28%) agreed that this element of the middle school concept was being implemented in their schools. In the Crowe study (see table 4), administrators surveyed (100%) were consistent with teachers' beliefs in that they agreed that this element should be implemented, yet only a little more than a quarter of them (36%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this was happening in their middle schools.

The data from this study also suggested that all of the teacher respondents surveyed (100%) agreed or somewhat agreed that the middle school program should provide hands-on learning experiences. Of the teachers surveyed, most agreed or somewhat agreed (86%) that their schools were practicing this element of the middle school concept. According to the Crowe study, administrators surveyed (100%) also overwhelmingly agreed or somewhat agreed that this should be happening. Currently in their schools, even more administrators (91%) than teachers agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was happening in their schools.

This study suggests that most of the teachers surveyed (96%) agreed or somewhat agreed that their middle schools should have opportunities available for students to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through an advisor/advisee program. Data suggest that only a little more than a quarter of teacher respondents surveyed (35%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element is actually being practiced in their schools. The Crowe study also suggests (see table 4) that administrators surveyed (100%) overwhelmingly agreed or somewhat agreed that this element of the middle school concept should be implemented in their schools. However, fewer administrators (18%) than teachers surveyed agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was currently being practiced in their schools. Through data collected from both studies, it is apparent that both teachers and administrators agree that this element should be implemented, but it is not implemented to the extent that it should be.

It is also revealed in this study that an almost perfect percentage of teachers surveyed (98%) agreed or strongly agreed that instruction in the middle school should be accommodated to the varied learning styles of middle level students. Though almost all teacher respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that this element of the middle school concept should be happening in their schools, only a little more than half of the respondents surveyed (61%) agreed or somewhat agreed that it is. Data from the Crowe study indicated (see table 4) that administrators surveyed (100%) also overwhelmingly agreed that this element of

the middle school concept should be happening in their schools. Interestingly enough, data suggest that more administrators surveyed (82%) than teachers agreed or somewhat agreed that instruction in their middle schools is accommodated to the varied learning styles of middle level students.

In this study, data suggested that a high percentage of teachers surveyed (96%) agreed or somewhat agreed that grading and reporting procedures in the middle school should involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress. Data indicated that about three-quarters of the teacher respondents surveyed (70%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element of the middle school concept was being implemented in their schools. The Crowe study revealed (see table 4) that all of the administrators surveyed (100%) were consistent with teachers in that they agreed or somewhat agreed that this element should be practiced in their schools. However, only about half of the administrators surveyed (55%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was being practiced in their schools.

Data from this study indicated that a perfect percentage of teachers surveyed (100%) agreed or somewhat agreed that teachers in the middle school should meet in teams to plan instruction. Of the teacher respondents surveyed, over three-quarters of them (81%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element of the middle school concept was being practiced in their schools. The Crowe study revealed (see table 4) that, as with teachers, a perfect percentage of administrators

surveyed (100%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element should be implemented in their middle schools. Consequently, a higher percentage of administrators (91%) than teachers surveyed agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was being implemented in their middle level schools.

Data from this study also indicated that an overwhelming percentage of the middle school teachers surveyed (94%) agreed that currently the middle school climates in their schools were warm, caring, and conducive to learning. An even greater percentage of teachers (98%) agreed that ideally this should be happening in their schools according to the middle school concept. In comparison, table 4 shows that the Crowe study indicated that administrators surveyed (91%) strongly agreed with teachers about the current climates in their middle schools. Administrators surveyed (100%), as with teachers, strongly agreed that climates in their schools should be warm, caring, and conducive to learning.

In this study, data suggested that an overwhelming percentage of teachers surveyed (98%) agreed or somewhat agreed that extra-curricular activities in the middle school should be set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest. Of these teacher respondents surveyed, a little less than three-quarters of them (72%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element of the middle school concept was being practiced in their schools. The Crowe study revealed (see table 4) that all of the administrators surveyed (100%) agreed or

somewhat agreed that this element should be implemented in their schools.

Interestingly enough, a relatively higher percentage of administrators surveyed (91%) rather than teachers agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was being implemented in their schools.

It is also revealed that an almost perfect percentage of teachers surveyed (98%) in this study agreed or somewhat agreed that teachers in the middle school should enjoy working with students at this age. A high percentage of teacher respondents (90%) agreed or somewhat agreed that teachers in their middle schools enjoy working with middle level students. The Crowe study found (see table 4) that administrators, as with teachers, agreed or somewhat agreed that teachers should practice this element of the middle school concept. Of these administrators surveyed, all them (100%) agreed or somewhat agreed that this element was being implemented in their middle schools.

This study suggests that a perfect percentage of teachers surveyed (100%) agreed or somewhat agreed that their middle schools should fully implement the middle school concept. Of the teacher respondents surveyed, less than three-quarters of them (69%) agreed or somewhat agreed that their schools have fully implemented this concept. According to data from the Crowe study (see table 4), a perfect percentage of administrators surveyed (100%), as with teachers, agreed or somewhat agreed that the middle school concept should be fully implemented

in their schools. However, even less administrators surveyed (64%) than teachers agreed or somewhat agreed that their schools were practicing this concept.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Administrators' Current Responses

Table 1
Percentages of Current Middle School Administrators'
Responses

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
<u>Statements:</u>					
1.	36.36%	36.36%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	27.27%	36.36%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%
3.	9.09%	63.64%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%
4.	18.18%	54.55%	18.18%	9.09%	0.00%
5.	27.27%	54.55%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%
6.	18.18%	18.18%	27.27%	36.36%	0.00%
7.	27.27%	63.64%	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%
8.	9.09%	9.09%	9.09%	72.73%	0.00%
9.	27.27%	54.55%	9.09%	9.09%	0.00%
10.	27.27%	27.27%	9.09%	27.27%	9.09%
11.	54.55%	36.36%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%
12.	36.36%	54.55%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%
13.	45.45%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%
14.	54.55%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
15.	18.18%	45.45%	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%

Appendix B

Table 2 Administrators' Ideal Responses

Table 2
Percentages of Middle School Administrators' Ideal Responses

	A	SA	SD	D	NS
Statements:					
1.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
3.	72.73%	18.18%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%
4.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
5.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
6.	63.64%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
7.	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
8.	63.64%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
9.	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
10.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
11.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
12.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
13.	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
14.	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
15.	90.91%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Appendix C

Table 3 Percentages of Administrators' Responses: Currently vs. Ideally

Table 3
Percentages of Administrators' Responses:
Currently vs. Ideally

	<u>Currently</u>	<u>Ideally</u>
<u>Statements:</u>	A or SA	A or SA
1	73%	100%
2	64%	100%
3	73%	91%
4	73%	100%
5	82%	100%
6	36%	100%
7	91%	100%
8	18%	100%
9	82%	100%
10	55%	100%
11	91%	100%
12	91%	100%
13	91%	100%
14	100%	100%
15	64%	100%

Appendix D
Middle School Survey

Middle School Survey

Please check the appropriate response: I am a(n): _____ administrator _____ middle school teacher

Directions: For each item in the survey, please mark one response in each column.

- 1) Please respond to all items marked “Currently” by circling the choice which identifies your perception of the practices that currently exist in your school.
- 2) Please respond to all items marked “Ideally” by circling the choice, which identifies your perception of how the practices should exist in your school.

A= Agree	SA= Somewhat agree	SD= Somewhat disagree	D= Disagree	NS= Not sure
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	<u>Currently</u>					<u>Ideally</u>				
1) Middle school teachers pay attention to the developmental characteristics of adolescents (physical, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual).	A	SA	SD	D	NS	A	SA	SD	D	NS
2) The middle school curriculum is based on both academic and personal need of the middle level students.	A	SA	SD	D	NS	A	SA	SD	D	NS
3) In the middle level classes, teachers experiment with the organization of time and people to best serve student need.	A	SA	SD	D	NS	A	SA	SD	D	NS
4) In the middle school, students have the opportunity to use many different method of learning.	A	SA	SD	D	NS	A	SA	SD	D	NS
5) Middle school teachers teach interdisciplinary units.	A	SA	SD	D	NS	A	SA	SD	D	NS
6) The middle school program provides many opportunities for students to choose topics based on their interests.	A	SA	SD	D	NS	A	SA	SD	D	NS
7) The middle school program provides many										

hands-on learning experiences for students.

A SA SD D NS

A SA SD D NS

(Continue on back)

A= Agree SA= Somewhat agree SD= Somewhat disagree D= Disagree NS= Not sure

8) Within the middle school, students have opportunities to discuss home, school, and peer related problems through an advisor/advisee program.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
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9) Instruction in the middle school is accommodated to the varied learning styles of the students.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
--	--------------	--------------

10) Grading and reporting procedures in the middle school involve parents, students, and teachers in discussions on student progress.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
---	--------------	--------------

11) In the middle grades, teachers meet in teams to plan instruction.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
---	--------------	--------------

12) The middle school climate is warm, caring, and conducive to learning.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
---	--------------	--------------

13) The extra-curricular activities in the middle school are set up so that all students are able to find at least one activity to meet their interest.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
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14) Teachers in the middle school enjoy working with students at this age.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
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15) The middle school has fully implemented the middle school concept.	A SA SD D NS	A SA SD D NS
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Please feel free to make any comments and/or any clarifications below:

Thank you for your time and cooperation in filling out this survey.

***Please return to Karen Crowe or Dana Taurisano by Wednesday, December 10th.