DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS: RESEARCH SUMMARY

Research Summary

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Understanding and responding to the unique developmental characteristics of young adolescents, 10- to 15-year-olds, in culturally responsive and sustaining ways is central among the tenets of middle level education (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). During early adolescence, a distinct period of human growth and development between childhood and adolescence, young adolescents experience rapid development, shape beliefs and attitudes, and adopt health habits and social behaviors that lay the foundation for adulthood (McCarthy et al., 2016). Though young adolescents may share common developmental characteristics, each has distinctive experiences, unique perspectives, and individual traits (Mertens & Caskey, in press). Supporting young people during this crucial time in their lives, requires acknowledging the shared perspective of young adolescents while recognizing that individuals experience early adolescence differently. Failing to do so creates an essentialized version of young adolescent development that inevitably creates a dichotomy between those who are normal and abnormal and what is typical and atypical (Brinegar et al., 2019). This research summary attempts to present a fluid picture of young adolescent development that converges developmental characteristics with social identity in culturally sustaining ways.

Early in the 20th century, G. Stanley Hall (1904), identified early adolescence (i.e., preadolescence) as a unique developmental growth stage in which youth transition from their savage state to a civilized state. Hall's theory gained popularity despite its grounding in scientifically biased research that reinforced Western racist and patriarchal stereotypes (Lesko, 2012). He believed White boys would reach a civilized state before White girls and thought BIPOC children could never reach it (Hughes-Decatur, 2012).

Subsequently, notable developmental psychologists (e.g., Piaget, 1960), pediatricians (e.g., Tanner, 1973), and scholars (e.g., Havighurst, 1968) advanced early adolescence as a credible developmental stage. In the middle grades, educational leaders, William Alexander (Alexander et al., 1968) and Donald Eichhorn (1966), and researcher, Joan Lipsitz (1984), heightened attention on early adolescence and described how middle schools could support young adolescents by responding to their development needs. Then, a groundbreaking report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) garnered widespread attention and specified recommendations for institutions, communities, and policy makers to improve young adolescents' education. Professional associations (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2010; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1989; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 1982, 1995, 2003) also offered recommendations for educational programs and practices that focus on young adolescents' developmental characteristics and needs.

Recent scholars continue to describe the distinctive characteristics of young adolescents regarding their physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological development (Bishop & Harrison, 2021), while acknowledging the scant research about the development of young adolescents' social identities (e.g., race, gender, class) (Brinegar, 2015). Though using these categories to

frame young adolescent development is a hallmark of the middle grades schooling, this developmental approach has limitations. First, developmental characteristics are overlapping and interrelated; each affects another characteristic. These categorizations vary and are relatively arbitrary. Second, developmental characteristics may oversimplify or describe young adolescents in generalities leading to the creation of an essentialized version of a young adolescent that does not account for the role the intersectionality of social identities such as race, culture, and gender identity plays in identity development. This further marginalizes individuals for differences outside of what society considers typical in the realm of development (Brinegar et al., 2019). Third, developmentalism ignores issues of power, privilege, and equity, thereby ignoring the needs of many young adolescents (Beane, 2005; Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Brown, 2005; Busey & Gainer, 2021; Harrison et al., 2019; Lee & Vagle, 2010), and centering deficit and pejorative ways of thinking that result in either the need to "fix" youth that do not meet typical developmental standards or forcing youth characterized as atypical to assimilate into mainstream ways of being (Brinegar et al., 2019; Valencia, 1997).

Cognizant of these cautions, we attempt to present a summary that leads to a more nuanced, assets-based understanding of young adolescents that converges developmentalism with culturally responsive, sustaining, and equitable pedagogies (Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Busey & Gainer, 2021; Harrison et al., 2019). We limit our summary to physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological development while acknowledging prior research regarding moral development (Brighton, 2007; Kohlberg, 1983) and spiritual development (Lingley, 2013).

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical development refers to biological changes in the human body leading to growth and maturation. During early adolescence, the young adolescent body undergoes more rapid growth than at any other time except from birth to two years old. In early adolescence, the dominant physical development characteristics include growth spurts, puberty, and neural change (Patton et al., 2016). These noticeable physical changes lead to increased self-awareness among young adolescents (Harrison et al., 2019). Scholars assert that social and institutional factors influence young adolescent development (Busey & Gainer, 2021)— including physical development. Along with the biological changes that young adolescents undergo, we acknowledge that the social construction of adolescence has Eurocentric roots (Busey & Gainer, 2021).

Growth spurts include significant increases in height, weight, internal organ size, and skeletal and muscular systems (Norris et al., 2021; Office of Population Affairs, 2018). Because skeletal changes precede muscular development, young adolescents may experience coordination issues as well as growing pains when muscles and tendons do not adequately protect bones (Wiles et al., 2006). Fluctuations in basal metabolism cause these youth to experience periods of restlessness and fatigue (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). Young adolescents around the world are often physically vulnerable due to poor nutrition (Beal et al., 2019), their physical fitness (Guthold, 2020), and health habits (McCarthy et al., 2016) as well as high-risk behaviors such as drug use (Johnston et al., 2021) and early sexual activity (Magnusson et al., 2019). In addition to substance use and sexual health, youth face specific risk factors associated with bullying, homelessness, mental health, and nutrition that challenge their overall health and well-being (Mertens & Caskey, in press).

Puberty, a phase of physiological change triggered by the release of hormones, begins in early adolescence (Wood et al., 2019). The onset of puberty is an intense developmental period with hormones signaling the development of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and secondary sex characteristics (e.g., breast development in females; facial hair in males). Females tend to mature one to two years earlier than males (Wood et al., 2019). The growth hormone triggers physical growth (e.g., height increase) and contributes to the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. These highly visible changes and disparate rates of maturity may cause young adolescents to feel uncomfortable about differences in their physical development (Simmons & Blyth, 2008). With increased awareness about changes in their appearance, young adolescents may also compare themselves to standards of the beauty representative of the mainstream culture rather than prioritizing their own cultures (Harrison et al., 2019). In addition, pubertal changes can also increase levels of stress and anxiety among transgender gender and non-conforming youth (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

Neural changes in the young adolescent brain are remarkable. While brain size remains relatively unchanged, researchers report significant changes within the brain (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Giedd, 2012). During early adolescence, neural proliferation followed by synaptic pruning restructures the brain's neural circuitry (Giedd, 2004, 2012). Specific areas of the brain continue to develop including (a) the frontal cortex that handles executive functions such as planning and strategic thinking, (b) the cerebellum that supports coordination and movement, and (c) the amygdala that is associated with emotions (Bahr, 2017). While researchers note anatomic differences (e.g., myelination, tissue organization) in brain development of young adolescent males and females, their brains remain more alike than different (Giedd et al., 2012).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Physical development often affects young adolescents' cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological development. Practitioners and parents can ease young adolescents' concerns about physical development by explaining that these changes are natural and common (Strahan et al., 2009). Not only can adults respond honestly to young adolescents' questions (Bishop & Harrison, 2021), but they can also guide them to seek accurate and credible sources. Teachers can also disrupt deficit talk and disparaging comparisons about body size or body image (Bishop & Harrison, 2021) to promote young adolescents' well-being.

To support young adolescents' physical development, schools need to ensure a safe and healthy space for learning about their bodily changes. Among these learning opportunities are health and science classes where teachers can explain the physical changes and respond to young adolescents' questions about these changes (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Schools need to provide

(a) comprehensive health programs that encourage fitness and healthy lifestyles, (b) comprehensive sex education including LGBTQ inclusive education that supports and affirms healthy approaches to sexuality (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021), and (c) appropriate instruction concerning numerous health risks factors (e.g., bullying, homelessness, mental health, nutrition, sexual activity, substance use) that challenge young adolescents' well-being (Mertens & Caskey, in press). Schools must also arrange for access to plenty of water and nutritious food options during the school day.

To promote physical activity in the school day, schools need both physical fitness programming and classroom-based movement. Schools can offer physical education options that focus on individual fitness, functional exercise, and team effort, rather than competition. At the classroom level, schools can provide a variety seating of options (e.g., different sized chairs and tables) to accommodate the changing young adolescent body (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Teachers can incorporate movement within their classrooms such as grouping and re-grouping students for various activities. When planning instruction, teachers can collaborate to ensure that young adolescents have opportunities for physical movement as well as rest. Importantly, school administrators, teachers, and parents can work together to minimize peer competition and interrupt comparisons between early and late maturing youth.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Cognitive development refers to the increased ability of people to understand and reason. In young adolescents, intellectual development is not as visible as physical development, but it is just as intense. As with all developmental characteristics, it is important to note than an individual's intersecting identity and background experiences have a profound impact on their cognitive development. According to Milner (2012), schools perpetuate the myth of meritocracy when they solely take a biological view of cognitive development. For educators, this means asking hard questions about which students' schools systematically assume to be unable to engage in complex thinking tasks due to structural barriers around language, class, [dis]ability, race, and culture. An example of this is the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse youth in special education (Connor, 2017; Ford & Russo, 2016). Taking a culturally responsive approach to cognitive development requires educators to pay attention to the backgrounds and experiences of young adolescents (Harrison et al., 2019), recognizing that all young adolescents deserve for educators to challenge and engage them in meaningful ways.

During early adolescence, youth exhibit a wide range of individual cognitive development (Manning & Bucher, 2012; Scales, 2010), including metacognition and independent thought. They tend to be curious and display wide-ranging interests (Scales, 2010). Typically, young adolescents are eager to learn about topics they find interesting and useful—ones that are personally relevant (Bishop et al., 2019; Powell, 2014; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012) and represent their intersecting identities (i.e., race, culture, gender, sexuality, class) (Busey & Gainer, 2021; Harrison et al., 2019). Many also favor active over passive learning experiences and prefer interactions with peers during educational activities (Bishop et al., 2019).

During early adolescence, youth develop the capacity for abstract thought processes (Elkind, 1981; Piaget, 1960) though the transition to higher levels of cognitive function varies considerably across individuals. Young adolescents typically progress from concrete logical operations to acquiring the ability to develop and test hypotheses, analyze, and synthesize data, grapple with complex concepts, and think reflectively (Manning & Bucher, 2012). Similarly, they are increasingly able to think through ideological topics, argue a position, and challenge adult directives. Moreover, they have an enhanced ability to think about the future, anticipate their own needs, and develop personal goals (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

They form impressions of themselves through introspection and are often extremely perceptive (Brighton, 2007). To make sense of the world around them, young adolescents, as learners, build upon their individual experiences and prior knowledge (Piaget, 1960) to understand different perspectives and think more objectively (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Because experience plays a central role in developing the brain and induces learners to construct meaning based upon what they already believe and understand (Narayan et al., 2013), enacting culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies becomes an especially critical endeavor in the middle grades.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Teachers need to consider the cognitive developmental differences of young adolescents when planning learning experiences. To address this diversity, teachers need to provide an assortment of educational approaches and materials that are appropriate for their students' wide-ranging cognitive abilities. For example, concrete thinkers require more structured learning experiences, while abstract thinkers need more challenging activities (Manning & Bucher, 2012). In the same vein, multilingual youth need language-rich educational experiences that celebrate their rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds, viewing them as assets versus deterrents to academic success (Hurd, 2012; Pacheco & Smith, 2019; Yoon & Ulassi, 2019).

In addition, teachers need to plan culturally responsive and sustaining curricula for all youth around real life concepts (Gay, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017) and provide authentic educative activities (e.g., experimentation, analysis, synthesis of data) that are meaningful for young adolescents. This includes engaging them in examining their own biases and assumptions (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Frameworks, such as Gholdy Muhammad's Culturally and Historically Responsive Education (Muhammad, 2020), for example, put students' identities and histories at the center of curriculum development and provide middle level educators with concrete strategies for bolstering cognitive development in all youth. Because young adolescents' interests are evolving, they require opportunities for exploration throughout their educational program (Manning & Bucher, 2012). To foster intellectual development, youth need to interact directly with their world—through discourse and hands-on experiences with peers and adults. Service learning, justice-oriented curriculum, place-based learning, problem-based learning, and personalized learning

are all examples of curricular frameworks that support the developmental and cultural needs of young adolescents (AMLE, 2019). Similarly, young adolescents need to learn and engage in democratic principles, including co-designing learning opportunities as well practicing and planning decision-making (Beane, 2019; Bishop & Harrison, 2021; DeMink-Carthew, 2018).

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Social-emotional development concerns a person's capacity for interactions with individuals and groups and the ways they regulate their own emotions (Harrison et al., 2019). In early adolescence, social-emotional development typically follows physical and cognitive development and often intertwines with other areas of development. For example, Powell (2014) described the connectedness of young adolescents' emotions to their physical characteristics, resulting in high or low self-esteem depending on how they compare themselves with their peers. This ties to young adolescents' strong need to belong to a group—with peer approval becoming more important and adult approval decreasing in importance. As young adolescents mature socially and emotionally, they may experience conflicting loyalties to peer groups and family. Young adolescents tend to emulate their esteemed peers and non-parent adults and may be rebellious toward their parents and adults, yet tend to depend on them (Scales, 2010).

Because young adolescents are fiercely loyal to their peers, they search for social stature and belonging within their peer group (Barron & Kinney, 2017). Young adolescents often experiment with new behaviors as they seek social position and personal identity (Scales, 2010). They often experience tension between their desire to conform to the peer group norms and their aspiration to be distinctive and independent (Brighton, 2007; Tucker et al., 2011). Young adolescents experience a variety of peer associations—positive and negative. It becomes particularly important during this stage to consider the multiple identities of young adolescents (Harrison et al., 2019). Children become aware of ethnic identity as early as age 3 (Holmes, 1995) and by early adolescence they recognize the social implications of ethnic identity, including the power and privilege afforded to some groups over others (Phinney, 2008). This includes the socialization of White youth to see themselves as representing the normative standard for being (Busey & Gainer, 2021). This has major consequences for the social-emotional health of students of the global majority who are conversely socialized to view themselves as abnormal (Brinegar et al., 2019; Busey & Gainey, 2021). As such, schools continue to be unsafe spaces for students of the global majority. According to Howard (2016), the rise of zero-tolerance policies makes schools particularly hostile places for Black youth.

During early adolescence, individuals may experience feelings of romantic or sexual attraction (Scales, 2010). Many young adolescents explore their sexual orientation and gender identity at this time. The average age in the United States for gay youth to come out is 14 (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Negative peer associations, particularly bullying, also become more prevalent in the middle school years, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth disproportionately reporting physical and psychological bullying and lower levels of belonging (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Young adolescents are also socially and emotionally vulnerable due to influences of social media and at the same time social media creates a way for young adolescents to widen their peer networks beyond their local community (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Because of young adolescents' need for affiliation and belonging, they must have opportunities to form affirming and healthy relationships with peers and trusting adults. Educators must take a culturally responsive approach to supporting social-emotional development, recognizing the importance of peer relationships and friendship (Harrison et al., 2019). Schools must critically examine the ways their policies and practices cause social and emotional harm to young adolescents with diverse backgrounds. This requires all educators to commit to learning about systemic and racial trauma (Alvarez et al., 2016; Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Henderson et al., 2019) and the ways that schools cause and perpetuate it (Shevrin Venet, 2021).

Educators need to incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum in ways that support the development of empathy and provide ways for students to relieve stress in healthy ways. Social-emotional policies and practices that center compliance and assimilation are harmful to the social-emotional development of young adolescents, particularly those with marginalized identities who are most harmed by such policies (Duane et al., 2021; Simmons, 2017). As such, schools must have safe spaces available to youth where they can destress, process, and reflect, when needed, without any punitive consequences (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

Teachers can design cooperative learning activities and collaborative experiences for young adolescents to interact productively with peers (Alley, 2019) and plan activities that simulate social situations through role-plays or simulations (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Curriculum needs to also create space for young adolescents, particularly those with marginalized identities, to claim and tell their own stories to develop their voice and counter stereotypes (Gibbs Grey, 2019).

Schools play a key role in providing young adolescents with educative programs that promote freedom and independence within a safe space. Organizational structures such as teaming and service learning advance positive places for young adolescent's growth. School districts need to support programs that interrupt negative peer interactions, particularly bullying, that impede the healthy development of youth. Such programs must include inclusive policies that center on education versus compliance and prepare youth to be upstanders (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Schools need to also elicit input from students when developing policies and procedures, allowing them the opportunity to co-construct their own support intervention (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

During early adolescence, the characteristics of psychological development are identity formation and the quest for independence. Young adolescents tend to experience two stages of identity formation: (a) industry versus inferiority when 10- to 11-year- olds typically identify themselves by the tasks and skills they perform well, and (b) identity versus identity when 12- to 15-year-olds typically explore and experiment with various roles and experiences (Erikson, 1968). Identity development also depends on the processes of exploration and commitment to an identity (Marcia, 1980). In addition to the biological components of identity development, administrators and teachers need to understand how mainstream racist, Eurocentric, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic discourses critically impact the healthy identity development of young adolescents (Busey & Gainer, 2021).

During these years, young adolescents seek their own sense of individuality, uniqueness, and autonomy (Bishop & Harrison, 2021); they ask themselves, "Who am I?" (Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Kellough & Kellough, 2008) In this search, they explore their family and peer values (e.g., honesty, community, empathy) and commit to those values that resonate with them (Warren et al., 2017). Notably, young adolescents' developmental relationships with teachers play a pivotal role not only in their academic motivation, but also in ensuring their sense of belonging in school (Scales et al., 2021) While they search for an adult identity and adult acceptance, young adolescents also continually strive to maintain peer approval (Kellough & Kellough, 2008).

Their search for identity and self-discovery may intensify feelings of vulnerability, when sensing differences between themselves and others (Scales, 2010). During early adolescence, young adolescents typically develop an increased awareness of social identities including race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, or immigrant status (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Not only is identity multifaceted, but its formation also plays a vital role in young adolescents' overall psychological well-being. For youth with marginalized or minoritized identities, their overall psychological well-being would benefit from trusted adults interrupting, disrupting, and redressing racism (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Busey & Gainer, 2021). Indeed, young adolescents' psychological well-being connects inextricably with their social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

Friendships take on greater importance during these years, as young adolescents actively choose peer relationships to meet their own needs (Ferguson et al., 2022). While they often have friends outside of school, friendships at school remain vital for young adolescents' well-being and school behavior (Traylor et al., 2016). As young adolescents expand their friendships and peer group affiliations, they may experience conflicting feelings due to competing allegiances (Wiles et al., 2006). Furthermore, they may experience shifting feelings of superiority and inferiority (Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Kellough & Kellough, 2008; Wiles et al., 2006). Along with these shifting feelings, young adolescents are developing a sense of themselves—including self-concept and self-esteem.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

To support young adolescents' psychological development, schools need to provide opportunities for identity formation through (a) formal and non-formal educational experiences, (b) organizational structures that promote affiliation among peers (e.g., affinity groups), and (c) experiences to explore an array of interests. Because young adolescents need to explore and experiment with their social identities in a safe space, teachers can include such formal and informal experiences within the classroom context. For example, teachers can provide experiences such as role-playing, drama, and reading to foster identity formation. These experiences may help young adolescents experiment with distinct roles. Teachers can design experiences that build young adolescents' confidence, self-concept, and self-esteem. To ensure all students have these opportunities requires teachers to interrupt, disrupt, and stop instances of racism by engaging youth and their families in conversations about race (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019).

Schools are ideal settings for engaging young adolescents in formal and informal learning experiences—opportunities for exploration and experimentation. To maximize these opportunities, schools can offer provide both curricular (e.g., core subjects, exploratory courses) and extracurricular options (e.g., clubs, afterschool programs) that build on young adolescents' strengths. Schools need to provide culturally responsive and sustaining curricula and experiences (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017) centered around the interests, needs, and experiences for all young adolescents. Schools can also create personalized learning pathways for every young adolescent learner (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Moreover, teachers can incorporate opportunities for student voice and student choice (Hurd et al., 2018) and students' self-assessment of abilities—a strengths-based assessment.

To foster successful experiences for every young adolescent, schools need to provide organizational structures such as teaming and advisory programs. These structures help to ensure that every young adolescent is known well by at least one adult and has regular occasions to experience positive relationships with peers. Young adolescents need opportunities to form relationships with adults who understand them and who are willing to support their development. Schools can also adopt programs and practices that promote an atmosphere of friendliness, concern, and group cohesiveness (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). Within the classroom, teachers can honor the importance of friendships by providing peer interactions in the classroom (Ferguson et al., 2022). They can create and sustain psychologically safe spaces for young adolescents to talk about their experiences and feelings (Silverman & Mee, 2019).

Schools can provide programming by affinity groups that allows students to build community and discuss the challenges they face (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). For instance, schools can offer space for Gay-Straights Alliances, student-led groups, and student-organized school clubs, to meet. Ultimately, all young adolescents deserve psychologically safe school environments—ones that are free from racism, harsh criticism, pejorative language, humiliation, and sarcasm—to develop their identities.

CONCLUSION

All young adolescents deserve educational experiences and schools that address their physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological developmental characteristics in culturally sustaining and affirming ways. According to middle school founders (e.g., William Alexander, Donald Eichhorn, John Lounsbury, Gordon Vars), educators need to consider young adolescents when developing education environmental and organizational structures. The desire for developmental responsiveness sets the middle school apart from its predecessor, the junior high.

Today's educators and policymakers need to continue to support initiatives that provide young adolescents with developmentally appropriate learning experiences and environments. They also need to understand that our mainstream and Eurocentric constructions of early adolescence can limit or harm the healthy development of youth, particularly those with marginalized identities (Busey & Gainer, 2021; Harrison et al., 2019). To disrupt these notions guided by isms and phobias (e.g., racism, transphobia), it is imperative that educators take the time to understand each of their young adolescent learners, acknowledging the ways that culture, background, experience, and their relationship to power and privilege shape them. They then need to use this knowledge to center and celebrate the many assets that make young adolescents uniquely them (Brinegar et al., 2019).

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ANNOTATED REFERENCES

Bishop, P. A., & Harrison, L. M. (2021). *The successful middle school: This we believe.* Association for Middle Level Education.

Bishop and Harrison (2021) articulate the Association for Middle Level Education's (AMLE) position paper in *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe*—the fifth edition of *This We Believe* (AMLE 2010, NMSA, 1982, 1995, 2003). To begin, Bishop and Harrison emphasize the importance of responsive middle level education for young adolescents. They share AMLE's belief about the five essential attributes of successful middle schools: responsive, challenging, empowering, equitable, and engaging. Then, they explain the 18 characteristics that AMLE believes define successful middle schools. They describe these characteristics in three sections: (a) culture and community; (b) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (c) leadership and organization. Notably, Bishop and Harrison ground this edition of *This We Believe* in research and theory that practitioners can use as a framework for creating and sustaining the positive learning environments and opportunities for young adolescents.

Brinegar, K., Harrison, L., & Hurd, E. (2019). *Equity & cultural responsiveness in the middle grades*. Information Age.

The chapters in this edited volume outline a vision of middle grades education that centers the diverse identities of young adolescents in culturally sustaining and affirming ways. The authors in section one acknowledge the failures of a middle school movement that privileged Eurocentric views of developmentalism over the real experiences of young adolescents whose social identities and histories influence their lives. Sections two and three draw on this theme by presenting chapters that explore ways

to support young adolescents with marginalized identities, including those who have been unhoused, multilingual learners, LGBTQ+, and Black youth and share models for building equitable spaces through culturally responsive practices. In the final section, the authors describe strategies for preparing educators to teach young adolescents in equitable and culturally sustaining ways.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Busey, C. L., & Gainer, J. (2021). Arrested development: How This We Believe utilizes colorblind narratives and racialization to socially construct early adolescent development. *The Urban Review*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-021-00604-3

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THE SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOL: THIS WE BELIEVE CHARACTERISTICS

- Educators respect and value young adolescents
- The school environment is welcoming, inclusive, and affirming for all
- Health, wellness, and social-emotional competence are supported in curricula, school-wide programs, and related policies
- Policies and practices are student-centered, unbiased, and fairly implemented
- Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about young adolescents, equitable practices, and educational research

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

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