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The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education

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Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Intersecting New Needs and New Approaches
Sandra L. Stacki, Hofstra University; Micki M. Caskey, Portland State University; Steven B. Mertens, Illinois State University

The lives of middle school students are dynamic, and their needs and desires are always evolving. They experience more complicated lives as influences of the broader society including popular media and technology, immigration and cultural diversity, amplified political divisiveness, and bullying effect their daily lives both in and out of school. These influences have contributed to the need for more socioemotional support and the desire of students and teachers alike to find and express their voices. Since the publication of the 2002 Handbook volume focusing on curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the ideas, approaches, and practices of middle school educators and researchers have also needed to evolve and change in many ways to meet these changing realities and the needs of students, teachers, and schools. This volume includes chapters focusing on varying aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment currently being implemented in middle grades classrooms across the country.

CONTENTS:

Equity & Cultural Responsiveness in the Middle Grades
Kathleen M. Brinegar, Northern Vermont University; Lisa M. Harrison, Ohio University; Ellis Hurd, Illinois State University

While developmental responsiveness is a deservingly key emphasis of middle grades education, this emphasis has often been to the detriment of focusing on the cultural needs of young adolescents. This Handbook volume explores research relating to equity and culturally responsive practices when working with young adolescents. Middle school philosophy largely centers on young adolescents as a collective group. This lack of focus has great implications for young adolescents of marginalized identities including but not limited to those with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQ youth, and those living in poverty. If middle level educators claim to advocate for young adolescents, we need to mainstream conversations about supporting all young adolescents of marginalized identities. It empowers researchers, educators, and even young adolescents to critically examine and understand the intersectionality of identities that historically influenced (and continue to affect) young adolescents and why educators might perceive marginalized youth in certain ways.
It is for these reasons that researchers, teachers, and other key constituents involved in the education of young adolescents must devote themselves to the critical examination and understanding of the historical and current socio-cultural factors affecting all young adolescents. The chapters in this volume serve as a means to open an intentional and explicit space for providing a critical lens on early adolescence—a lens that understands that both developmental and cultural needs of young adolescents need to be emphasized to create a learning environment that supports every young adolescent learner.


Preparing Middle Level Educators for 21st Century Schools
Enduring Beliefs, Changing Times, Evolving Practices

Penny B. Howell, University of Louisville; Shawn A. Faulkner, Northern Kentucky University; Jeanneine Jones, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Jan Carpenter, Maryhurst University


Over the last decade, significant changes have occurred in how schools are organized, how educators are prepared and certified, how accreditation policies have shifted both curriculum and content, as well as changes to the demographics of middle school classrooms. This volume, Preparing Middle Level Educators for 21st Century Schools: Enduring Beliefs, Changing Times, Evolving Practices provides a review of current research focused on middle level education preparation at all levels. Our enduring beliefs about young adolescents have not changed (e.g., need for developmentally responsive instruction, caring adults who understand them and are prepared to teach them, opportunities to explore their interests) but the political and sociocultural climate of schools and schooling has. In light of changing times, this volume allows researchers and teacher educators to share research from their context and inform the evolving practices of educator preparation for the middle level.

The research presented in this volume is organized into three sections, with an introduction provided for each. The authors grounded their work in the Association for Middle Level Education’s teacher preparation standards (2012) and tenets of This We Believe (NMSA, 2010). By doing so, they examine topics that hold potential for meeting the learning needs of teachers and students in middle level schools. The first section includes chapters from individuals working to ensure that the enduring beliefs of middle level education continue to guide the structures of their middle level teacher preparation programs. The second set of chapters closely examines how changing times are shaping the work of teacher educators. Finally, the last section spotlights evolving practices that continue to develop in response to the changes impacting our classrooms, schools, and communities.

This text provides readers with researched-based practices and information to help them continue the tradition of middle level teacher education. The enduring beliefs of preparing teachers who understand, respect, and honor the many talents,
Gifts, and contributions of the young adolescent student will guide teacher educators as they respond to the changing times of education and the evolving practices of teachers, teacher educators, and schools.


Research on Teaching and Learning with the Literacies of Young Adolescents

Kathleen F. Malu, William Paterson University; Mary Beth Schaefer, St. John’s University


Research on middle level education indicates that student learning at the middle level has a deep and abiding influence on post-secondary opportunities and career paths. As research continues to highlight the urgency of engaging middle level students in academic learning, it is increasingly clear that these students’ multiple literacies must become a part of teaching and learning. Understanding how to infuse the literacies of middle level students across classroom activities is a critical part of improving student achievement.

This volume in The Handbook series shares literacy research from multiple contexts and deepens our understanding of the literacies that middle level students use in and out of school. This volume includes research that identifies how to best teach and learn with our increasingly diverse students. The perspectives that emerge from this volume help us examine the current state of new and evolving literacies and construct a cutting edge research agenda for middle level literacy education. Research reports focus on digital literacies including social networking media and games, English language learners, high stakes literacy tests and middle level learners, specifically boys, and literacy teaching and learning in middle level teacher education programs. A wide range of research methods and modes are used in these reports including case studies, teacher research, narrative inquiry, survey research, and action research.

This volume, the ninth volume in the Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education, is a compilation of research studies focusing on the use and implementation of common planning time (CPT) in middle level schools. All of the studies were part of the Middle Level Education Research SIG’s National Middle Grades Research Project (NMGRP) on Common Planning Time, which provides additional evidence about teachers’ understandings, experiences, the benefits and barriers about CPT.

Since all researchers participating in the SIG-sponsored project utilized the same data collection protocols and followed the same protocols, the overall data collection was systematic and is highly reliable. Five research questions were generated to guide the development of the data collection protocols. While the authors were encouraged to use their data to address these project-level questions, they were not required to do so. The project consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Phase I (qualitative) consisted of observations of CPT meetings and structured interviews with teachers. Phase II (quantitative) was comprised of an online teacher survey. Within the chapters of this volume, a variety of relevant and meaningful research questions are examined utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

The need for continued research at the middle level is clear and urgent. The previous volumes in this Handbook series testify to this urgency. While quantitative studies continue to be essential, there is a critical need to understand the complexities of the middle level community. One way to capture the rich, diverse mosaic of the voices and experiences of middle level participants and stakeholders is to use narrative inquiry methodology. The intent of this volume in The Handbook is to give voice to and broaden our understanding of the wide variety of participants and stakeholders who weave through the middle level. Such participants and stakeholders may include middle level teachers, school psychologists and counselors, students, parents, administrators, middle level researchers, research foundations, and community groups. In addition to hearing directly from these groups, this volume will focus on the intricate webs, connections and questions that these narratives hold and frame them within current middle level research, theory, and practice. Ultimately this volume will highlight the nuance, diversity and future directions that research may need to explore.


An International Look at Educating Young Adolescents

Steven B. Mertens, Illinois State University; Vincent A. Anfara, University of Tennessee; Kathleen Roney, University of North Carolina Wilmington


(Sponsored by the Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group and the National Middle School Association)

Studies like the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have compared the performance of U.S. middle grade students (i.e., eighth graders) to those in other countries. In relation to middle grade schools, 20 countries outperformed the United States in mathematics and nine countries scored above the U.S. in science. The intent of this volume of The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education, An International Look at Educating Young Adolescents, is to broaden our understanding of middle grade schooling by critically examining the education of young adolescents (ages 10-15, typically grades 6-8) through an international lens. In addition to looking at how schooling and students are
organized for teaching and learning, this handbook will focus on the successes and failures that are evident in a wide variety of nations, present the indictments and praises that have been offered by supporters and critics alike, and review the research that has been generated about educating young adolescents in an effort to cross national boundaries. Ultimately, this volume of the handbook series will explore what international perspectives teach us about the effective education of young adolescents.


The Young Adolescent and the Middle School

Steve B. Mertens, Illinois State University; Vincent A. Anfara, University of Tennessee; Micki M. Caskey, Portland State University


(Sponsored by the Middle Level Education Research SIG and the National Middle School Association)

The Young Adolescent and the Middle School focuses on issues related to the nature of young adolescence and the intersection of young adolescence with middle level schooling.

This volume of the Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education marks the sixth installment in the series. The Handbook series, begun in 2001 by Vince Anfara, the series editor, has addressed varying thematic issues important to middle level education research. This volume, The Young Adolescent and the Middle School, focuses on the unique developmental needs of young adolescents and the role of the middle school in attending to these needs. The contributing authors in this volume address one of three developmental areas critical to young adolescents—physical development, intellectual/cognitive development, or social and personal development—and how these developmental characteristics affect the educational environment and the organization of middle schools.