2002

Principals' perceptions of elementary to middle transition practices in Iowa middle level schools

Amanda J. Lemanczyk Ross
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons

Recommended Citation
Ross, Amanda J. Lemanczyk, "Principals' perceptions of elementary to middle transition practices in Iowa middle level schools" (2002). Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. 1026.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/1026

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI
Principals’ perceptions of elementary to middle transition practices
in Iowa middle level schools

by

Amanda J. Lemanczyk Ross

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Educational Administration

Program of Study Committee:
Donald G. Hackmann, Major Professor
Susan M. Hegland
Mack C. Shelley
Ann D. Thompson
Janice M. Walker

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2002

Copyright © Amanda J. Lemanczyk Ross, 2002. All rights reserved.
Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of

Amanda J. Lemanczyk Ross

has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES vi

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION 1
   Statement of the Problem 2
   Purpose of the Study 3
   Research Questions 4
   Rationale for the Study 6
   Assumptions of the Study 8
   Delimitations 8
   Definitions of Terms 9
   Organization of the Remainder of the Study 10

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW 11
   Development of the Early Adolescent 16
   Abbreviated History of Middle Level Education 19
      Interdisciplinary teaming 24
      Advisor/advisee programs 28
      Exploratory programs 32
   Transitioning from Elementary to Middle Level Schools 35
      Lower academic achievement 38
      Lower self-esteem 40
      Student concerns about teacher expectations 42
      Teacher/parent concerns 43
      Transition practices 45
   Summary 51

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY 53
   Introduction 53
   Research Questions 54
   Statistical Procedures 55
   Sampling Frame 56
   Development of the Instrument 57
      Validation of the instrument 58
      Human Subjects release 59
   Instrument Distribution and Data Collection 59
   Analysis of the Data 61

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS 64
   Introduction 64
   General Characteristics of the Sample 64
      Demographics of responding principals 64
      Data related to schools 67
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Grade level configuration by principal’s gender 60
Table 2. Responding principal demographics 65
Table 3. Frequency of grades reported by responding principals 68
Table 4. Grade level reported by Iowa Department of Education compared to study findings 69
Table 5. Data related to schools 70
Table 6. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations of implemented transition practices for middle level students in Iowa middle level schools in descending mean order 75
Table 7. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations of implemented transition practices for parents of middle level students in Iowa middle level schools in descending mean order 77
Table 8. Planning resources identified as most integral in developing transition practices in selected Iowa middle level schools 79
Table 9. Correlations between student transition scores and parent transition scores and level of implementation of signature middle level practices 80
Table 10. Correlations among transition scores and school demographics 82
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

During this century of seeking to understand the educational needs of the early adolescent learner, two themes have evolved: the characteristics of early adolescents and their schools (Epstein & MacIver, 1990). "Striving to achieve a vision of what education for young adolescents should be has been the goal of administrators, teachers, scholars and researchers for almost 100 years" (Clark & Clark, 1994, p. 3).

The evolution of a separate learning environment for early adolescents in the United States began in the 1909-10 school year when Berkeley, California, and Columbus, Ohio, created the first junior high schools (Clark & Clark, 1994). This grade level structure resulted from a perceived failure of the commonly implemented elementary-secondary grade level organization, in which grades 1 through 8 were considered a unit while grades 9 through 12 were separate from the lower unit. Briggs (1920) felt that the creation of the junior high came about because of the increased number of high schools, changes in American social and industrial lifestyles, and the rapid increase in the number of students staying in school after the elementary grades. These changes resulted in a need for curricular changes, additional financial resources, and increased pressure on schools to meet these demands. Seven years later, Koos (1927) indicated that the move to the junior high school, the predecessor of the middle school, was precipitated by four key areas of concern: economy of time, high student dropout rate at the secondary level, a wide range of needs of adolescent learners, and the specific needs of learners at this stage of development.

An increased realization that the needs of the early adolescent learner were not being met adequately in the junior high school setting created a new impetus for the current middle
school movement. Whereby the junior high school evolved out of a perceived failure of the elementary-secondary school structure that was in place in the early 1900s (George & Alexander, 1993), today's middle school movement had its inception in the mid-1960s with the publication of *The Middle School* in 1966. Generally today's middle school leaders seek to structure the middle level learning environment around the needs of the learner, rather than base the learning environment on the needs of the system itself. This shift in thinking has resulted in increased understanding of the developmental needs of the middle level learner. Although much research has accumulated concerning the characteristics of early adolescents and their schools, a lack of information pertaining to the "prevalence and persistence of middle grades practices" still exists (Epstein & MacIver, 1990, p. 1).

**Statement of the Problem**

In the past 40 years, educators have come to realize that the needs of the early adolescent are not simply miniaturized versions of the needs of the high school-aged adolescent. At a time when everything in their lives seems to be changing, from their voices and bodies to their relationships with friends and family, students entering middle level schools often feel deep concern about the transition from elementary school (Petersen & Crockett, 1985; CCAD, 1996; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Therefore, a need exists to define strategies and practices to ease the elementary to middle level school transition.

Because of the many changes and insecurities that occur during early adolescence, there is a need to examine the transition from elementary to middle level school in an effort to help determine if there are transition practices used to address anxieties and concerns that many students experience during the potentially rough passage from elementary to middle school.
and to understand how schools identify their transition practices. According to Viadero (1999), “Though researchers and educators know where these rough passages lie on the long educational journey, they still don’t know enough about how to make all of them easier” (p. 30). Maclver (1990) also notes that “school transition programs that use numerous and diverse articulation activities were seen to help students succeed in their first year following a school transition” (p. 464).

Therefore, a need exists to understand what transition practices are currently in use, and to understand how schools develop, implement, and evaluate their transition programs. This study attempts to identify transition practices used in selected Iowa public middle level schools that address the concerns of students coming from the elementary feeder schools. It also explores how transition practices are influenced by such factors as the number of elementary schools that feed into a middle level school, the grade levels included and the number of students enrolled in the middle level school, the length of time the principal has served a particular middle level school, and differences in practices between junior high schools and middle schools.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to determine to what extent transition practices are used in identified public middle level schools in the state of Iowa, and why selected schools using those practices have chosen to utilize them. The current body of research focuses largely on interviewing or surveying students before, during, and/or after they have moved from elementary to middle school. Based on transition practices identified by a review of the literature, this study surveys Iowa public middle level principals, based on predefined criteria
(public middle level schools with two or more feeder schools with grades no lower than 6 and no higher than 9) to determine what, if any, transition practices are used, and the levels of use of these practices.

Upon analysis of the transition practices instrument, three to four middle level schools that described using a high number of transition practices will be identified for follow-up qualitative study to further analyze purposes for implementation of transition practices. Middle level principals will be interviewed to help identify what practices they employ to assist incoming middle level students and to help understand why these schools have continued to utilize their transition practices. The data obtained from this study may help to mold the development of transition programs and thereby smooth the transition for students going from elementary to middle level schools.

Research Questions

This study is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequently and the least frequently implemented transition practices for middle level students and their parents in selected Iowa middle level schools?

2. What planning resources have schools identified as most integral when developing their transition practices?

3. Is there a positive relationship between the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation) and the use of transition practices used to
acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment?

4. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

5. Is there a positive relationship between the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation) and transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment?

6. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

7. Does the number of transition practices implemented have a positive relationship to:
   (a) enrollment size of grade entering the middle level school, or (b) the number of feeder schools, or (c) the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches?

8. How do principals who have self-identified high use of transition practices determine which practices to use based on student need, parental input, and other factors?
Rationale for the Study

A review of the literature reveals that student concerns as they transition from elementary to middle level schools can have a negative impact on their academic achievement, their behavior, and their communication at home. The need for a smooth middle level experience for early adolescents is accentuated by Viadero's (1999) report indicating that eighth grade achievement is the best predictor of high school success, which points out the need to lessen other areas of concern so that learning can be of higher importance to the early adolescent learner. Thompson's (1981) research indicated a decline in student-parent communication as well as an increase in negative student behaviors when children left the elementary school setting. Additionally, summary of a national survey of middle level principals concluded that “schools with more extensive articulation programs report that significantly fewer students are retained to repeat the transition grade” (Epstein & MacIver, 1990, p. 52). Based on these and other research findings, the need for smooth transitions is apparent.

Turning Points, a report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989), had a dramatic impact on the middle school reform movement. Prior to that, a body of research was evolving to help explain the differences between the needs and development of early adolescents and their older counterparts at the high school. Although there exists a considerable amount of research pertaining to the developmental needs of the early adolescent learner as well as what types of learning environments best engage learners at this stage of development (CCAD, 1989; Jackson & Davis, 2000), a relatively small body of research exists to help define and shape the transition programs for students as they move from the elementary learning environment to the middle level school. With all the changes
that the transescent is experiencing at this time of life, it is essential that a smooth, research-based foundation be laid systematically to ease the students' transition from the elementary school to the middle level school.

*A 21st Century Research Agenda: Issues, Topics & Questions Guiding Inquiry into Middle Level Theory & Practice* was published by the National Middle School Association (NMSA) in 1997 in an effort to promote continuing conversations about issues and questions related to middle level education. This document also was designed to encourage the study of the effectiveness of middle level practices and their related outcomes. This document identified transition practices as an area needing further study. Research questions raised by NMSA that relate to this study include: 1) What types of leadership activities promote school culture? 2) How are new students acclimated into the school culture? 3) How effective are existing programs in promoting interagency collaboration? 4) What are current models of interagency collaboration?

There may be differences between middle level schools that utilize middle school practices compared to schools that utilize a junior high structure as well as differences related to school size. For example, Lipsitz, Jackson, and Austin (1997) found that middle schools tended to have high student achievement. Additionally, smaller learning environments tended to receive a higher student satisfaction rating. However, Gulino (1997) determined that large schools utilized more transition practices than smaller middle level schools. According to Williamson (1996), students expressed improved satisfaction and higher student achievement in a smaller learning environment, as with the smaller team setting that is a signature practice of the middle school.
A review of the literature is inconclusive regarding whether schools that implement practices traditionally associated with the middle school philosophy (such as interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory classes) also display a tendency to implement extensive transition practices. Similarly, relatively little research exists related to transition practices for parents, and the differences in transition practices based upon districts' characteristics (such as suburban, urban, and rural). This study will be helpful in examining the relationships, if any, among these variables.

Assumptions of the Study

This study is based on the assumption that subjects will respond honestly and candidly to the written inventory instrument. It also assumes that follow-up interviews with administrators or other staff members will provide accurate information in an effort to triangulate data collected from the inventories as well as to enhance the quality of that data.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. The sample is limited to public middle level schools in the state of Iowa, which may minimize the ability to generalize the findings of this study.

2. The middle level schools were selected based on having two or more elementary feeder schools. Berliner (1993) indicates "that the organization of secondary schools, the rigorous academic demands, and the social pressures to interact with students of varying ages from multiple feeder schools may cause stress for the adolescent in transition" (on-line), thus indicating that districts with more than one
elementary feeder school may have different needs than districts with only one feeder school.

3. Due to a very small sample size of only six Iowa public middle level schools that began at grade 5 and had two or more elementary feeder schools, this cluster of schools was eliminated from the study. Therefore, only middle level schools that contained no grade lower than grade 7 nor higher than grade 9 were included in this study.

4. The study was conducted during the 2001–2002 school year.

**Definitions of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

*Junior high school:* A school between elementary and high school in which the program delivery is largely departmentalized (George & Alexander, 1993).

*Middle school:* A school where the lowest grade is grade 6 or grade 7 and the highest grade is grade 8 or grade 9. “The middle school concept is intended to help the early adolescents of these grades make a smooth transition from elementary to high school and from childhood to adolescence” (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 23). For the purposes of this study, a middle school is one that uses practices associated with middle level philosophy, especially interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs.

*Middle level school:* A school that includes any combinations of grades 5 through 9 in a school system that includes both elementary grades before and high school after. The term “middle level schools” includes both middle schools and junior high schools and
does not denote a particular philosophy or specific program delivery (Valentine, Clark, Nickerson, & Keefe, 1981).

**Transescence**: “The stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence” (Eichhorn, 1966, p. 3).

**Transition practice**: Practices used to focus on creating a smooth change of schools for the young adolescent from elementary to middle level school and/or from the middle level school to the high school (NMSA, 2001).

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: Chapter 2 provides a review of the research regarding the needs and development of the early adolescent learner as well as an historical overview of middle level schools in the United States over the past century. The key characteristics of current middle level school practices are also defined and described. Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design and methodology used in this study, including descriptions of the sample population, statistical procedures, development of the survey instrument, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the data collected for this study and provides analysis and interpretation of the data. These data are summarized in Chapter 5, where conclusions and inferences from the data are presented along with recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early adolescence is a time of dramatic change that “can be described as a period of life, typically occurring between the ages of 10 and 15 years, in which youth undergo rapid physical, cognitive, and social transformation” (Urdan & Klein, 1998, p. 1). Over the past several decades, numerous studies and reports (Eichhorn, 1966; National Middle School Association, 1982; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Thompson et al., 2000) have underscored the importance of this phase of a young person’s life and development. In the school setting, this period is compounded by the organizational structure of many school systems that require movement from the elementary school environment, which generally is self-contained, to the larger and more impersonal setting of the middle or junior high school. During this time of rapid change, efforts to assimilate students into their new environments become increasingly important, as student success depends on the schools’ ability to address student needs.

One of the most significant efforts in the middle level movement was initiated by the National Middle School Association (NMSA), which published This We Believe in 1982. This position statement included the rationale behind the middle school movement, characteristics of young adolescents, and what NMSA described as “essential elements of a ‘true’ middle school” (1982, p. 15). These elements included the following: 1) educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents, 2) a balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents, 3) a range of organizational arrangements, 4) varied instructional strategies, 5) a full exploratory program, 6) comprehensive advising and counseling, 7) continuous progress for students, 8) evaluation procedures compatible with the
nature of young adolescents, 9) cooperative planning, and 10) a positive school climate. According to NMSA (1992), none of these elements in isolation makes an effective middle school. Rather, "the school must exhibit all of the essential elements to a considerable degree before it can claim to be effective in educating its students" (p. 23).

Determining that early adolescence is a critical time in a young person's life, in 1986 the Carnegie Foundation of New York established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD). In 1987, CCAD created the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents comprised of leaders in the areas of education, research, government, health, and nonprofit and philanthropic areas. The purpose of this task force was to study existing practices and examine "promising new approaches to fostering the education and healthy development of young adolescents" (CCAD, 1989, p. 13). The CCAD report, called Turning Points, included a study of the early adolescent. In their findings they noted that adolescence may last 10 or more years, thus accentuating the need to address this developmental stage in a young person's life. Due to the extended length of this period, the CCAD subdivided adolescence into phases to assist in identifying experiences that typically occur during each particular phase. Early adolescence generally occurs from ages 10 through 14. During this phase, physical changes begin to take place, and awareness of one's changing sexuality and social challenges become evident. Middle adolescence, encompassing roughly ages 15 through 17, is a time when a desire for increased independence from the family accelerates. Late adolescence is identified as that stage, generally occurring from age 18 into the 20s, when many young people delay entry into adulthood due to continuing education or such social factors such as substance abuse and violence (CCAD, 1996).
*Turning Points* asserted that American middle level schools, whether they were named junior high schools or middle schools, were not meeting the developmental needs of their students. They found that many middle level schools were large, impersonal environments largely unconcerned with individual students and delivering curriculum rather than teaching students. CCAD further noted that the curriculum was largely irrelevant to early adolescent students, leading the task force to recommend the creation of a developmentally responsive curriculum as a point of consideration. Additionally, CCAD reported that schools did little to address the health care and counseling needs of middle grade students. In general, schools were not designed to meet the needs of early adolescent learners.

From these findings came a series of *Turning Points* recommendations. These key recommendations (CCAD, 1989) included: 1) creating small communities for learning, 2) teaching a core academic program, 3) ensuring success for all students, 4) empowering teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students, 5) selecting middle grade teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, 6) improving academic performance by fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents, 7) reengaging families in the education of young adolescents, and 8) connecting schools with communities.

The recommendation for small learning communities included smaller team settings in which teachers share a common group of students in order to know one another better. This recommendation also stressed the need for increased continuity in expectations and practices as well as the integration of content areas, so that students would better understand teacher expectations and learn that curriculum from varying subject areas worked together at school as they do in "real life." Creating a community for learning included having one adult for
each student who really knows that student, his or her concerns, and personal issues (CCAD, 1989).

The second major recommendation was teaching a common core of knowledge. This suggestion included teaching critical thinking, helping students develop healthy lifestyles, teaching students to be active citizens, integrating curriculum across disciplines, and teaching students learning and testing strategies to enhance their academic success. By having a plan for these areas, it is by design and not by chance that they are addressed in the school environment.

Ensuring success for all students was the third recommendation by CCAD (1989), and several methods for addressing this recommendation were identified. One approach was the use of cooperative learning and cross-age tutoring to challenge all students to reach their potential. This suggestion comes from the realization that tracking, or grouping students by ability for the majority of their instruction, is a damaging and detrimental practice. Another method for ensuring student success is scheduling classroom periods to maximize learning. Flexible scheduling allows teacher teams to change class schedules when learning opportunities warrant, thus better addressing the needs of students rather than the demands of the clock. The final method is expanding the structure of opportunity for learning. All of these recommendations are based on the developmental needs of the emerging adolescent learner.

Havighurst (as cited in Ingersoll, 2000) presented a detailed look at the developmental aspects of early adolescents, identifying 11 developmental tasks that accompany the transition into adolescence: a new sense of physical self, new intellectual abilities, increased cognitive demands at school, increased need for expanded verbal skills, a need for
development of personal sense of identity, a need for establishing vocational goals for adulthood, emotional and psychological independence from parents, development of peer relationships, management of evolving sexuality, adoption of personal value system, and increased need for impulse control and mature behavior. Havighurst noted that these tasks do not evolve in a linear fashion. Rather, several can be occurring simultaneously, further complicating an already challenging developmental period in the lives of early adolescents.

With so much happening so quickly and often simultaneously, it is no wonder that the early adolescent often feels worried and confused. Until Eichhorn's coining of the term "transescence" (1966, p. 3), the English language did not contain a word to describe this transient state between childhood and adulthood. By addressing school-related concerns, particularly those relating to the transition from elementary to the middle level school, some fears facing the transescent learner can be lessened or even eliminated. Jackson and Davis (2000) note,

Amid the stresses of early adolescence, entry into middle school can itself be troubling. For many young adolescents, the transition from elementary school to a less supportive middle school environment is associated with a decline in self-esteem. Students' sense of their ability to perform well in specific subject areas such as English and mathematics has also been shown to decline after the transition. (pp. 7–8)

In the elementary setting, children generally experience a more intimate learning environment where they know their teacher well, because they spend the majority of the day together in a self-contained classroom. However, in many communities, more than one elementary school may feed into a single middle level school. When this shift occurs,
students experience a larger learning environment, new peers with whom they must become acquainted and socialize, and the personal concerns that result due to these situations (CCAD, 1996). Additionally, multiple new teachers, changing classes with a different teacher for each subject, and new learning expectations create even more concerns for the new middle level student. Considering all the physical and emotional changes the early adolescent is experiencing, in combination with the social and educational changes precipitated by the move to the middle grades, it is no small wonder that this period is a very stressful time for young people.

**Development of the Early Adolescent**

One of the earliest signals that a young person truly has entered early adolescence is the onset of puberty, including the development of secondary sexual traits. Today's adolescents as a group are experiencing this change at a younger age than adolescents in previous generations, approximately two years earlier than children a century ago (CCAD, 1996). George and Alexander (1993) attribute earlier maturation to "several factors, including nutrition and quality of medical care" (p. 5).

Both males and females experience significant physical changes during the onset of puberty, although girls generally reach sexual maturity at an earlier age (George & Alexander, 1993). Males undergo a change in their voices, which typically is accompanied by periodic fluctuations in the form of cracking and sudden changes from low- to high-pitched tones while speaking. Females experience the onset of their menstrual cycle, accompanied by physical changes in the form of breast development. Many transescents develop overactive pores and glands, often resulting in acne and a need for changes in
personal care habits. Growth spurts also may necessitate a demand for additional nutrition. With these dramatic changes, it is little wonder that young people at this stage frequently feel insecure and self-conscious.

Until reaching early adolescence, children typically identify most closely with parents and family. However, a shift begins to occur during the transition stage of adolescence, with the transescent beginning to break away from the family as the primary focus for his/her identity to peers playing a significant role in how the young person perceives him/herself (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1996; Tedesco & Gaier, 1988). George and Alexander (1993) note that “the movement into adolescence is one toward greater independence and greater need for freedom from the total authority of adults, including parents and teachers” (p. 11). Transescents tend to find a strong need to fit into their peer groups, wishing to look and act like their friends. They often perceive that their every movement and word is being evaluated by those around them, because they constantly are evaluating and comparing themselves to their peers as they seek to define their identity. They also can become quite critical of those whose appearance and actions do not meet with their approval.

Physical and social developments are the most obvious and most frequently noted changes that the early adolescent experiences. However, research in the area of brain development has shed additional insight into the cognitive development that also is occurring during this period. Research by Toepfer (1979) supports the theory of brain growth periodization in which the brain plateaus, causing decreased self-esteem and frustration if young adolescents are pushed beyond their developmental readiness levels. Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine confirm Toepfer’s findings that during early adolescence, brain growth gradually plateaus for a period of time (Thompson et
al., 2000). Other studies (Eson & Wolmsley, 1980; Miller, 1980) support the idea that many middle level students remain in the concrete operations stage, whereby they are not developmentally able to generalize and extend their thinking beyond the current situation. This finding generally would tend to support Piaget’s reports indicating that during early adolescence, only about 15% of the student population is able to consistently and fully function at the formal operations level (Brooks, Fusco, & Grennon, 1983). However, Piaget’s (1958) stages of development indicate that formal operations—that is, involving one’s ability to engage in metacognitive abstract thinking—begin to develop between the ages of 11 to 15 years. Contemporary research previously cited seems to suggest that formal operations may not occur as early as Piaget had reported. Because students at the middle level are just beginning to develop the capacity to engage in metacognition and abstract thinking, the curriculum must reflect the fact that not all students will be developmentally ready to move into deeper levels of abstract thinking, thus necessitating a potential curriculum change to more concrete, hands-on instructional techniques as well as choices to accommodate the diverse needs of early adolescent learners.

Additionally, students’ limited ability to engage in metacognition has implications for social interaction. This shift in thinking may create a challenge in the transescent’s belief systems and result in exploring these belief systems in the context of peer interaction (Erickson, 1968; Kagan, 1971). The shift creates implications for many of the recommendations for middle schools, including creating a small, safe learning environment where students can safely explore areas of interest to them, and having a caring adult who knows them acting as a guide. Therefore, the cognitive development of the transescent learner is an important consideration in the development of the middle grades curriculum.
Abbreviated History of Middle Level Education

The eight-four grade level configuration, whereby grades K–8 were housed together and grades 9–12 were together, was described by Briggs (1920) as “an historical accident, a sort of compromise between the early contending elementary and secondary schools” (p. 6). However, by design, “…the junior high school is a device of democracy whereby nurture may cooperate with nature to secure the best results possible for each individual adolescent as well as for society at large” (Briggs, 1920, p. 327). Historically, the middle level school was identified as the “junior high” or a little version of the high school model where students moved between elementary and high school. One of the founders of the junior high movement, Briggs (1920) indicated that the junior high arose after the eight-four elementary-secondary configuration encountered criticism for its ineffectiveness in meeting the needs of early adolescent pupils.

Although middle level scholars generally acknowledge that the first junior high schools opened in 1909 in Berkeley, California, and Columbus, Ohio (Clark & Clark, 1994), the major movement toward the junior high concept occurred after 1920 when increased births after World War I affected school enrollment (George & Alexander, 1993). The common response to increased student enrollment was to place grades 7 through 9 into a junior high school setting where students from various elementary schools were transferred. Here students went from class to class, which might be in opposite ends of the building, switched classes when the bell rang after a prescribed number of minutes, passed in the halls for a specified number of minutes, and repeated the same routine several times daily until the school day ended and they went home.
In the 1940s and 1950s, efforts were made to bring about changes to the junior high school to better address the needs of students served at this level (Lounsbury, 1996). Gruhn and Douglass (1947), for example, proposed the following major functions of the junior high: 1) integration, 2) exploration, 3) guidance, 4) differentiation, 5) socialization, and 6) articulation (pp. 31-32). Changes began to occur with the realization that early adolescents had different needs than their high school counterparts. However, support for the junior high declined when educators recognized that this model did not adequately address the needs of the early adolescent (Lipsitz, 1977). George and Alexander (1993) note that the lack of agreement about whether it was necessary for the junior high to serve a distinctly different purpose from the elementary or high schools had a substantial impact on the decline of the junior high and, thus, the emergence of the middle school.

The junior high movement provided the foundation for the middle school philosophy, which was conceived in the 1960s under the guidance of William Alexander (George & Alexander, 1993). In *The Emergent Middle School*, Alexander, Williams, Compton, Hines, and Prescott (1968) state their case for a new middle level school. The needs of the learner are at the forefront, with all aspects of the school environment focusing on this key element. Knowledge about how children move from childhood into adolescence is critical in the successful middle school, including understanding of physical, psychological, intellectual, and personality development, as well as the wide range of variation in when and how children experience these changes. The middle level curriculum and guidance programs must address all four areas of development. Of these four developmental areas, there is a need for the middle level curriculum to address personal development, skills for continued learning, and organized knowledge (Alexander et al., 1968). Additionally, Alexander et al. (1968)
advocated the need for educators who are trained and willing to work with early adolescent learners, encouraging "creative teaching" (p. 94) as well as team teaching. The organization of the school itself is addressed as a means to "facilitate attainment of educational goals" (Alexander et al., 1968, p. 125). Organization includes grade level configuration, instructional groupings, instructional techniques, school size, and staffing. Finally, Alexander et al. stress the need for assessment and evaluation of the middle school as a means for refining and further meeting the needs of the learner.

Grades that are included in middle level schools vary from district to district based on the unique needs within each school system. Although the NMSA (2001) notes that defining the "best" grade level configuration is difficult, the trend is toward schools that include grades 5–8 and grades 6–8, with many administrators giving preference to the 6–8 configuration as being the most developmentally appropriate for the early adolescent (Valentine et al., 1993). Data collected and reported by the Middle Level Leadership Center (2000) indicate a shift in grade level configurations over the past 30 years. In 1971, 45% of the nation's middle level schools contained grades 7, 8, and 9, but by 1981, only 33% of the schools included these grades. In both cases, the 7–8–9 grade level configuration was still the modal type. However, by 1991, middle level schools containing grades 6, 7, and 8 were the most common configuration, with 40% of the schools reporting this arrangement. Nine years later, 59% of the nation's middle level schools included grades 6, 7, and 8.

A trend toward including grade 5 in the middle level schools has been emerging slowly but steadily, from 7% of the nation's schools in 1971 to 10% in 2000 (Middle Level Leadership Center, 2000). Including grade 5 in the middle level school is a reflection of ongoing efforts to identify the needs of the early adolescent learner and to adjust the learning
environment to better meet their needs. This change is based on the rationale that having students make the move to the new middle level school shortly before the onset of puberty, which occurs around sixth grade for many children, "...would enable students to make those adjustments before they must deal with the challenges of puberty" (Valentine et al., 1993, p. 19).

Although a variety of viewpoints exist to describe the foundation of the middle school, common themes do emerge. According to NMSA (2001), the key components of the middle school philosophy have been identified as interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, varied instruction, exploratory programs, and transition programs. Maclver (1990) identifies advisory groups (advisor/advisee programs), interdisciplinary teaming, and school transition programs as critical to meeting the needs of young adolescents. Turning Points (1989) targeted eight recommendations, previously cited, to improve middle level education. While maintaining the integrity of the original Turning Points recommendations, Turning Points 2000 (Jackson & Davis, 2000) placed increased emphasis on "the centrality of teaching and learning to ensuring every student's success" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 25) to reflect the standards and benchmarks movement in education. This increased emphasis also helped to address the claims by some that middle schools were lenient on achievement. For example, a study conducted by Maclver, Maclver, Balfanz, Blank, and Ruby (2000) found that when compared to other countries, the middle level curriculum in the United States significantly lacks coherence, rigor, and focus. Thus, the emphasis in the revisions to the original Turning Points is on "gains in student achievement and other positive outcomes for students" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 16).
In 1994, Russell conducted a dissertation study of an urban school district consisting of 10 middle/junior high schools. Her study used a survey completed by the teaching staff in these schools to assess the level of middle school implementation as well as the California Achievement Tests to determine the level of student achievement. The middle level programming concept that had the greatest impact on student achievement in this study was required curriculum and learning skills. Russell also found that developmentally appropriate teaching strategies and interdisciplinary teaming had a positive effect on increased student achievement, and advisor/advisee programming appeared to have a negative impact on students’ language arts achievement. The study concluded, “middle level programming does play a role in enhancing student achievement” (p. 104).

Similarly, Felner et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of schools in the Illinois Middle Grades Network (IMGN), which included 97 schools serving over 15,000 students. Schools in the network represented “a full range of geographic, demographic, and size characteristics of all schools in Illinois, including urban, suburban, and rural schools” (p. 539). Schools participating in this study were in the process of restructuring from a traditional junior high school model toward the middle level model presented in Turning Points. Their research indicated that “across subject areas, adolescents in highly implemented schools achieved at much higher levels than those in non-implemented schools and substantially better than those in partially-implemented schools” (p. 544).
Interdisciplinary teaming

One of the "signature practices" of middle level education is interdisciplinary teaming (Valentine et al., 1993). The definition of interdisciplinary team organization, according to George and Alexander (1993), is:

a way of organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share: 1) the same group of students; 2) the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area; 3) the same schedule; and 4) the same area of the building. (p. 249)

Other researchers also have advocated interdisciplinary teaming as a critical component of effective middle schools (CCAD, 1989; Epstein & MacIver, 1990). Similarly, Shockley (1992) indicates that the rationale behind interdisciplinary teaming is the need to "1) establish a structure that empowers middle school teachers to address better the educational and developmental needs of the young adolescent, and 2) redefine the mission and purpose of the middle level school" (p. 94).

The interdisciplinary team concept was conceived over three decades ago but has been called by such synonyms as team teaching, cross-curriculum, and others. In its early stages, however, the primary emphasis in the interdisciplinary team concept was placed on having a lead teacher or two rather than the current emphasis on collaboration among team members (George & Alexander, 1993). Although interdisciplinary teaming has been a key component in middle level schools for over 30 years, it was not until the release of *Turning Points* that teaming became more prevalent in schools (Reiser & Butzin, 2000). A recent national study of 1423 middle level principals conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002) determined that 79% of
the respondents indicated that teaming was being used in their schools. This compares to 57% of the nation's schools using teaming in 1992, supporting the finding that interdisciplinary teaming has increased in middle level schools.

In *Turning Points*, CCAD (1989) called for creating "small communities for learning where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth" (p. 9). They also provided leadership and guidance in the need and formation of interdisciplinary teams as a way of creating schools within schools, or smaller groupings, to better meet the needs of individual students within the larger school setting. The task force cited three qualities that should be present in the middle level setting in order to meet the needs of all students. First, students should be part of a smaller community where people have the opportunity to get to know one another. Second, common expectations, integration of subject matter, and stability of peer groups should be addressed. Third, every student should have at least one adult advocate who knows the student well and is accessible to the student. Implementation of teaming provides the vehicle for addressing all of these factors.

According to a growing body of research in the area of teaming, there is increasing support for the effectiveness of this organizational structure (Eccles & Midgeley, 1989; MacIver & Reuman, 1988; McPartland, 1987). Teacher collaboration is one area in which interdisciplinary teaming has proven to be effective. The importance of the interdisciplinary team in the middle school organization as it relates to teachers is underscored by Spear (1992, p. 103) who writes, "If the heart of the middle school is the interdisciplinary team, the muscle and nerves that make the interdisciplinary teaming work are the teachers." By opening the classroom door to colleagues and moving away from isolation, teachers have
increased opportunities to enhance learning for the early adolescent learners with whom they work.

Maclver (1990) also cites the effect that interdisciplinary teams may have on eliminating the isolation that many teachers feel “by providing a working group of colleagues to conduct activities and to discuss and solve mutual problems” (p. 460). Reiser and Butzin (2000) note that teaming can have a positive effect on teachers’ feelings of efficacy and professional image. Interdisciplinary teaming also provides an opportunity for teachers to explore curriculum integration and a more student-centered approach to learning, according to Pitton (2001). By working together, educators can explore new curriculum connections to provide real-life problems and experiences that add meaning and definition for early adolescent learners. Teaming requires a commitment from the school district in the form of time and financial resources, but the dividends for students are the payback. Maclver (1990) explains that, at least in theory, interdisciplinary teaming enables teachers to better articulate across subject areas, known as the core curriculum, thus helping students make connections between concepts and ideas in various content areas.

According to Arhar (1992), interdisciplinary teaming has its historical roots in the core curriculum of the 1930s. The core curriculum was an attempt to break down the artificial barriers between subjects through curriculum integration and to provide teachers with the opportunity to know their individual students. To accomplish these ends, core curriculum enthusiasts advocated block scheduling and joint planning time for teachers (Arhar, 1992).

The core curriculum at the middle level generally includes language arts, social studies, math, and science (George & Alexander, 1993). While the combination of teaming and core curriculum does not automatically result in cross-subject, interdisciplinary units, this
instructional approach is desirable at the middle level for a myriad of reasons, including collaboration among teachers, community-building among students and staff, helping students to see connections between subjects areas, thus recognizing that each does not stand alone (George & Alexander, 1993).

The time to plan and collaborate is an essential element of interdisciplinary teaming, since "[c]ommon planning time underpins the concept of teaming and provides the opportunity for personal interactions that must be provided to teachers before they can model it for their students" (Pitton, 2001, p. 19). Although common planning time may seem like a relatively benign part of the picture, teaming requires that teachers must change their behaviors and attitudes about their roles as teachers. Many seasoned teachers have come to accept their curriculum, classrooms, and students as their own. However, interdisciplinary teaming requires a much more collaborative approach to all of these areas, thus requiring a new level of collegiality.

Serious consideration about how teachers are assigned to each team is also a critical factor in an effective middle school interdisciplinary team. Team size is important because, according to Clark and Clark (1994), having a team that is too large can impair the team’s ability to plan, schedule, and group as well as deter content integration. They also note that a large team has an increased tendency for personality conflicts. Highly effective teams are created with consideration of personalities, although no single method of team assignment has been found to be exclusively successful. Upon determining team assignments, the need for establishing leadership is crucial, but this leadership should be based on expert knowledge, control of information, and personal charisma rather than power in the form of rewards, punishment, or authority (Glatthorn & Spencer, 1986).
Student benefits from interdisciplinary teaming include an increased feeling of belonging with those members of the team to which a student is assigned due to smaller, stable grouping. Research indicates that students on interdisciplinary teams tend to have increased self-esteem, more positive attitudes about learning, and perform better on standardized tests in language arts, reading, and mathematics (Erb, 1997; Stevenson & Erb, 1998). Arhar, Johnston, and Markle (1989) support the growing body of literature suggesting that interdisciplinary teaming has a positive influence on students in the affective domain. In order to create and maintain a feeling of belonging as well as the other positive attributes of teaming, 90 or fewer students is the most desirable size for an interdisciplinary team (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

According to George (2000/2001), “Of all of the components of the middle school concept, teaming is the one that school leaders refuse to give up” (p. 40). When funding and other limitations require changes or cuts in schools, middle level educators still hold fast to interdisciplinary teaming. In addition to the academic benefits of interdisciplinary teaming, students in a teaming environment benefit from the student-teacher relationships that evolve because of the closer, more collaborative environment (Kramer, 1992). This fact enhances and supports another key middle level practice, advisory programs.

Advisor/advisee programs

The advisor/advisee concept was conceived in an effort to create a smaller, more caring learning climate in which teachers and other staff help to monitor the social and academic development of students. Epstein and MacIver (1990, p. 22) note that “one of the major dilemmas of middle grades education is how to balance the academic emphases of subject
classes with structures that provide early adolescents with the social and emotional support they need to succeed as students.” Although the design of this program varies from school to school, the underlying purpose remains the same: to promote stronger relationships between students and staff in a small, secure setting (George & Alexander, 1993; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Most principals in schools with active advisory programs expect fewer students to drop out of school before high school graduation and also give higher ratings to their guidance programs (Epstein & MacIver, 1990).

In *This We Believe*, the NMSA (1992) identified the characteristics of young adolescents, one of which was the area of social development and the need to belong to a group, search for themselves, and address the issue of social vulnerability. The NMSA indicated that the responsive middle school provides adult advocates for every student in an effort to help each student grow in self-esteem and develop a positive attitude resulting in improved student performance (Baker, 1986). Connors (1992) notes that effective middle level schools include advisory programs because the staff is committed to the personal and social growth of young adolescents, and realize that many middle level students may lack home support.

Despite these arguments in favor of advisor/advisee programs at the middle level, a survey of 1,753 principals in schools that included seventh graders determined that 25% of these schools had no advisory-type structure in place (Epstein & MacIver, 1990). Additionally, Pitton (2001) noted that teacher-based guidance programs, such as advisor/advisee programs, had declined slightly from 1988 to 1993. Confirming this decline, a recent NASSP middle level study (Valentine et al., 2002) indicated that only 57% of middle level schools had regularly scheduled advisor/advisee programs.
The advisor/advisee program, including the role of the teacher-advisor, must be well planned and well defined to be effective. However, lack of teacher preparation deters the effectiveness of any program or curriculum, including the advisory program (Pitton, 2001). *Turning Points* recommended that “advisors should receive pre- and in-service education in adolescent development and principles of guidance” (CCAD, 1989, p. 40). Advisors should understand their role in relationship to the school’s guidance counselor. The most effective advisory programs, according to Jackson and Davis (2000), are those in which advisors work in collaboration with guidance counselors. The teacher-advisor should be a facilitator, not a counselor, whose primary role is to promote positive relationships with students and help them in addressing the many problems that are reality in the life of a young adolescent. Clark and Clark (1994) note that the activities in the advisor/advisee program should not require the specialized training and skills of the guidance program, but rather, should address the social and instructional needs of each child.

Activities in a well-designed advisor/advisee program should focus on “social or academic support activities that use teachers’ talents as advisors and that help students feel that someone is looking out for their interests and needs” (MacIver, 1990, p. 459). Middle level students need this opportunity to discuss issues that concern them, to find a place where they feel they belong, and to connect with an adult who cares about them (Pitton, 2001). Although content of advisor/advisee programs varies from school to school, the topics should be decided with input from teachers and students and reflect the needs of the students within each school and community. Schools that implement “canned” or prepackaged advisory programs or topics tend to be less successful than those schools in which teachers design their own (Fenwick, 1992). Themes and topics can range from orienting students to the rules
and procedures of the school, to learning to set and attain goals, to improving testing and study skills. Coordination of the program from grade to grade eliminates or reduces repetition in the advisor/advisee curriculum so that students stay actively engaged and interested in the topics.

Critical questions when planning and implementing an advisor/advisee program include at what time of day to schedule the program, how often to meet, and how long each meeting should last (Connors, 1992). These details also vary significantly from one school to another. Since the needs of schools should determine the design of the advisor/advisee program, input from staff members should weigh heavily in these decisions.

The decision about when to schedule advisor/advisee meetings also is affected by many factors in each school. Connors (1992) indicated that the optimal time for advisors to meet with students was the beginning of the day, to help students with any negative attitudes or other problems with which they might start the day. She found, however, that other schools have met with success when advisor/advisee time fell after the lunch hour or even at the very end of the school day. Although most middle level schools scheduled advisor/advisee meetings at the start of the instructional day, it was not uncommon for advisory meetings to take place near the lunch hour, at the end of the day, or to allow interdisciplinary teams to decide when in their own schedules the advisory groups would meet (Clark & Clark, 1994). Jackson and Davis (2000) noted similar findings, but they also stressed that advisory group meetings should not be "squeezed into a lunch period, scheduled irregularly as time allows, or conducted when another activity is canceled. The effectiveness of the advisory depends on trust, forged through continuity in relationships over time" (p. 143).
The time spent in the advisor/advisee period varies greatly, although advisor/advisee sessions generally last about 20 to 30 minutes (Clark & Clark, 1994; Epstein & MacIver, 1990). Jackson and Davis (2000) indicate that the ideal amount of time for advisor/advisee meetings is 25 to 30 minutes daily, or at the very least, three times per week. Frequency of advisory sessions in schools ranges from monthly to daily, with most middle schools indicating a daily preference (Clark & Clark, 1994). Regardless of the time and frequency that the advisor/advisee groups meet, ongoing program review and revision are critical to success, as is the commitment by staff to address the needs of the early adolescent learner.

Another critical concern in the advisor/advisee program is the size of the group, as well as whether an advisor should maintain a multi-year relationship with the same group of students. Group sizes tend to vary according to the size of school and availability of adults to serve as advisors. Clark and Clark (1994) found that group size varied from 15 to 30 students, and that groups usually consisted of students within a single grade. They also found some schools in which teachers and students remained together as an intact advisory group for the duration of the students' stay within that school. With an ongoing relationship over multiple years, the advisor gets to know his/her students better with each passing year (George, 1987). This arrangement enhances the level of trust between students and advisor, as well as among students themselves.

**Exploratory programs**

The purpose of the exploratory program is to make the most of the natural curiosity of early adolescent learners, as well as to allow students to demonstrate their abilities in a variety of areas. The NMSA (2000) advocates that exploratory programs should expose
middle level learners to academic, vocational, and recreational subjects to allow them to explore career options, community service, enrichment, and enjoyment. Clark and Clark (1994) state that the exploratory curriculum should be an essential part of the middle level curriculum, providing “essential, less structured learning experiences…and student selected enrichment, participatory experiences” (p. 97). The exploratory curriculum allows students to explore areas of interest during a time of crucial development to better understand themselves and those interests.

The organization and structure of the exploratory program vary among middle level schools, but most include a sequence of required and elective courses (Clark & Clark, 1994). Topics addressed in the exploratory offerings could include foreign languages, intramural sports, clubs, student government, family and consumer science, art, independent studies, music, industrial technology, dramatics, creative writing, and a variety of other topics deemed to be of interest to the learners in a given school.

There are a variety of reasons for including exploratory courses at the middle level. Exploratory offerings tend to provide opportunities for socialization and hands-on activities. Additionally, they build on or utilize skills that students have acquired in their core curriculum classes (Clark & Clark, 1994; Toepfer, 1992). Irvin (1992) reports that exploratory courses can help to reinforce concepts and develop vocabulary while helping students connect what they have learned in the core curriculum with the outside world. Toepfer (1992) also noted the need for exploratory courses to “help students apply what they learn in school to current issues in their lives” (p. 217). He viewed the exploratory offerings as a vehicle by which early adolescent learners can find out more about themselves in preparation for high school and adult life afterward.
One of the key differences between the core curriculum and the exploratory curriculum is the flexibility in deciding what is offered. According to Clark and Clark, the core curriculum consists of the “content and skills that are considered to be basic for all students” (1994, p. 91) and is based on academic standards of what all students should know and be able to do. The core curriculum typically consists of reading/language arts, social studies, math, and science, although George and Alexander (1993) omit specifying reading as a part of the middle school core curriculum. By contrast, the exploratory curriculum is locally designed to be flexible to address the needs and interests of students in a community. Since the availability of resources and the needs of students vary widely from one school to another, so do the offerings of the exploratory courses. Therefore, local control of what exploratory courses to offer should be decided by educators who are directly involved in the implementation and working with middle level students who will be affected by the courses. Clark and Clark (1994) offer three questions to guide the decisions about which exploratory offerings should be made available: 1) Should exploratory experiences assist students with current needs and interests? 2) Should exploratory experiences be future-oriented and assist students in acquiring skills that will assist them when they become adults? 3) Should exploratory experiences focus on attitudes and values? In addition to determining the availability of exploratory offerings, structure and scheduling are also an important part of planning for exploratory courses. Time of day, frequency, length of the exploratory period, and staffing can influence the success of the exploratory program.

In their study, Epstein and MacIver (1990) reported that fewer than half of middle level principals indicated that some type of exploratory offerings were available in their schools. The actual numbers varied based on whether the schools defined their courses as electives,
exploratories, or mini-courses. However, a decade later Valentine et al. (2002) found that 79% of middle level principals responding to a nationwide survey about middle school practices indicated they offered exploratory courses. In the decade between the two studies, a significant increase in the implementation of exploratory programming is noted.

Transitioning from Elementary to Middle Level Schools

The joys and challenges accompanying the onset of early adolescence are many and occur at varying times for each child. According to Arth (1990), students making the transition from childhood to the early stages of adolescence experience new behaviors and thinking in all areas, ranging from physical and mental to social and emotional. This is a time of life when parents and children begin to part ways, yet a time when a child needs considerable guidance as he/she explores the path to adulthood. In *Great Transitions*, CCAD (1996) points out the complexity and importance of this developmental stage:

> Adolescence is one of the most fascinating and complex transitions in the life span: a time of accelerated growth and change second only to infancy, a time of expanding horizons, self-discovery, and emerging independence, a time of metamorphosis from childhood to adulthood. Its beginning is associated with profound biological, physical, behavioral, and social transformations that roughly correspond with the move to middle school or junior high school. The events of this crucially formative phase can shape an individual’s entire life course and thus the future of our society. (p. 7)

According to CCAD (1996), the tremendous changes and growth of the early adolescent are only exceeded by the rapid physical development experienced during infancy.
The influence of these changes in the development of transescent learners has strong implications for providing guidance and direction during their transition from elementary to the middle level school. Simmons and Blyth (1987) asserted that many young adolescents' problems in school begin at the transition from the elementary to middle grades school. The need for well-planned and implemented transition practices also is emphasized by the findings of Epstein and MacIver (1990): "Regardless of grade span, principals in schools with more extensive articulation programs report that significantly fewer students are retained to repeat the transition grade" (p. 52).

A well-articulated transition between elementary and middle level schools is a primary factor in the successful experiences that students have in middle level schools and, consequently, is a key to the success of public education. However, transition practices do not start simply at entry in the middle level school (Arth, 1995; Toepfer, 1990). Rather, students in the last elementary grade should be provided with experiences that prepare them for the move into the middle level school the following year. A well-articulated transition program requires cooperation between the elementary and middle level schools; it is not the sole responsibility of the middle level school (Toepfer, 1990).

A variety of reasons for strong transition programs have been reported. For example, Turning Points (1989) has noted the warning signals of alienation, drug abuse, absenteeism, and school dropouts. Epstein and MacIver (1990) cite the following purposes for developing transition practices between elementary and middle level school: 1) to better inform children and families about school programs, requirements, procedures, opportunities, and about students' and parents' responsibilities in the new learning environment; 2) to better inform middle grade educators about the connections between their programs and those of the
elementary schools from which students are coming; and 3) to better prepare middle level educators to help students adjust to and experience success in their new school. In a study of 251 sixth grade students, Mullins (1997) found that many students experienced anxieties related to self-perception, scholastic competence, social acceptance, and physical appearance as they prepared to enter into the middle school, providing further evidence for the need for well-developed transition practices.

The Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools at The Johns Hopkins University surveyed 2,400 middle level principals on the degree of middle level implementation practices employed in their schools. Epstein and Maclver (1990) summarized these surveys and concluded that the behavior and learning that students experienced depends on well-designed and carefully implemented transition activities for students and their families as they move into new schools.

According to Viadero (1999), making connections is critical during early adolescence because of a shift in intellectual capacity that enables students at this level to "really be able to think about the future and make choices" (p. 33). However, thinking about the future and making good choices must be taught and modeled for students. Well-designed transition programs can provide a vehicle to assist in this effort. According to Epstein and Maclver (1990), "Fuller and more diversified articulation programs should make the transitions to and from the middle grades easier for students. This is a potentially important connection between a particular middle grades practice and an indicator of more successful school programs" (p. 52).
Lower academic achievement

A review of the literature discloses that one area of concern expressed by students and their families is academic performance. In a longitudinal study of 335 early adolescents followed from grades 6 through 8 in two Midwestern suburban school districts, Petersen and Crockett (1985) identified a drop in academic performance at the transition year as measured by students' grades in five academic subjects. Finger and Silverman (1966) studied seventh grade students in five junior high schools in two Rhode Island cities. They used the Personal Values Inventory, a student self-assessment, to measure students' expectations of themselves and found that students who had large drops in academic performance when they entered the middle level school had lower expectations for themselves academically. This study also concluded that "youth culture," the expectations of peers and the need to fit in, also played a role in a general decline in academic achievement.

Odegaard (1992) studied the perceptions of 205 sixth grade students, their parents, and 87 middle level teachers in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, regarding concerns related to elementary to middle school transition. Her study determined that, while each group had different emphases, all three had concerns about the movement of students from elementary to middle school. Parent and student concerns were focused largely on academics (students expressed concerns about excessive homework, and parents concerns focused on their children completing homework), and teachers were most concerned about student behavior.

When Turning Points 2000 was published, student achievement, coupled with addressing the developmental needs of the early adolescent learner, received a greater emphasis than was the case in previous discussions of middle level education. With this enhanced emphasis on academic achievement came a more pressing need to provide students
with support and assistance in making the transition into middle school. According to Balfanz and Maclver (2000), nearly half of the students from school districts in the largest cities in the United States have not made successful transitions into high school. Other studies have shown that in the middle level entry year as well as in high school entry grade, students generally experience a decline in grade point averages (Finger & Silverman, 1966; Mullins, 1997). In a longitudinal study of 594 students in the Milwaukee Public Schools from 1974 to 1979, Blyth, Simmons, and Carlton-Ford (1983) found a general decrease in students' grade point averages as they transitioned into their new school at both the middle and high school levels. Additionally, they determined that boys and girls moving into the middle level school tended to have lower grade point averages than their counterparts who remained in a K–8 school configuration. A longitudinal study of 335 early adolescents followed from sixth through eighth grades in two Midwestern school districts, conducted by Petersen and Crockett (1985), concluded that girls tended to have higher grades than boys in the areas of language arts, literature, and social studies, suggesting a possible need to provide early adolescent males with study skills instruction and a more structured transition. Finger and Silverman (1966) studied seventh grade students in five junior high schools in two Rhode Island cities. Using the California Achievement Test in reading to measure students' academic performance, they also found that student performance tended to drop as they moved from elementary to the middle level school. However, they also noted that the development of academic plans had a positive impact on their performance at the middle level school.

This need for strong practices is not only limited to the elementary to middle level transition but also is vital between the middle level and high schools (Balfanz & Maclver,
Pantleo (1992) studied ninth grade students in a high school of 1,200 students to determine if a variety of transition practices employed during their eighth grade year affected their performance as high school freshmen. As part of a middle-to-high school transition program, students participated in four activities designed to make their move into the high school go smoothly: 1) a study skills program that began the year prior to entering the high school; 2) a shadow day where a middle level student followed a high school student for a day; 3) a day where students were told about sports, music, drama, and related clubs and encouraged to sign up to participate; and 4) assignment of high school peer leaders who met with younger students throughout the year for social and/or academic support. When students participated in this program, the likelihood of their success in high school increased, and those who participated in the peer visits had fewer failing grades. Pantleo reported that students indicated they wanted to connect to their new school and that they needed more information about extracurricular activities, careers, class schedules, and study skills.

**Lower self-esteem**

Students moving into middle level schools face a variety of concerns and negative experiences ranging from academic to social challenges (CCAD, 1989, 1996; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Stewart, 1999; Valentine et al., 2002). Concerns include negative social interactions, reduced self-esteem, and academic uncertainty. Due to the developmental needs of early adolescents to find their place in the social environment, the transition to the new school environment may cause feelings of uncertainty and concern due to potential disruptions of social relationships (Simmons & Blyth, 1987).
Jackson and Davis (2000) assert that many students experience a decline in self-esteem upon transitioning to middle school. Mullins (1997) surveyed 251 students from two elementary schools in the southeastern United States regarding their perceptions of their transition experiences from elementary into middle school, after completing grade 5 at the elementary. Students were surveyed both before and after their transition into middle school. Mullins found that there was a slight decline in students' perceptions of their physical appearance during the transition time, with a more marked decline in their perceptions of their overall self-esteem. Petersen and Crockett (1985) reported similar findings, but also noted that girls tended to have a lower body image than their male counterparts.

James (1994) surveyed students in a suburban Midwestern community who had recently entered a 6–8 grade junior high school and concluded that many of their concerns focused on social and self-esteem issues. Brimlow's (1998) survey of sixth and seventh grade students from two separate feeder schools in northwestern California found that girls generally reported lower self-esteem than boys.

Blyth, Simmons, and Carlton-Ford (1983) found that female students experienced a decline in reported self-esteem while boys generally experienced an increase in reported self-esteem. This study also determined that students entering the middle level school environment reported increased feelings of anonymity when compared to their feelings in their former school. Similarly, in a study of fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and their parents in an upper middle-class suburban community in California, Thompson (1981) reported an increase in alienated and/or deviant behavior by students as they entered the secondary learning environment.
Felner's (2002) study of 1,204 Illinois students in a treatment group compared 761 students in a control group, all of whom were entering the middle level school from the elementary setting. This study concluded that students who participated in well-defined transition programs experienced lower levels of concern about the move to the middle level school, and better adjustment in the areas of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and delinquent behaviors than their counterparts in the non-treatment group.

Student concerns about teacher expectations

The middle school movement has provided leadership and guidance in creating a responsive learning environment that truly addresses the needs of the early adolescent learner, but a need still exists in the area of transitioning students from the elementary to the middle level school. Research continues to document that students and their parents are concerned about moving from elementary to middle school (Sierer, 1988). Gulino (1997) included 62 Missouri 6–8 grade middle level schools in a study of student engagement in four programmatic practices (including well-defined transition programs, interdisciplinary teaming, curriculum designed to meet the developmental needs of the student, and middle school endorsed teachers) and the students' levels of satisfaction with school. Principals of these schools completed a survey in which they indicated programs used in their respective schools, and students were surveyed about their levels of school satisfaction. Gulino found that curriculum designed to address the developmental needs of young adolescents showed the highest correlation with student satisfaction. Additionally, he found that a well-developed transition program alone did not result in student satisfaction with school. Instead, Gulino
noted, "It appears from the data that impact on student satisfaction is a function of a comprehensive set of circumstances" (Gulino & Valentine, 1999, p. 97).

Sierer and Winfield (1988) conducted a study of 379 eighth and ninth grade students in private middle schools concerning their middle school experiences. They found that students in eighth grade tended to have more negative attitudes about school, and that many students reported concerns about lack of clarity in goals and directions, teachers who were not helpful, and lack of consideration in the curriculum and instructional approaches for taking into account what topics were of interest to the students. Although this study was conducted in a private school setting, they concluded that their findings were consistent with other studies of public middle school students.

Ison (1995) surveyed fifth grade students in the Milton-Union, Ohio School District during their final elementary year during the 1992–93 school year and then again in their entry middle level year in sixth grade during the 1993–94 school year. Ison replicated this survey with another group of students during the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years, finding that most students ranked personal responsibility and independence to be the most pressing concerns as they moved from the elementary to the middle level school. However, this concern decreased over time. Additionally, this study found that students were also concerned about teacher expectations, recognition, and school organization, but to a lesser degree.

Teacher/parent concerns

Transition practices have many facets, including helping to inform students and their families about school programs and requirements, assuring that students are prepared for
moving into a new school environment, and informing and preparing middle level educators so they are knowledgeable and ready for the incoming students (Epstein & Maclver, 1990).

Although most transition practices focus on helping the incoming middle level student make a smooth adjustment, there is also a need for careful articulation, including communication and planning between the elementary and middle level staffs. Articulation issues affecting students include student grading practices, instructional delivery systems, subject content and sequence, and teaching methodology (Valentine et al., 2002). These issues point to a need for addressing elementary-middle level planning and articulation to ensure that the needs of the students are met in a seamless fashion.

Research has documented a decline in parent and family involvement when students enter middle level and high schools, which seems to correspond with the decline in student performance during this same period of time (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). Findings such as these have led to the realization that there is a need to provide transition activities for the parents of middle level students in addition to activities for students (Epstein & Maclver, 1990). Although a need exists for providing parent transition activities, the challenge of developing effective transition practices exists. This is noted by Epstein and Maclver (1990), who found that some transition practices were not used because principals believed they were too time consuming for the benefit they provided. Examples include parent visits to the middle level school in the fall for orientation after their children have entered the school, and parent visits to the middle level school when children are in the elementary school.

The need to involve and include parents in transition practices from elementary to middle level school is further emphasized by Thompson’s (1981) finding that parent-child
communication typically deteriorates as students move from elementary to middle level schools, that social climate with respect to home-school relationships deteriorates, and that there is an increase in alienated and/or deviant behavior by students as they enter the secondary learning environment. These factors point toward the need for further research to understand the effective use of elementary to middle level transition practices.

**Transition practices**

There are several ingredients for successful transitions (Viadero, 1999). Viadero purports that successful school transitions are cumulative, beginning before children enter the middle level school. By preparing children and families for elementary school, a foundation is developed for later successful transitions. Once children have entered elementary school, there must be support for children and families in the early grades, including positive expectations for the future. Although the elementary experience provides the foundation for later successful transitions, the types and frequency of transition practices vary.

Successful transitions must occur throughout the schooling process. Viadero (1999) points to several factors that result from effective transition programs, including the following: 1) children have good feelings about school, teachers, parents, and peers; 2) children show good progress in physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development; 3) parents and key adults express positive attitudes toward school and promote children’s learning; 4) teachers and school personnel provide programs adapted to children’s individual development and cultural/linguistic diversity; 5) mutually supportive relationships occur among families, school personnel, service providers, and communities; and 6) positive school adjustment and successful transitions to adolescence and adulthood.
Epstein and Maclver (1990) note that “schools dedicated to early adolescents... use more and different articulation practices than other schools” (p. 50). However, high-poverty urban schools and schools in rural communities, where low student achievement is prevalent, tend to be the schools that do not implement middle school practices, including transition activities from one level to the next (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Epstein and Maclver (1990) found that the most commonly utilized transition activities included elementary students visiting the middle level school they would be attending for an information session or assembly, middle level and elementary administrators meet to plan articulation programs, and middle level counselors meet with elementary guidance staff. It also was noted that transition practices that were more time consuming, more difficult to implement, or costly were used less often than other transition practices that did not present these constraints. Fewer than 40% of the principals responding to their study used the aforementioned practices. Additionally, few responding schools indicated that they used transition practices that included parent visits to the middle level school in the fall for orientation after their children have entered, meetings between middle level and elementary teachers, parent visits to the middle level school while their children were still in the elementary school, middle level students presenting information at the elementary school, elementary students attending classes at the middle school, summer meetings for students at the middle school, or buddy programs pairing new students with older ones upon entry to the middle school.

Additional transition practices noted by Valentine et al. (2002), ranked from most to least frequently employed by the responding middle level principals, included middle level counselors going to the elementary schools to meet with students, incoming students coming
to the middle level school in the fall for orientation activities without the older students present, and middle level counselors conducting the orientation process at the middle level school without significant assistance from teachers or students.

Well-defined transition practices work to address the many concerns that students and families experience as children move from elementary to middle level schools. Gulino (1997) found that education in large middle level schools tended to implement more transition practices than smaller schools. However, many of the needs addressed in transition practices are not limited to only the needs of students who attend larger schools.

Odegaard (1992/1993) noted that incoming middle level students experienced generalized feelings of concern about entering the middle level school. Her study also found that a variety of transition programs helped students make a successful transition from elementary to the middle level school. Epstein and MacIver (1990) state that “...student learning and behavior depend on the design and conduct of activities for students and families that ease the transition to new schools, and even more on the excellence of the school program after the transition is made” (p. 49).

Research supports the theory that differences exist in the types and frequency of transition practices used in middle schools and junior high schools. Fonts (1998) noted that students moving into a junior high setting had more negative comments and feelings than did their peers moving into a middle school setting where interdisciplinary teams were in place. Fonts’ dissertation research, which surveyed 500 middle level and high school principals from across the nation, also noted that children moving into a middle level school from multiple feeder elementary schools generally tended to need more transition services to address the wider range of concerns that a larger, more impersonal feeder pattern imposes.
In a dissertation study of transition practices at eight middle level schools in Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Florida, Boronkay (1999, p. 79) suggested the following activities for elementary to middle level school transition programs: 1) determine a grouping strategy or model based on research and student needs, 2) hold transition meetings between elementary and middle level staffs to dialogue about transitioning students and their needs/talents, 3) present a thorough orientation for transitioning students with high administrator visibility and involvement, 4) host a thorough orientation for the parents of transitioning students describing a typical day and emphasizing how the middle school is equipped to deal with early adolescent needs, 5) use the advisor/advisee model to have each transitioning student known especially well by at least one caring adult, and 6) empower teacher teams to have ownership of their school-within-a-school and their transitioning students.

Small teams and teacher-based advisory programming appear to enable students to make the transition into middle grades schools without the pronounced declines in socio/emotional well-being and academic achievement that have been reported in some studies of students moving into middle grades schools and junior high schools. The positive effects of small teams and teacher-based advisory programs are even more pronounced when the teams are kept in their own areas of the building and away from older students (Simmons & Blyth, 1987).

Alexander and George (1981) list transition/articulation as one of the essential features of middle level schools. Similarly, NASSP (1985) lists effective transition practices as a primary responsibility of the middle-level school. Addressing the concerns of students as they move from elementary to middle level school is the underlying reason for planning,
implementing, and evaluating transition programs. Epstein and Maclver (1990, p. 48) indicate the following benefits of a well-designed elementary-to-middle level transition program: 1) to ensure that students and their families are well informed about middle level school programs, requirements, procedures, and opportunities, as well as the responsibilities of both the parents and students in the new learning environment; 2) to ensure that incoming students are well prepared for the academic and social demands in the new school; 3) to ensure that middle level teachers knowledgeable about the connections between the elementary and middle level schools, so they can better understand how to meet the needs of these students; and 4) to ensure that middle level teachers are prepared to assist students to adjust and to succeed in their new school environment.

The preparation of students to be successful as they transition from elementary to middle school still lacks the research and definition necessary to provide a strong foundation for improving this important step in the educational process. The quality and scope of transition practices from the elementary to middle level school are inconsistent, with middle-class, suburban, and private schools using more transition practices than middle level schools in areas where they are needed most—specifically poor, urban schools (Viadero, 1999). Jackson and Davis (2000, p. 5) found that schools in “high-poverty urban and rural communities where unacceptably poor student achievement is rampant” were also least likely to implement middle school practices. According to the NASSP (1985), there is “lack of data on program successes and failures” as they relate to middle level programming (p. 82). Allen (1993) cited the developmental needs of transescents as the basis for enhanced transition practices:
Given the problems and challenges confronting young people in contemporary American society, it is necessary for middle level schools to meet the educational and developmental needs of young adolescents in school settings and to attempt to provide experiences which are socially, emotionally, and intellectually satisfying. (p. 21)

Additionally, Maclver (1990) found that school administrators believed transition programs that best met the needs of students included activities that gave students and their parents information about the new school, provided social support for students during the transition period, and brought staff members from both the entering and receiving school levels together to learn about the incoming students, curriculum, and expectations.

A review of the literature has repeatedly shown that students, parents, and teachers have concerns as students make the transition from elementary to middle level schools. Early adolescents experience a wide array of concerns related to their personal and social relationships at a time that often coincides with their movement from a smaller, more personal elementary setting to a larger, less structured middle level setting. According to the research, these factors tend to create a risk factor for the early adolescent learner. However, the literature is virtually void of an understanding of what transition practices are most often employed to lead to successful transitioning of middle level students, how middle level schools determine which of many transition practices to employ, and how to refine those practices based on student needs.

Much of the research that has been conducted in the area of elementary to middle level school transition programs has addressed the concerns held by students, and to a lesser degree, concerns held by parents, teachers, and administrators about the challenges and
difficulties, both perceived and real. While these studies clearly demonstrate that a need exists for transition practices to address the movement of students from one level to another, this review of the literature produced very little research that showed what transition practices are most frequently employed by middle level schools as they bring elementary students into the new school environment. Additionally, there is a lack of research to describe how schools determine what transition practices to use and when to make changes in those practices that they employ.

By systematically addressing the concerns of incoming students and their parents, as well as providing strong communication with their elementary colleagues about incoming students, middle level schools can create a proactive response to the needs of new students. With ongoing assessment, adjustments can be made to transition practices to meet the changing needs of students over time.

**Summary**

This review of literature described the needs of the early adolescent based on the dramatic physical, cognitive, and social changes experienced at this time in a young person’s life. The historical evolution of the middle school movement was outlined, beginning with the junior high school in 1909, which was designed to better meet the needs of the middle level learner than its predecessor, the 8-4 grammar school-high school grade level structure. In the early 1960s, the middle school philosophy began to emerge under the guidance of William Alexander. Although the emphasis on meeting the needs of the early adolescent learner was the foundation in both the junior high and middle school, Alexander’s work did more to address the emotional and social needs of the middle level student. It was not until
Turning Points 2000 that a balance of academic, social, and emotional emphases seemed to emerge.

With the many needs of the early adolescent, or transescent, addressing the transition from the elementary to the middle level school was absent from the literature. In Turning Points (1989), CCAD points out the need for addressing the transescent's move from the smaller, more structured elementary school to the larger, more impersonal middle level school. This observation seemed to provide a springboard for an increase in the research related to the movement of students from elementary to middle level school, as well as students moving from the middle level to high school. These studies, many of them focusing on the needs and the concerns of the students, found that students moving across buildings do have worries and concerns, as do their parents. The majority of the studies in the literature review focused on surveying and/or interviewing students to learn more about their concerns during the move from elementary to middle level school. Some studies included the concerns of parents and teachers.

This review found a number of studies that surveyed middle level principals about their descriptions of transition practices employed in their schools, and some studies that described the principals' role in transitioning students into the middle level school. The findings of these studies clearly demonstrate that students, their parents, and even educators experience many concerns about the changes that students experience as they move from elementary to the middle level school. The wide variety of concerns found in so many studies support the need to determine the elements of successful transition programs that will provide guidance and structure as students move into the middle level learning environment.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology; research questions; description of the statistical analysis; research design; pilot study; instrumentation including validity and reliability; human subjects release; and data collection, processing, and analysis.

This study utilized a mixed methodological approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative data, to study to what extent transition practices are used in identified public middle level schools in the state of Iowa, and why officials in selected schools have chosen to use these practices. Based on predefined criteria (public middle level schools with two or more feeder schools with grades no lower than 6 and no higher than 9), 118 Iowa public middle level principals were asked to complete a Transition Practices Inventory to determine what, if any, transition practices were used and the level of use of these practices. Analysis of the transition practices instrument identified four middle level schools in which the principal reported using a high number of transition practices. These schools’ principals were invited to participate in the qualitative portion of the study, which consisted of interviews to further analyze what practices they employed to assist incoming middle level students, purposes for implementation of transition practices, and to help understand why these schools have continued to utilize their transition practices.
Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequently and the least frequently implemented transition practices for middle level students and their parents in selected Iowa middle level schools?

2. What planning resources have schools identified as most integral when developing their transition practices?

3. Is there a positive relationship between the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation) and the use of transition practices used to acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle-level school environment?

4. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

5. Is there a positive relationship between the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation) and transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment?

6. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new
middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

7. Do the number of transition practices implemented have a positive relationship to:
   (a) enrollment size of grade entering the middle level school, or (b) the number of feeder schools, or (c) the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches?

8. How do principals who have self-identified high use of transition practices determine which practices to use based on student need, parental input, and other factors?

**Statistical Procedures**

Research questions 1 and 2 used descriptive statistics to describe the use of transition practices, planning resources utilized, and which schools were most fully implementing the identified transition practices. Research questions 3, 5, 7a, 7b, and 7c used one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients to test for relationships between student transition practices and the three signature middle level practices; parent transition practices and the three signature middle level practices; and the level of transition practices and enrollment size, number of feeder schools, and the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. Research questions 4 and 6 used independent-sample t-tests to test for relationships between the use of student-oriented transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a district, and the use of parent-oriented transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a district.
To address question 8, qualitative analysis was used to describe the results of the interviews with four middle level principals whose Transition Practices Inventory results indicated that a high number of transition practices were employed at their schools, how they identified which practices to use, and what factors influenced their decision on continued use of those transition practices. Finally, principals had the opportunity to add comments that extended beyond the survey items (see Appendix E).

**Sampling Frame**

A request was made to the Iowa Department of Education for a listing of all public middle level schools in Iowa that included grades 5 through 9. Additional information included name of school district, name of school, principal, address, city, grade levels at each building and the corresponding student enrollment by grade, total student enrollment by building, and number of elementary feeder schools. Upon analyzing the data, it was determined that four grade level clusters were used at the middle level in the state of Iowa: grades 5–8, 6–8, 7–8, and 7–9. Due to an extremely small number (5) of 5–8 grade level configured middle level schools, it was determined that this sample size would not be adequate for statistical analysis. Therefore, this grade level configuration was eliminated from the study. Similarly, a small number of additional schools were disqualified from the study because they did not have multiple elementary feeder schools. For example, two schools were eliminated because their school districts had two middle level schools, each serving different grade levels so that a middle level building, not an elementary school, was the feeder school. Next, the data were analyzed to verify that all remaining schools had at least two elementary schools that contributed to the student population of the middle level
Verification included checking the district websites and making phone calls, as some districts shared middle level schools and the elementary feeders were from two separate school districts. The result of these analyses was a total of 118 middle level schools that included grades no lower than six and no higher than nine, with each school having at least two elementary feeder schools. The 118 principals formed the sample population and were invited to participate in the study.

For the qualitative portion of this study, the data from the Transition Practices Inventory were analyzed by first identifying schools that reported high use of the three signature middle school practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs. Next, the number and level of implementation of student transition practices was assessed, followed by the number and level of implementation of parent transition programs. From this analysis, a purposive sample of four middle school principals were selected for the follow-up qualitative interviews. These interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participating principals and conducted at the identified middle school. All interviews were audiotaped, and the researcher also took handwritten notes. The audiotapes were transcribed and analyzed for common trends and themes.

**Development of the Instrument**

The inventory used in this study was developed after an extensive review of the literature to identify signature middle school practices and to identify transition practices used to assist students and their parents/guardians in the move from elementary to middle level schools. Many of the practices identified in the literature were integrated or adapted for the inventory used in this study.
During the fall of 2000, a dissertation seminar group consisting of doctoral students and a university professor reviewed the inventory to provide feedback as the inventory evolved. In April 2001, the researcher's major advisor and doctoral committee provided additional input to further refine the inventory. The final step was to pilot the inventory with eight Missouri middle level school principals in September 2001 (see Appendix A). As a result of the pilot, minor clarifying wording changes were made to the inventory before it was posted online. These steps are consistent with guidelines developed through research on the development and use of Internet surveys (Dillman, 2000). A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix C.

Validation of the instrument

The Transition Practices Inventory was validated by five Iowa State University professors familiar with various aspects of middle level education and public school administration. Additionally, the inventory was shared with graduate students in a dissertation seminar. Recommendations included the following: excluding value-driven questions in which respondents would indicate how they felt about the need for certain middle level practices, revising some word choices, and employing research-based organizational techniques for web-based surveys. Once the doctoral committee approved the research proposal, eight middle level principals in the state of Missouri were invited to complete a paper-pencil version of the inventory and provide feedback on wording, length of time required to complete the inventory, and general comments regarding the inventory itself. Four of these principals completed the inventory and provided feedback for modifications. Additionally, three middle level principals in Iowa who did not meet the criteria to be invited
to participate in this study were asked to provide feedback on the prototype of the web-based version of the inventory, which eventually was used in the actual research study.

The qualitative portion of the study provided reasonable reliability by the use of a common set of questions with all subjects participating in the qualitative interviews. However, as in all qualitative research, these findings cannot be generalized beyond the participants in this portion of the study.

**Human Subjects release**

The final form of the letter inviting principals to complete the Transition Practices Inventory was mailed to identified Iowa middle level principals after Iowa State University Human Subjects Committee approval was obtained (see Appendix F). In accordance with Human Subjects criteria, participants were informed of their rights as related to participation in this study. Consent to participate was obtained from all participants in the form of modified consent assumed by those who voluntarily accessed and completed the web-based inventory, in accordance with Human Subjects criteria.

**Instrument Distribution and Data Collection**

The initial letters inviting the 118 middle level principals to participate in this research study via a web-based inventory were mailed on November 12, 2001, accompanied by a dollar bill as a token of gratitude and added incentive to access and complete the Transition Practices Inventory (see Appendix B). The letter, which was sent via United States Postal Service, included a code number for each principal to use on the website. This code number provided security to ensure that unidentified individuals did not complete the inventory and
also provided a vehicle to monitor which schools had not completed the inventory so that they could be reminded to do so. An additional benefit of the coding was the researcher’s ability to seek and enter data that were omitted by the respondent. The initial letter asked participants to complete the web-based inventory by November 30, 2001. Four principals contacted the researcher to request paper copies of the survey due to accessibility difficulties with the web site. Respondents using the web-based survey had their data electronically returned to the Iowa State University Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE) office where data were tabulated and reviewed. On December 1, 2001, non-respondents were e-mailed with a reminder to access the survey, resulting in four additional responses. On December 12, 2001, a final reminder was sent to 21 non-respondents. There were 72 total responses on December 27, 2001, when web-access to the survey was terminated. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Grade level configuration by principal’s gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grades 6, 7</th>
<th>Grades 6, 7, 8</th>
<th>Grades 7, 8</th>
<th>Grades 7, 8, 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of the Data

The RISE office assisted in posting the Transition Practices Inventory to the Internet website as well as in downloading and entering the data into The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which was used to analyze quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the most frequently and least frequently used transition practices and planning resources utilized.

One-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to compare the relationship between the three signature middle level practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program) and student-oriented transition practices as well as parent-oriented transition practices. One-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients also were used to compare the relationships between the level of implementation of the three signature middle level practices and 1) enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school, 2) the number of elementary schools feeding into the middle level school, and 3) the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches.

Independent-sample t-tests were used to evaluate the differences between the use of student-oriented transition practices and whether districts had multiple middle level schools, and between the use of parent-oriented transition practices and whether districts have multiple middle level schools.

Based on the self-scoring of 72 responding principals, a Composite Implementation Score was obtained for each middle level school by summing the ratings principals gave their schools in the implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs. Schools with a score from 9 to 12 were considered, for the purposes of this study, to be most consistently implementing practices consistent with the middle school
philosophy, since these principals ranked them high in the use of middle school practices. Schools with a score of 8 or lower were considered to be implementing practices most closely associated with the junior high school philosophy, although they may be implementing some middle school practices.

Next, the sums of the responses to the 15 student-oriented and 7 parent-oriented transition practices were totaled separately to obtain a Student Transition Score and a Parent Transition Score, respectively. A score of 30 would indicate a perfect Student Transition Score, thus indicating full implementation of all 15 student-oriented transition practices identified in the Transition Practices Inventory. A score of 14 would indicate a perfect Parent Transition Score, thus indicating full implementation of all 7 parent-oriented transition practices identified in the Transition Practices Inventory. In both cases, a 0, 1, 2 response rating was used to indicate no implementation, partial implementation, or full implementation of each of the identified student or parent transition practices.

Based on an analysis of the aforementioned data, four middle level principals were invited to participate in qualitative interviews to further explore their responses. The data were analyzed by first sorting by schools where the principal had given a high rating in the implementation of the three signature middle level practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programming, and exploratory programming. Next, data were sorted according to schools that were rated high in their implementation of student-oriented transition practices, and final sorting was done according to schools that were rated high in implementing parent-oriented transition practices. The schools selected for the qualitative interviews ranked high in all three categories (use of middle level signature practices, and implementation of student- and parent-oriented transition practices).
Qualitative analysis was used to describe the results of the interviews with the four middle level principals. Interviews were conducted at the participating school principals’ offices between February 14 and February 25, 2002, and lasted a maximum of 90 minutes. For the qualitative data, transcripts of each interview were reviewed and analyzed to identify common themes. These themes were grouped and reported based on how they supported the quantitative data and the research questions.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent transition practices are used in identified public middle level schools in the state of Iowa, and why selected schools using those practices have chosen to utilize them. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a thorough understanding of how and why transition practices are used in Iowa.

General Characteristics of the Sample

Based on a review of the literature, an inventory instrument was developed to obtain information from middle level principals in the state of Iowa whose schools had at least two elementary feeder schools and contained grades no lower than six and no higher than nine. The inventory items were selected in an effort to develop an understanding of the transition practices used at these schools, how they were selected, and what factors influenced the continued use of these transition practices. A total of 118 middle level schools in the state of Iowa met the criteria for this study. The principals of these schools were mailed a letter inviting them to participate in the study. A total of 72 principals responded, for a response rate of 61.0%.

Demographics of responding principals

In addition to data pertaining to the use of transition practices, demographic data included gender, number of years at current school, number of years of combined
administrative and classroom middle level experience, and highest degree earned were reflected in the responses to the inventory. Table 2 summarizes these demographic characteristics of the middle level principals who responded to the Transition Practices Inventory.

Table 2. Responding principal demographics (n=72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
<th>Valid percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years at current school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 30</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest degree earned</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's +</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Specialist/Certificate</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed.D./Ph.D.</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender. Of the 72 responding principals, 55 (76.4%) were male and 13 (16.7%) were female. Four (6.9%) respondents failed to identify their gender, and the researcher was unable to identify their gender due to the respondents' failure to include their identifying code. According to the Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Department of Education, 2002a) data for the 2000–2001 school year, 30.6% of the full-time principals in Iowa were female. Therefore, the respondents for this study do not appear to be representative of the gender distribution statewide. A study conducted by Valentine et al. (2002) indicates that nationally, 73% of responding middle level principals were male and 27% were female, while the gender distribution in the Midwest region was 76% male and 24% female. In terms of gender, the participants in this study more closely resembled the participants in the Valentine et al. study compared to K–12 principals in the state of Iowa.

Years at current school. Thirty-seven of the respondents (51.4%) indicated that they had held their current middle level principalship for five or fewer years. Fifteen (20.8%) respondents indicated they had held their current position for 6–10 years, 11 (15.3%) for 11–15 years, and 2 (2.8%) for 16–20 years. The highest number of years in the current position was 36 years (one respondent, 1.4%) and the lowest number was 1 year (eight respondents, 11.1%). Six respondents (8.3%) did not indicate the number of years they had held their current positions, and the researcher was unable to reconstruct these data. Data provided by the Iowa Department of Education's website (Iowa Department of Education, 2002a) indicate that in 2000–2001, K–12 principals in the state averaged 11.8 years of in-district experience. The respondents in this study averaged fewer years in their current positions (6.5 years), almost half the state reported average. However, it should be noted that the state reported K–12 averages, where this study reported the experience of only middle level principals.
responding to the study. Valentine et al. (2002) reported that 15% of the middle level principals in their study had only one year of experience in their current position, 32% had been in their current position for 2–3 years, 46% held their current positions for 4–14 years, and 7% were in the current position for 15 or more years.

**Highest degree earned.** The majority (n = 40, 55.6%) of the responding principals held a master’s degree with additional hours beyond the degree. A master’s degree only, with no additional hours, was held by 7 of the respondents (9.7%), 14 respondents (19.4%) held an educational specialist/certificate of advanced studies, and 8 respondents (11.1%) had earned an Ed.D. or Ph.D. degree. Three respondents (4.2%) did not indicate a response to this survey item. According to Valentine et al. (2002), 19% of the middle level principals in their study held only a master’s degree, 50% held a master’s degree with additional hours, 17% held an educational specialist or certificate of advanced studies, and 11% held an Ed.D or Ph.D. The participants in this research study closely resembled the participants in the Valentine et al. national study.

**Data related to schools**

In addition to demographic data regarding the responding principals, the following demographic data about their schools also were obtained.

*Grade levels in the school.* Grades 7 and 8 were the most frequent grades included in the schools in this study. Grade 9 was the least likely grade to be included in the responding middle level schools. Table 3 shows the frequency of each grade included in this study, as reported by responding principals.
Table 3. Frequency of grades reported by responding principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=52)</td>
<td>(n=70)</td>
<td>(n=70)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the principals who responded, 51 (70.8%) indicated that grades 6–8 were included in their schools, 15 (20.8%) included grades 7–8, 5 (6.9%) included grades 7–9, and one (1.4%) indicated grades 6–7 served in that building. There was one (1.4%) respondent who failed to indicate this response. Data provided by the Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Department of Education, 2001) at the onset of this study, which were used to help determine which schools met the research criteria, indicated that of the 118 middle level schools comprising the population for this study, 84 (71%) contained grades 6, 7, and 8, while 28 (23.5%) served students in grades 7 and 8. There were 5 (4%) middle level schools that contained grades 7, 8, and 9, and one school (.8%) that served students in grades 6 and 7. Table 4 demonstrates that the sample closely parallels grade level configurations similar to those reported by the Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).

*Number of elementary feeder schools.* Nearly half (49.2%) of the responding principals reported that three or fewer elementary schools fed into their middle level schools. The number of elementary feeders reported ranged from 1 to 13, with 2 being reported most frequently. The mean number of elementary feeder schools reported in this study was 4.

*Number of students in lowest grade.* Principals were asked to report the number of students enrolled in the lowest grade in their middle level schools. The reported enrollments
Table 4. Grade level reported by Iowa Department of Education compared to study findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Iowa DE data</th>
<th>Study responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>1 (.8%)</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>28 (23.7%)</td>
<td>15 (20.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7-8</td>
<td>84 (71.2%)</td>
<td>51 (70.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8-9</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
<td>5 (6.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ranged from 28 to 487 students. The mean enrollment for the lowest grade in the schools represented in this study was 179.29 students.

*Total building enrollment for the 2001–2002 school year.* Principals were asked to report the total building enrollment for the current school year. Reported enrollments ranged from 84 to 1051 students. Just over half of the respondents (50.7%) indicated that their building enrollments were 496 students or lower. The mean building enrollment for schools represented in this study was 510.55 students.

*Number of middle level schools in the district.* Principals reported the number of middle level schools within their own district, including their own buildings in this total. The number of middle level schools within a single district ranged from 1 to 10, with the majority (53.5%) reporting a single middle level school in a district. The mean number of middle level schools per district, as represented in this study, was 2.73.

*Percentage of free or reduced lunches.* Principals were asked to report the percentage of the students in their building who received free or reduced lunches, according to their
Table 5. Data related to schools (n=72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School grade level configuration</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7-8</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8-9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of elementary feeders</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students in lowest grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-50</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-150</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-200</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-250</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251-300</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-350</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>351-400</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401-490</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total building enrollment</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-200</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-400</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401-600</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>601-800</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>801-1,000</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001-1,051</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of middle level schools</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of free/reduced lunches</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-15</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-60</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-75</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
district's comprehensive school improvement plan. Reported free or reduced lunch percentages ranged from 4 to 75%, with nearly half (48.6%) indicating that their rate was 24% or below. The mean free and reduced lunch rate reported in this study was 27.19%.

Based on Iowa Department of Education reports (Iowa Department of Education, 2002b), these data indicate that the average school in this study was slightly above the state average of 26.7% for free or reduced lunches.

**Statistical Treatment of Data**

Based on the self-scoring of 72 responding principals, a Composite Implementation Score was obtained for each middle level school by summing the ratings principals gave their schools in the implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs. Schools scoring from 9 to 12 were considered, for the purposes of this study, to be most consistently implementing practices consistent with the middle school philosophy, since their principals ranked them high in the use of middle school practices. Schools scoring 8 or lower were considered to be implementing practices more closely associated with the junior high school philosophy, although they may be implementing some middle school practices to a lesser extent.

Next, the sums of the responses to the 15 student-oriented and 7 parent-oriented transition practices were totaled separately to obtain a Student Transition Score and a Parent Transition Score, respectively. A score of 30 would indicate a perfect Student Transition Score, thus indicating full implementation of all 15 student-oriented transition practices identified in the Transition Practices Inventory. A score of 14 would indicate a perfect Student Transition Score, thus indicating full implementation of all 7 parent-oriented
transition practices identified in the Transition Practices Inventory. In both cases, a 0, 1, 2 response rating was used to indicate no implementation, partial implementation, or full implementation of each of the identified student or parent transition practices.

Research Question 1. What are the most frequently and the least frequently implemented transition practices for middle level students and their parents in selected Iowa middle level schools?

Respondents were asked to rate the levels of implementation from a list of transition practices for incoming middle level students and their parents. Responses were 0 for No Implementation, 1 for Partial Implementation, and 2 for Full Implementation. The responses from the 72 participating middle level principals indicated that the most frequently used student-oriented transition practice was elementary students going to the middle level school in the spring of the prior year for orientation activities ($M = 1.71, SD = .680$), followed closely by staff from feeder elementary schools and middle level staff having a process for sharing information regarding at-risk students ($M = 1.39, SD = .779$). Middle level counselors going to the sending school to meet/work with the future students was another frequently used student-oriented transition practice, according to the responding middle level principals ($M = 1.29, SD = .846$), while staff from feeder elementary schools and the middle level school staff communicating about the academic, social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs of incoming students, beyond those students with IEPs, 504s, and other formally identified needs ($M = 1.28, SD = .716$) also was a commonly used practice. The least frequently used student-oriented transition practices were students coming from the elementary paired with older grade students to provide a support “buddy” ($M = .15$,
The most frequently used parent-oriented transition practice was the use of a parent orientation meeting held at the middle level school ($M = 1.61, SD = .742$). No other parent-oriented transition practice was used nearly as often as the orientation meeting. The least frequently used parent-oriented transition practice was parents and students shadowing a current middle level student together ($M = .10, SD = .381$). Table 7 summarizes parent transition practices findings.

**Research Question 2. What planning resources have been identified as most integral when developing their transition practices?**

Respondents were asked to indicate to what degree they relied on eight different resources as they considered implementing various transition practices. Responses were scored as 1 for "Not Used," 2 for "Some Use," and 3 for "Integral for Implementation." Valid percentages were used for reporting purposes. Of the eight planning resources suggested in the Transition Practices Inventory, the resource with the highest use was consulting middle level school personnel from another middle level school ($M = 2.48, SD = .609$). Sixty-five (94.2%) principals indicated that they consulted with external middle level school personnel as they considered implementing various transition practices. Of those, 37 (53.6%) indicated that consulting with middle level school personnel was integral in the development and implementation of transition practices in their schools. Another 28 (40.6%) principals indicated that consulting with other middle level personnel about transition practices was used somewhat in developing and implementing their transition plans, while
Table 6. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations of implemented transition practices for middle level students in Iowa middle level schools in descending mean order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student transition practice</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Some or full</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary students come to our school in the spring of the prior year for orientation activities.</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=60</td>
<td>n=63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and middle level staffs have a process for sharing information regarding at-risk students.</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td>n=41</td>
<td>n=59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level counselors go to the sending school to meet/work with the future students.</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=39</td>
<td>n=54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff from feeder elementary schools and middle school communicate about the academic, social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs of incoming students.</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>84.8%</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=30</td>
<td>n=31</td>
<td>n=61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary teams include orientation activities as part of the curriculum.</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=26</td>
<td>n=21</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level administrators go to the sending school to meet/work with the future students.</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td>n=17</td>
<td>n=27</td>
<td>n=44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level advisory lessons/units, designed to ease student concerns related to “new” school environment, are presented throughout the year.</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=30</td>
<td>n=27</td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student transition practice</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Some or full</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer event(s) are held for students coming from elementary.</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=38</td>
<td>n=14</td>
<td>n=20</td>
<td>n=34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level students go to the sending elementary school(s) to meet/orient future students.</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=39</td>
<td>n=16</td>
<td>n=17</td>
<td>n=33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level advisory groups include students from different grades.</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=54</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students coming from elementary follow/shadow a middle level student.</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=53</td>
<td>n=12</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looping (teachers move with students to the next grade level).</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=57</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level teachers go to the sending school to meet/work with the future students.</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=57</td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pen pal/e-mail program between elementary students and middle level students.</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=61</td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students coming from elementary are paired with older grade students to provide a support &quot;buddy.&quot;</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=62</td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations of implemented transition practices for parents of middle level students in Iowa middle level schools in descending mean order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent transition practice</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Some or full</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent orientation meeting at the middle level school.</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=55</td>
<td>n=61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents' meeting throughout the year for purposes of communication and ongoing orientation.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=24)</td>
<td>n=27</td>
<td>n=21</td>
<td>n=48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are involved in the school in activities focused on easing students' transition into the school.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=24)</td>
<td>n=36</td>
<td>n=12</td>
<td>n=48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are included as full members of advisory groups and/or school-based management teams.</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td>n=21</td>
<td>n=20</td>
<td>n=41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-teacher organization meetings address issues related to needs of the early adolescent.</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td>n=20</td>
<td>n=20</td>
<td>n=40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings/workshops/classes are conducted to help parents understand the needs of early adolescents.</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=40)</td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and students shadow a current middle level student together.</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=67)</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
four (5.8%) principals indicated that using other middle level personnel was not a resource that they utilized in planning their own transition practices.

The second most commonly used resource for the planning and implementation of transition practices was journal articles ($M = 2.13, SD = .575$). Of the 67 responses to this item, principals indicated that journal articles were integral for implementation (23.9%) or used somewhat (65.7%).

Consultation with elementary school personnel was the next most commonly used practice to determine which transition practices to use ($M = 2.04, p = .700$). Of the 69 responses to this item, consultation with elementary school personnel was used to some degree by 78% of the respondents, and using student input through surveys or consultation ($M = 1.97, p = .740$) was the next most commonly used resource for consideration of transition practices, with 71.4% of the respondents indicating that they involved some level of student input in deciding their transition practices.

The least commonly used resource for developing and implementing transition practices was consultation with college or university personnel ($M = 1.40, p = .583$), with only 35% of the responding principals indicating that this resource had been used either some or as an integral part of their decision about implementing transition practices. (See Table 8.)

Research Question 3. Is there a positive relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and the use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation)?
Table 8. Planning resources identified as most integral in developing transition practices in selected Iowa middle level schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>1=Not used</th>
<th>2=Some use</th>
<th>3=Integral for implementation</th>
<th>Some or integral</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with middle level personnel</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td>n=37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal articles</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>89.6%</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=44</td>
<td>n=16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with elementary personnel</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=35</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation/survey of students</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td>n=29</td>
<td>n=16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning Points 2000</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td>n=22</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This We Believe</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td>n=22</td>
<td>n=17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning Points (1989)</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=29</td>
<td>n=24</td>
<td>n=14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with college/university personnel</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=41</td>
<td>n=19</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine if there was a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate students to the new middle level school and the use of the three signature middle school practices. Setting alpha at the .05 level, the relationship was found to be significant ($r = .231, p < .05$). (See Table 9.)

Table 9. Correlations among student transition scores, parent transition scores, and level of implementation of signature middle level practices (n=72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level of implementation</th>
<th>Student transition score</th>
<th>Parent transition score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of implementation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student transition score</td>
<td>0.231*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent transition score</td>
<td>0.291**</td>
<td>0.373**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p<.05$.
** $p<.001$.

Research Question 4. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices to acclimate students coming from the elementary to the new middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

An independent samples $t$ test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a relationship between the use of student transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a school district. The test was not significant, $t (69) = -.345, p = .731$. The results
indicated that there was no difference in the use of student-oriented transition practices and the number of middle level schools in a school district.

**Research Question 5.** Is there a positive relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation)?

Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed correlation coefficients were computed to determine if there was a relationship between the use of parent-oriented transition practices and the level of implementation of the three signature middle school practices. Setting alpha at .05, the relationship was found to be significant ($r = .291, p < .007$). (See Table 9.)

**Research Question 6.** Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment having multiple middle level schools in a school district?

An independent samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a relationship between the use of parent-oriented transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a school district. The test was significant, $t(68) = -2.351, p = .022$. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the districts that had only one middle level school and districts that had multiple middle level schools. In districts with multiple middle level schools, respondents reported significantly higher implementation levels of parent-oriented transition practices.
Research Question 7a. Do the number of transition practices implemented have a positive relationship to enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school?

Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to see if there was a relationship between the number of student transition practices implemented and the enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school. Setting alpha at the .05 level, the relationship was determined to be not significant ($r = .140, p = .126$). Table 10 summarizes the correlations between transition scores for both students and parents and school demographics, including enrollment size of the entering grade level, number of elementary feeder schools, and the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Table 10. Correlations among transition scores and school demographics (n=72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student transition score</th>
<th>Parent transition score</th>
<th>Size of entering class</th>
<th>Number of elementary feeder schools</th>
<th>Percentage of students on free/reduced lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student transition score</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent transition score</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of entering class</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>0.343**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of elementary feeder schools</td>
<td>.298**</td>
<td>.362**</td>
<td>.829**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students on free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>-0.157</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p<0.05$.
** $p<0.001$. 
Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine if there was a relationship between the number of parent-oriented transition practices and the enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school. Setting alpha at the .05 level, the results indicate this relationship was statistically significant ($r = .343$, $p = .002$). The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between the reported level of implementation of parent-oriented transition practices and the enrollment size of the grade entering the middle school, suggesting that schools with more students reported having more transition practices in place for parents of incoming middle level students.

Research Question 7b. Do the number of transition practices implemented have a positive relationship to the number of feeder schools?

Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to see if there was a relationship between number of transition practices used to acclimate students to the new middle level school and the number of feeder schools that sent students to the responding middle level school. Setting alpha at the .05 level, the relationship was found to be statistically significant ($r = .298$, $p = .008$).

Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to see if there was a relationship between the number of parent-oriented transition practices and the number of elementary feeder schools. Setting alpha at the.05 level, results indicate that this relationship was statistically significant ($r = .362$, $p = .002$) indicating that schools with more elementary feeder schools employed more parent-oriented transition practices.
Research Question 7c. Do the number of transition practices implemented have a positive relationship to the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches?

Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to see if there was a relationship between number of student transition practices implemented and the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunches. Setting alpha at the .05 level, the results indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between the number of student-oriented transition practices and number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches ($r = -.157, p = .196$).

Assuming a positive relationship, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to see if there was a relationship between the number of parent-oriented transition practices implemented and the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. Setting alpha at the .05 level, the results indicate that this relationship was not statistically significant ($r = .018, p = .882$).

Introduction to the Qualitative Analysis

The research question that guided the qualitative portion of this study was: How do principals who have self-identified high use of transition practices determine which practices to use based on student need, parental input, and other factors?

The four school principals selected for the qualitative follow-up interview were identified by ranking the Composite Implementation Score from highest to lowest, then sorting by Student Transition Scores, followed by Parent Transition Score. From that data, four middle level schools clearly stood apart from the others as they indicated a score of 12 out of a possible 12 for the Composite Implementation Score, thus indicating that they
reported fully implementing all three signature middle school practices. While the sums for
the student transition practices ranged from 0 to 19, the four identified schools ranged from 9
to 19. The range of the sums of the parent transition practices for all respondents ranged from
0 to 11, with the four identified schools ranging from 10 to 14. When these three scores were
sorted and ranked by Composite Implementation Score, student transition practices, and
parent transition practices, the principals of the four middle level schools with the highest
overall rankings were invited to participate in face-to-face interviews with the researcher to
further explore the planning and implementation of transition practices in these schools.

The middle level principals who were interviewed included one woman and three men
from around the state of Iowa. Schools ranged from two middle schools in northwest Iowa,
one suburban school that is labeled a junior high in central Iowa, and a middle school in a
small rural district in eastern Iowa. The grade level configurations of these schools were one
school with grades 6–7, 15 schools with grades 7–8, 51 schools with grades 6, 7, 8, and five
schools with grades 7, 8, 9. In all cases, regardless of the label of middle school or junior
high school, all four principals rated their schools high in the use of the three signature
middle school practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programming, and
exploratory programming.

**Qualitative Interviews**

Based on an analysis of the data from the web-based survey, four schools were
identified as meeting the criteria for the follow-up qualitative interviews. The criteria
included high self-rating of the use of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs,
and exploratory programs. Additionally, these schools met the criteria for high ratings in the
number of student and parent transition practices used. Each interview was arranged with the middle level school's principal based on his/her availability. In some cases, the principal invited other school personnel to participate in the interviews. For example, one principal invited the school's at-risk counselor to the qualitative interview session.

The first step in each of these interviews was obtaining signed, written consent forms that informed the research subject about the overall purpose of the investigation (see Appendix D). Interviews were a maximum of 90 minutes in duration and were audiotaped, as outlined in the written consent form. The interviews began with small talk in order to establish rapport, and then moved into a series of questions related to the qualitative research questions as reflected by each participant's responses to the web-based survey. Questions were open-ended to encourage the participants to respond freely and to reflect on their particular setting and situation (see Appendix D). More in-depth questioning by the researcher was used to allow the participant to elaborate or further clarify responses. The insight gained from these interviews added to the depth and understanding of this study and provided additional insight into transition practices used by middle level schools around the state of Iowa.

Data analysis

The interviews were audiotaped to ensure accuracy in interpretation and for transcription purposes. After being transcribed, the data were reviewed with the research questions in mind. During this review, margin notes were employed to "serve to isolate the initially most striking, if not ultimately most important, aspects of the data" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Verbatim transcriptions then were reviewed a second time to begin to
classify the data derived from the margin notes. From this step, categories began to form and were coded for purposes of organizing the codes into themes. The themes that related to the research questions that also were common to all four interviews were reported in this study.

In addition to audiotaping the interviews with the principals, the researcher took handwritten field notes during the course of the interviews to reflect thoughts and reactions as well as to serve as a reminder of aspects of the interviews that seemed significant during the course of the interview (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The field notes served to further enhance and verify the themes that emerged from the transcriptions.

**Emerging Themes**

This section presents and examines the themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews with four Iowa middle level principals who self-scored high in the implementation of the three middle level practices, student-oriented transition practices, and parent-oriented transition practices. These themes emerged as a result of analysis of each interview by coding the principals’ responses and finding any commonalities. Many variations and differences existed between the transition practices used by the four principals and the reasons for selecting and implementing these practices; however, the following themes emerged from the interviews.

**Use of student achievement data**

Although the state of Iowa is placing an increasing emphasis on using student achievement data, none of the four principals who were interviewed used any formal type of student achievement data to assist in determining which transition practices to use to help
students acclimate from the elementary school to the middle level school. One principal, who used a wide array of transition practices that deeply engaged parents and students, commented, “Hard data like tests? I don’t know how I would even record that.”

One principal and his at-risk counselor shared data that reflected how at-risk students who attended the middle school’s summer orientation program assessed themselves before and after the program. Areas addressed both in the survey and in the orientation program included social skills, problem solving, school involvement, perceptions of staff, goal setting, and ability to “find my way around this new school.” In addition to surveying students, parents also were surveyed regarding their perceptions of their children’s experiences in the summer orientation program. This school’s staff used these data to annually assess their at-risk orientation program and make necessary changes. The at-risk counselor noted, “With budget reductions and fewer grants that subsidize the summer program, the data may not be enough to keep the program afloat.”

In all four interviews, principals did not use student achievement data to develop or refine their school’s elementary to middle level school transition practices. Instead, it appeared that at least one principal used a trial-and-error approach to decide which transition practices to use. He stated, “We started doing [one transition practice] and then we dropped it, but we found that we had some problems. Then we moved back doing those things again.”

**Elementary and middle level staff communication**

In all four interviews, principals reported that strong communication between elementary and middle level staff was clearly an asset in their transition programming. Probing into this topic revealed that the discussions between the school staffs clearly focused
on meeting the needs of students. Most of the communication was initiated by the middle level school, including setting dates for staff members to meet. In one school, the elementary and middle level staffs met to collaboratively develop the middle school class lists. Their discussions focused on grouping students who would fit together well socially and separating students who might have conflicts. They also sought to distribute children with special needs according to staff availability, access to needed services, and other decisions that were student or staff specific. The principal of this school described the strong communication between the feeder elementary school staffs and her middle school staff as one of the primary reasons “we have a real good idea about what those kids need” even before they arrive at the middle school.

One principal described the communication between the elementary and middle level staff members as one of the most effective transition practices in his school. Even so, he acknowledged that with constraints of time and other resources, “We rely heavily on the elementary counselors to help us identify the needs of the students coming from each elementary.” Another principal described how the elementary and middle school staffs in his district met to review student data from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. “We want to know where they’re at, what their growth has been so that we can see that. We do an item analysis on every question on ITBS and then we design curriculum for that.” However, despite the strong communication about meeting the needs of the incoming class of students, none of the principals described any discussion between elementary and middle level staff concerning the identification of appropriate transition practices to use, how to refine those currently utilized, or additions to the current practices.
Use of transition practices

Although all four principals described using transition practices for students and their parents, there was variability in the number of practices and scope of those practices. In the area of student-oriented transition practices, three of the schools reported conducting summer activities to help transition students into the middle level school. Conversations revealed that the summer programs were limited to a designated number of students who were considered to be at-risk by their elementary guidance counselors. In one school, the at-risk counselor noted, “We have a summer component. Hopefully we can run it from six to eight weeks, if we have the funds. Generally speaking, we work with the principals of those [elementary] buildings” to identify which students will be eligible to attend those programs. Although these programs might include an academic component, they appear to lack activities specifically for the purpose of transitioning students between levels.

In all four cases, students who were served in special education programs at the elementary level were included in additional transition experiences in the spring of the year preceding their arrival at the “new” middle level school. Activities generally involved a visit to the middle level school, in addition to the normative visit by all incoming middle level students. Transition activities specific to the special education students generally included a small-group visit or shadowing another current middle level student during the day in the spring. “They come over to see their rooms, meet the teacher and some of the other kids that are in there, walk around the building a little bit, any questions that they may have, and meet with the guidance counselor,” said one principal.

Based on data from the principal interviews, it appeared that an even wider array of parent-oriented transition practices existed among the four schools. The most transition-
focused school included a “promotion dance party” in May where students who would be moving to the middle school the following fall were invited, and their parents could come along to observe, visit with the principal, and generally learn more about the middle school environment through a casual, social atmosphere. The school principal noted that while many of these soon-to-be middle school parents accepted the invitation to come to the dance, many left within the first hour because “they stay until they think of their child as comfortable and at ease, and then they sneak out.”

Another parent-oriented transition practice employed by one of the principals was inviting middle school parents to shadow their middle school children for a morning. Although this first sounded like a logistical nightmare, the principal had developed a well-planned system where approximately six parents were invited each day over a two- or three-week period of time, to shadow their children for the first few class periods. Afterward, parents had the opportunity to meet with the principal and then join their children for lunch. The principal reported, “We talked about what they saw and what fears they had, what fears they don’t have now.” Her observation was, “It was a real good transition for parents.” She also noted that this small group time with interested parents helped her pick up a lot of ideas and learn about the things the parents wanted to see or have implemented.

**Final Considerations**

The principals interviewed for the qualitative portion of this study clearly felt that they were making strong efforts to assist the elementary students who were transitioning into their buildings each year. The Transition Practices Inventory responses from each of the four principals showed many common facets between the respondents’ schools. However, the
interviews disclosed a much greater range in the actual practices and the levels of implementation.

The interviews determined that one of the smallest schools employed the greatest number of student and parent transition practices and implemented them to a higher degree than the other schools. In this case, the principal, who was currently in her third year in the position, worked with staff and parents to build a strong working relationship between home and school. The new transition practices at her school were created with the primary intent to help parents be better informed about what happens at the middle school and to help them feel more comfortable about their children's experiences. This principal also worked diligently to make herself known to elementary students and parents prior to their move to the middle school to increase their comfort levels with her, thus making the elementary to middle school transition easier for them. However, despite the wide variety of transition practices both before, during, and after the move into the middle school, this school did little in the way of collecting evidence of whether or not their practices were effective in the forms of student achievement or in the affective domain.

The interviews also disclosed a common emphasis on addressing the needs of students served in special needs and at-risk programs. All four principals discussed transition practices that were designed specifically for these students, including a special visit beyond the normative visit for all incoming students. In two of the four schools, at-risk students were provided extended summer opportunities to help them become better acclimated with the new school environment and staff. In both of these schools, agencies beyond the school or district were involved in funding and/or assisting in the summer program with personnel or other resources. Examples would include state sponsored grants for at-risk programming,
collaboration with the juvenile court liaison office, and collaboration with the community resource center. Both schools kept detailed data of the number of students served and surveyed students and parents regarding program feedback. The data collection procedures for at-risk transition practices presumably reflect the fact that these programs have multiple funding sources, including grants, which require documentation for reporting purposes. However, there was evidence that one of the two schools that employed summer transition programming for at-risk students also used these data annually to make changes and adjustments to their transition practices.

Overall, the normative transition practices for students and their parents during the transition from elementary to the middle level school were based on feelings of the principal and/or staff, and did not include analysis of student achievement data to determine the effectiveness of the practices that were employed. In some cases, principals noted that parents, students, and/or staff provided informal feedback or that “no news was good news” in regard to the effectiveness of the practices for helping students and their families become familiar and comfortable with the new middle level school environment. Conversely, transition practices for at-risk students tended to include a more formal data collection and analysis component. This element seemed to be related to the grant funding sources that supported most of these programs, thus requiring data for reporting back to the funding source.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study. The analysis of data determined that, as reported by responding principals, the use of the three signature middle level practices of
interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programming, and exploratory programming had a positive, statistically significant relationship with both student-oriented and parent-oriented transition practices. There was also a positive relationship between parent-oriented transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a district, but there was not a statistically significant positive relationship between student-oriented transition practices and multiple middle level schools in a district. This study also found that there was a positive relationship between parent-oriented transition practices and enrollment size of the lowest grade level in the middle level school, but that same relationship did not exist between student-oriented transition practices and enrollment size of the lowest grade level in the middle level school. Finally, there was a statistically significant, positive relationship between both student-oriented and parent-oriented transition practices and the number of elementary schools that fed into the middle level schools.

The qualitative portion of this study determined that the principals who were interviewed did not routinely use student achievement data to base their decisions on which transition practices to use. However, most principals used some data to determine the success of their transition practices specific to at-risk students. These data generally included student and parent satisfaction surveys or informal feedback such as comments from parents, staff, or students.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the research study, which includes the statement of the problem, a description of the methodology, and the major findings. The initial research questions provide the basis for the conclusions presented in this chapter. Limitations of this study are provided to assist the reader in understanding and interpreting the results. A discussion of the results provides possible explanations for the findings, as well as implications of the study. This chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

Summary of Problem, Methodology, and Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent transition practices are used in identified public middle level schools in the state of Iowa, and why selected schools using those practices have chosen to utilize them. Based on data provided by the Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Department of Education, 2001), 118 middle level principals were mailed a letter in November 2001, inviting them to participate in a web-based survey. Seventy-two principals completed the survey, for a response rate of 61.0%.

The purpose of this investigation was to gain an understanding of what transition practices were being utilized in identified Iowa middle level schools, and to understand how these schools developed and implemented their transition programs. This study attempted to identify transition practices used in selected Iowa public middle level schools that addressed the concerns of students coming from the elementary feeder schools. It also explored how transition practices were influenced by such factors as the number of elementary schools that feed into a middle level school, the grade levels included and the number of students enrolled
in the middle level school, the length of time the principal has served a particular middle level school, and differences in practices between schools that self-scored within the pre-identified criteria of junior high schools and middle schools.

Eight research questions provided the basis for both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study.

1. What are the most frequently and the least frequently implemented transition practices for middle level students and their parents in selected Iowa middle level schools?

2. What planning resources have schools identified as most integral when developing their transition practices?

3. Is there a positive relationship between the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation) and the use of transition practices used to acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment?

4. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

5. Is there a positive relationship between the level of use of the three signature middle school practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee program, and exploratory program implementation) and transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment?
6. Is there a relationship between the use of transition practices used to acclimate parents of new middle level students coming from the elementary school to the new middle level school environment and having multiple middle level schools in the school district?

7. Do the number of transition practices implemented have a relationship to: (a) enrollment size of grade entering the middle level school, or (b) the number of feeder schools, or (c) the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches?

8. How do principals who have self-identified high use of transition practices determine which practices to use based on student need, parental input, and other factors?

This mixed methodological study was conducted between November 2001 and February 2002, beginning with a web-based survey and concluding with four qualitative follow-up interviews. The survey was developed after reviewing related literature, and seeking input from doctoral students, the researcher's doctoral committee, and middle level principals from a neighboring state.

The participants for the qualitative interviews were selected according to their responses to the quantitative survey. Using these responses, four schools were selected based on high ratings by the principals in the areas of implementation of the three signature middle school practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs. All four principals indicated that their schools fully implemented all three of the signature middle school practices. Next, the schools were considered based on their use of the student and parent transition practices identified in the survey. Based on these three areas,
the four principals were invited to participate in face-to-face interviews, which were conducted in each principal’s office at a mutually convenient time and date. Pre-identified questions guided the interview.

The data were collected by the end of February 2002. Quantitative data were downloaded from the web-based survey into Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software with the assistance of the Iowa State University Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE) office where data were tabulated and reviewed. Based upon the research questions, descriptive statistics, one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients, or independent samples t-tests were used to test data. Results from the quantitative interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and coded, whereby three major themes emerged.

Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the most and least frequently used transition practices for middle level students and their parents based on the responses to the survey employed in this study. Additionally, descriptive statistics were used to describe the use of planning resources based on the responses to the survey. Descriptive statistics included the mean and the standard deviation.

One-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine differences between student transition practices and the level of implementation of the three signature middle level practices (interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs), and between parent-oriented transition practices and the level of implementation of the three signature middle level practices. One-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients were also computed to examine differences in the level of transition practices and (a) enrollment
size of the grade entering the middle level school, (b) the number of feeder schools, and (c) the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the relationships between the use of student transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in the district, and to evaluate the use of parent transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in the district.

Statistical tests showed that there was a positive relationship between the use of student transition practices and the use of the three signature middle school practices. There was also a positive relationship between the use of parent transition practices and the use of the three signature middle school practices. Additionally, this study found that there was a positive relationship between parent transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a district. However, there was not a significant relationship between student transition practices and having multiple middle level schools in a district. A positive relationship was found between parent transition practices and the enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school, and there was a positive relationship between both student and parent transition practices and the number of elementary schools feeding into the middle level school.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. The validity of the survey data are limited to the respondents' interpretation and perception of the survey items at the time they completed the survey.

2. The Transition Practices Inventory outlined a limited number of student and parent transition practices that were used to test for relationships against other variables.
Although principals may have used additional or different transition practices, those practices were not used for purposes of testing the research questions.

3. The descriptive findings of the qualitative aspect of this study reflect those perceptions expressed by selected school personnel administrators from school districts in the state of Iowa. The findings reported cannot be generalized to a broader population of school districts.

Discussion

Findings of this study include the fact that principals who indicated that their schools had high degrees of the three middle school practices in place tended to rate their schools higher in the number and level of implementation of both student and parent transition practices. The number and level of implementation of parent transition practices had a positive relationship to both the enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school and having multiple middle level schools in the district. The number of elementary schools feeding students into the middle level school had a positive relationship to the number and level of implementation of both student and parent transition practices. This section discusses the specific findings and describes their relationship to the existing literature.

Use of middle school practices

Middle schools were designed with the purpose of addressing the developmental needs of early adolescent learners, and three signature middle school practices have been identified as interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programs, and exploratory programs (George & Alexander, 1993; Valentine et al., 1993). Extensive studies over the past few decades have
evidenced a steady increase in the implementation of these signature middle school practices (Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Valentine et al., 2002).

Most recently, Valentine et al. (2002) reported that 79% of the principals responding to their national survey reported the use of interdisciplinary teaming. The current study found that the Iowa principals participating in this study reported a lower incidence of teaming than the national findings. Full implementation of interdisciplinary teaming was reported by 52.8% of the respondents, and 20.8% reported partial or extensive implementation of teaming at their schools. Small schools may find teaming difficult to implement due to the level of staffing and subsequent funding to support this practice. The relatively low number of schools reporting full use of interdisciplinary teaming might be further explained by the definition of teaming supplied in the survey. The definition read: “A team of 2–5 teachers sharing common students, common planning time, and housed in close proximity.” If the responding principals perceived that any one of those parameters was not in use at their schools, they may have rated themselves lower than “fully implemented.” Therefore, including “partially,” “extensively,” and “fully” in the count for this item may be more reflective of the actual use of teaming practices in Iowa. The three categories grouped results in 73.6% of the responding school principals reporting partial to full use of interdisciplinary teaming at their schools, which is close to the nationally reported levels.

Advisor/advisee programming, another signature middle school practice, is intended to give each early adolescent learner at least one caring adult in the school environment who really knows that child and can advocate for the child in the school. The underlying purpose is to promote stronger relationships between students and staff in a small, secure setting (George & Alexander, 1993; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Epstein and MacIver (1990)
determined that 75% of principals reported advisor/advisee programs in place in their schools. Just over a decade later, Valentine et al. (2002) found that 57% of the principals participating in their study reported the use of advisor/advisee programs in their schools. The current study determined that 72.2% of the principals who responded to the Transition Practices Inventory reported that advisor/advisee programs were in place in their buildings at either the partial, extensive, or full levels. Only 48.6% reported full implementation, however. Again, the lower level of principals reporting full implementation may be due to self-limitation due to interpretation of survey item, which read, “Advisor/Advisee program: Teachers and student meet regularly in small groups to develop trusting relationships, and to increase engagement in learning, positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging.” If any one of these components was not in place, a principal may have rated her/his school’s program lower. Additionally, it is conceivable that some schools may not be prepared to implement this program due to budgetary constraints, staffing, and a variety of context-specific reasons.

The third signature middle school practice is exploratory programming. According to the definition used for the Transition Practices Inventory, exploratory programs:

Provide early adolescents with the opportunity to experience a variety of content areas outside the basic core curriculum. Some exploratory courses may be “required” (required of all students at that grade level) and others might be “electives” (courses or content areas where students have the opportunity to select from a list of possible electives. The delivery of instruction for exploratory courses, whether required or elective, is sometimes similar and sometimes different than the delivery of instruction for core courses. An example might be an exploratory wheel consisting of quarter-long courses in
industrial technology, family and consumer science, or art. Physical education would NOT be an example of an exploratory course.

As evidenced by the lengthy definition for exploratory programs, there are many variations in this area. Valentine et al. (2002) reported 79% of the respondents to this survey indicated use of exploratory programs in their schools. Similarly, this study found that 79.2% of principals responding to the Transition Practices Inventory reported full implementation of exploratory programs in their schools, for a total of 97.3% of the respondents indicating some level of implementation of exploratory programs in their schools. It seems that the high degree of flexibility in defining program design, course choices, and delivery may contribute to the high level of use reported across the state of Iowa.

Overall, this study found that the levels of use of the three signature middle school practices reported by the Iowa middle level principals who participated in this study were consistent with national findings.

School uses of transition practices

The selection of transition practices utilized in the schools in this study was not particularly surprising, as they tended to reflect national reports. For example, Epstein and Maclver (1990) reported a wide variety of practices ranging from elementary students visiting the middle level school for an information session, middle level and elementary administrators meeting for purposes of articulation and programs, and middle level counselors meeting with elementary staff. Similarly, McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1996) reported that 90% of the schools in their study reported that students visited the middle level school. The second most frequently reported transition practice in the study was obtaining
student data from the elementary feeder schools, which Toepfer (1990) indicates is vital for students to successfully make the move from elementary to middle level school. Additionally, McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1996) also found that 51% of the schools included middle school students as part of the orientation team that visited the elementary feeder schools.

These reports on student orientation activities are similar to the findings of the current study. Large-group visits to the middle level school for orientation was the most frequently used student-oriented transition practice in this study, with 83.3% of the participating principals reporting use of this practice. The practice of a spring student orientation visit to the middle level school is supported by Toepfer (1990) and Arth (1995), who both advocate for beginning the transition process for students prior to students starting classes at the middle level school to their questions and concerns can be addressed prior to their arrival. A process for sharing information about at-risk students was the second most frequently used student-oriented transition practice reported in this study. This finding also reflects the national reports that indicate that a process for sharing information between the elementary and middle level schools was one of the most frequently reported practices, and McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1996) also reported it as the second most frequently reported practice in their study.

Maclver (1990) reported that the average number of transition practices employed by school responding to his study was 4.5. The findings of the current study indicated that the average number of transition practices employed in schools represented was 11.5 transition practices, reflecting the use of a much higher number of student transition practices than
Maclver's study. These data appear to suggest that, over the past decade, schools have elected to implement substantially more transition practices.

Epstein and Maclver (1990) emphasized the need to educate and inform parents about the middle level school environment and expectations as well as to address their concerns and questions. The current study found that the number of parent transition practices was considerably more limited than the student practices and generally included parent orientation meetings and tours. These transition activities were similar to those reported by the principals who were interviewed for the qualitative aspect of this study, as well as reported uses of parent-oriented transition practices on the Transition Practices Inventory.

Evaluating the use of transition practices or making the decision to change which practices to use seemed relatively arbitrary and void of a strategic plan to drive these decisions. As part of the Transition Practices Inventory, principals were asked how transition practices were developed in their schools. One question specified a variety of resources from Turning Points, one of the most recognized recent middle school documents, to consultation of persons ranging from middle school personnel from other schools to university personnel. It was surprising to find that the use of research-based documents such as Turning Points, This We Believe, and Turning Points 2000—three highly regarded middle level documents—were the least used resources for developing school transition practices. It seems apparent that, rather than looking to research-based documents, Iowa principals tend to look to their community or colleagues when selecting transition practices for their students.

Involvement from a wide range of stakeholders was another survey question related to the development of transition practices. The limited input from stakeholders about selection and implementation of transition practices was intriguing. Overall, principals and guidance
counselors were the ones who made the decisions about what transition practices to use. Fewer than half the responding principals included input from middle level staff or students in deciding which transition practices to use. According to NASSP (1985), “Schools should create a transition panel, composed of elementary, secondary, and middle level school teachers and parents” (p. 17). According to the findings of the current study, transition practices seem to be based on preferences and existing practices rather than as a purposeful set of events and activities targeted at specific needs of the students in the community.

Even more surprising was the finding that none of the principals consciously correlated their transition practices with student achievement. While research supports the need for providing activities to help students successfully transition between elementary and middle level schools in academics as well as in the areas of social and emotional needs, no studies were found that reported correlations between the use of transition practices and improved student achievement. Maclver (1990), however, did report that well-developed transition practices generally resulted in lower dropout rates at the incoming grade level. The qualitative interviews provided a glimpse into the thoughts that principals with strong middle school transition practices occurring in their schools had about relating transition practices with student achievement. In all four cases, the principals expressed surprise at the suggestion that one might try to measure this relationship and plan accordingly. Since the data-driven decision-making movement is still relatively young, educators may see the need to include the influence of transition activities as they consider ways to improve student achievement in the future.
Transition practices for students

Many (83.3%) of the principals responding to this survey indicated that they used a normative transition activity in the spring that included having elementary students make a visit to the middle level school. This activity is one of the most commonly used transition practices (Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Fonts, 1998; Valentine et al., 2002). This particular transition practice seems to be the most commonly used because of the relative ease in having all incoming middle level students to attend an assembly-type orientation during the school day. By having all or most students attend at one time, there is less disruption in both the elementary and the middle level school schedules. An assembly also provides a venue for all incoming students to hear about the new school environment, expectations, etc., and generally take a tour of the facility to become familiar with the school they will attend in the fall. This study found that the majority of the responding principals indicated that this practice was the foundation of their transition practices.

In some cases, the large-group visit was the only contact that students had with the middle level school prior to the beginning of their middle level careers. Although the visit to the middle level school allows students to become familiar with the physical layout of the facility, in most cases, it does little to relieve student anxiety about how they will get to class during passing time, teacher expectations, homework concerns, academic performance, and other issues identified as student concerns related to the move to the middle level school (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Mullins, 1997; Odegaard, 1992). However, in most cases, the middle level school visit was the backbone of the schools’ transition practices and these schools offered other opportunities for incoming students to learn more about the school, expectations, and other related information. The middle level school orientation visit may
serve as the foundation for building additional transition structures so that the transition process becomes a multifaceted event that seeks to address student needs and concerns over time.

**Transition practices for parents**

Research has documented a decline in parent and family involvement when students enter middle level and high schools, which seems to correspond with the decline in student performance during this same period of time (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). Therefore, a need exists to involve parents in their children’s education at a time when the children are striving to become increasingly independent from the adults in their lives. Parent transition practices can help to serve that need.

Parent transition practices reported by the responding principals tended to be limited to large-group, orientation meetings. This practice was the only parent activity reported by the majority (76.4%) of the respondents. As with the assembly-type meetings for incoming students’ visits to the middle level school, these parent orientation meetings were widely used and appeared to be relatively simple to execute. This finding was not surprising, because the study by Epstein and MacIver (1990) noted that principals did not use some transition practices because they believed them to be too time consuming for the amount of benefit provided. This explanation would appear to account for the high number of responses to the use of parent orientation meetings in this study. Other parent-oriented activities were reported but were not widely used or used on a routine basis. Principals in this study apparently did not make routine use of additional transition practices to facilitate the involvement of parents in the middle level experience.
Number of elementary feeder schools, enrollment size, and transition practices

When numerous elementary schools feed into a middle level school, entering students may find it more challenging to acclimate to the new setting, because they are confronted with large numbers of new classmates. A review of literature discloses a dearth of research addressing the influence that numerous elementary feeder schools may have on transition practices. However, this study found that middle level schools with multiple elementary feeder schools tended to employ more transition practices than their counterparts with only one elementary feeder school.

It can be reasonably concluded that middle level schools that receive students from multiple elementary feeder schools would offer a wider variety of transition practices to better meet the needs of a more diverse group of students and their families if they are coming from multiple feeder schools. In three of the four qualitative interviews, principals indicated that there was some diversity in the socioeconomic status of the different buildings from which students were coming to middle school. By offering a variety of transition activities for students as well as for their parents, there would be increased opportunities for students and their families to learn about the middle school, thereby creating a greater likelihood for increased attendance and participation by students and families.

This study found that schools with more students at the grade entering the middle level school reported having more transition practices in place for parents of incoming middle level students. This was a particularly interesting finding, since the same finding was not true for student transition practices. Fonts (1998) found that students in smaller schools tended to experience more successful school transitions and offered more transition activities for
parents than larger schools. Conversely, Gulino (1997) reported that larger middle level schools offered more transition practices.

Upon analyzing why parent transition practices in the current study might be affected by the enrollment size of the grade entering the middle level school, it appears that the reason might center around an increased need to offer a variety of opportunities to reach more parents, whereby the student transition practices might be less influenced by the enrollment size due to more normative practices where most students participate in the large-group transition activities during the school day. Conversely, parents tend to be more available in the evening hours, thus making a variety of offerings at different days and times necessary to reach the most families. The same explanation can be offered for the finding that indicates that middle level schools that have more than one elementary feeder school tend to implement more parent transition practices than middle level schools with only one elementary feeder school. The needs of larger communities or consolidated school districts create a need for more opportunities for families to be involved in their children’s educations.

Transition practices and free/reduced lunch rates

The percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch rates did not appear to influence the number of student or parent transition practices employed by the schools included in this study. Although no research was found that addressed the correlation of free or reduced lunch rates and number of transition practices used by schools, Fonts (1998) did find that principals’ perceptions of what transition practices are most important in relationship to their free/reduced lunch rates was to have a panel of students currently in the receiving school (in the Fonts study, the receiving school was the high school, receiving
incoming middle level students) share experiences and perceptions with the incoming students. This practice, while used by some of the schools in the current study, was not prevalent.

**Principals' tenure and transition practices**

Over half (56.1%) of the responding principals indicated that they had five or fewer years of administrative experience in their current positions. This is considerably higher than Fonts' (1998) study, where 38.5% of the principals had served in their positions. The higher percentage of principals in the current study who were new or relatively new to their positions may have an impact on the number and level of implementation of the transition practices that middle level schools are employing. Fonts (1998) suggests that the number of years an individual has served as a principal does influence the transition practices that are implemented. According to Bryk (1999), high principal turnover can strongly impact the ability of schools to initiate and sustain restructuring initiatives. This finding could presumably influence the use of transition practices, as well. These observations may suggest that it takes time for principals to become adequately acclimated to their new environments to the degree that they are able to attend to making changes in transition practices.

The lack of input from stakeholders reported in the current study also may reflect the lack of longevity of the majority of the responding principals. If a variety of stakeholders were included in identifying the transition practices, additional time and effort would be necessary to plan and include these stakeholders. This additional time, the ability to identify a variety of stakeholders, and the ability to realize the contextual needs of a new school and
community may impede a new principal from actively pursuing new transition practices in the first few years in a middle level leadership position.

Three of the four principals involved in the qualitative interviews in the current study indicated that they "inherited" all or most of the transition practices used in their schools. One, however, who had been in her position for only three years, had implemented a number of new practices since her arrival. Her purpose in adding the new practices was to provide parents and students more opportunities to get involved in the middle school as early as possible in order to enhance student and family comfort levels and participation.

The fact that the female principal in the qualitative interview implemented a variety of new transition practices despite her relatively short tenure in her current position may suggest that gender may have some influence on decisions regarding transition practices. Fonts (1998) found that female principals viewed transition practices as more interpersonal than the male principals, who tended to view transition practices as more structural. She also found that female principals used more extended versions of the same practices as their male counterparts.

**Transition practices and middle level programs: Junior high vs. middle school**

Much like the findings of other research studies (Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Gulino, 1997), the schools in this study that most fully implemented the three signature middle school practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programming, and exploratory programming were also the schools that employed more transition practices than the other schools. Gulino and Valentine (1999) reported that schools employing the signature middle school practices in addition to well-defined transition practices also described increased
student satisfaction with school. This connection would seem to be a natural relationship because the three signature middle school practices are designed to be student centered, and the primary purpose for using a variety of well-implemented transition practices tends to be to address the needs and concerns of the students who will be joining the middle school learning community.

Epstein and Maclver (1990) found that schools dedicated to early adolescents used more and varied transition practices for helping students make the move from elementary to the middle level school. The findings from the current study are consistent with Epstein and Maclver’s research, because principals who reported that their schools implemented all three of the signature middle school practices tended to also rate themselves high in the number and degree of transition practices used in their schools. The implication, which was further strengthened by the qualitative interviews, is that schools that are most developmentally responsive to the early adolescent learner use more transition practices to reach these students to ease their move to the middle level school.

Additional discussion

Although the survey instrument used in the current study did not request that participants specify whether they were a rural, urban, or suburban school district, the four qualitative interviews included principals from two rural and two urban/suburban middle schools. Based on the interviews, it is apparent that the two rural schools do not follow the trends reported by Jackson and Davis (2000) stating that rural schools often lack developmentally responsive structures to address the needs of middle level students, because both clearly were using a variety of transition practices designed to address the needs and
concerns of students and their parents. One in particular had more transition offerings for parents and students than the other three schools included in the qualitative follow-up interview. The two rural schools in the qualitative aspect of this study implemented as many or more transition practices than the urban or suburban middle schools.

**Implications**

Transitions occur throughout life. However, the transition from elementary to middle level school occurs at a time when the early adolescent is experiencing a wide range of changes that ultimately have the capacity to change the course of his or her adult life. The effective use of transition practices to ease the move into the middle level learning environment, therefore, can provide the pathways for easing the challenge of the school transition. The following implications for practice are suggested as a result of this study:

1. With the increased emphasis on accountability, principals should consider methods for connecting their transition practices to issues related to student achievement. According to Gulino (1997), transition practices alone cannot produce student satisfaction and presumably cannot single-handedly influence student achievement. However, research shows that addressing student and parent concerns and questions regarding the middle level school can allow students to focus more on academic progress than extraneous factors that might otherwise impede academic progress during the transition (CCAD, 1989; Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Mullins, 1997; Petersen & Crockett, 1985).

2. Principals should consider using input from a variety of stakeholders to determine what transition practices to use and the level of implementation.
3. Principals should make greater use of the professional literature to assist in identifying effective transition practices in an effort to create research-based programs.

4. Input from teachers, parents, and students should be actively sought on a routine basis to determine the effectiveness of the school’s transition programming.

5. In an effort to better address student needs at all levels, district-wide discussion of transition practices should be considered, especially when receiving schools have multiple feeder schools.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The following recommendations for further study are presented:

1. Because this study was limited to the state of Iowa, it would increase the current body of knowledge to expand this study into other states and perhaps to a national level to better understand the uses of elementary to middle level school transition practices.

2. Conduct a qualitative study of schools with high implementation levels of middle school practices and extensive implementation of transition practices to better understand the common factors that create the correlation of these two factors and to ensure that study participants share a common understanding and interpretation of middle level concepts and transition practices.

3. Conduct a survey of students’, parents’, and teachers’ impressions of elementary to middle level school transition practices.
4. Conduct a study comparing student achievement data between schools with high levels of middle school and transition practices and schools with similar demographics that do not employ high levels of middle school and transition practices, in an effort to identify those practices that promote improved student achievement.

5. Conduct a study that focuses on the influence of the principal on the use of transition practices. Issues to be addressed could include age, gender, level of education, number of years of administrative experience, number of years in the current position, and leadership style.

6. Research the conditions that influence the decision about what transition practices to use. This study would potentially reflect the varying needs of schools based on demographics of the communities in which they serve.

7. Research the relationship between principal turnover/longevity and the use of transition practices.


Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what transition practices are used to help students transition from the elementary school into the middle level school environment, to what extent they are used, and what influences the choice of these practices in the state of Iowa. Principals who met the predetermined criteria were invited to complete the Transition
Practices Inventory. Based on the responding principals’ input, four middle school principals from around the state of Iowa participated in qualitative follow-up interviews.

Transition practices in the state of Iowa rely largely on large-group spring orientation visits as the key transition activity for students moving into the middle level school the following fall. Similarly, many schools have an evening orientation visit for parents of these students. A variety of other practices were reported, but with considerably less consistency. According to the findings of this study, the decision regarding the choices of transition practices to be used by middle level schools seems largely arbitrary. There was no evidence reported in this study to suggest that student achievement helped inform the choices of what transition practices to utilize. Most input regarding transition practices tended to be informal, such as parent comments or general observations by counselors or administrators. However, despite the lack of use of data-driven evidence to decide on the choices of transition practices, all responding principals reported using some activities to transition students into the middle level school from the elementary.

This study found that principals in schools with high levels of implementation of the three signature middle school practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisor/advisee programming, and exploratory programming reported higher levels of implementation of both parent and student transition practices than those reporting a junior high structure. The use of student and parent transition practices increased as the number of elementary feeder schools increased. Additionally, the number of parent transition practices increased as enrollment of the lowest grade entering the middle level school increased. Additional findings suggest that transition practices do not currently include a structured evaluation component whereby student achievement data impact the choices of transition practices for
students and parents. Additionally, a formal method for obtaining input from staff, students, and parents is not routinely implemented in the majority of the schools included in this study.
APPENDIX A. PILOT LETTER
702 NE Hayes Drive
Ankeny, IA 50021
September 7, 2001

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University working with Dr. Donald G. Hackmann to study transition practices that are used to assist elementary students and their families as they move from elementary school to middle school or junior high school. This study focuses on the middle level principal's perspective of the use of transition practices.

As a middle level administrator, you are being invited to help pilot the Transition Practices Inventory tool to help "troubleshoot" any potential difficulties in wording, layout, or any other areas that might deter from getting a good response rate and accurate responses when the actual study is conducted later this fall. While you are being asked to provide feedback on a paper version of the inventory, please be aware that the intent is that most participants in the study will take the inventory via an Internet website.

Please complete the enclosed Transition Practices Inventory, taking into consideration the following:

1. How long did it take you to complete the inventory?
2. Did you have any questions about inaccurate/unclear wording?
3. Did you have any questions about layout or organization?
4. General comments that might be useful for the researcher and/or participants?
5. You are encouraged to write on the inventory (in margins, etc.) to comment on items.

Your assistance in piloting the Transition Practices Inventory is essential for the success of this study, and I would greatly appreciate your taking the time to provide your input and expertise. Please return the completed inventory in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by Friday, September 21, 2001, so that your input can be incorporated into the upcoming study. If you have any questions you may contact me at home (515-964-3393) or at work (515-239-3780). Thank you for your assistance.

With appreciation,

Mandy Ross
Ph.D. Candidate

Enclosure
APPENDIX B. SURVEY INVITATION LETTER
Dear Iowa Middle Level Principal:

I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University, majoring in educational administration. I am writing to request your assistance with my dissertation research, which focuses on elementary to middle level school transition practices, specifically practices used in the state of Iowa, how schools identify these practices, and how they implement and refine their practices. Based on data obtained from the Iowa Department of Education, middle level principals are being asked to participate in this study if their schools contain grades 6, 7, 8 and/or 9, and if at least two elementary schools feed into their school.

In order to conduct this research, I am seeking your assistance in completing a web-based Transition Practices Inventory addressing these issues. Your participation is voluntary, but is greatly appreciated and vital for the success of this study. All responses will be kept confidential; your name or the name of your school district will never be used or published. Therefore, please complete the survey openly and honestly. Since data will be reported by groups, individual school data will not be listed. It is anticipated that, in addition to the dissertation, the results of this study also will be disseminated through conference presentations and at least one journal article.

Should you agree to participate in this study, please:

- Log on to the inventory at http://survey.educ.iastate.edu/surveys/ross.htm
- Enter the code provided in the upper right-hand corner of this letter, and
- Complete the inventory according to the online instructions. In the event that you are unable to answer some of the inventory questions because you were not employed in the district at the time that some of the decisions were made, please seek input from a staff member who was involved to assist in completing those inventory items.

The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and should be completed by November 30, 2001. In the event that you cannot access this website, please contact Mandy at 515/239-3780 or 515/964-3393 so that I can send you a paper version of the survey as soon as possible.

Upon analysis of the data from the Inventory, three to four Iowa middle level school principals will be invited to participate in follow-up interviews, to enrich the data.
generated from this project. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of the results of
this study, please email me or contact me by phone at the numbers listed below, and I
will gladly share my findings with you when the study is complete.

Please accept the enclosed brand new dollar bill as a token of my appreciation for the
time you've taken to assist in this study by completing the survey. If you have any
questions concerning this study, please contact either one of us at the numbers listed
below.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated participation.

Sincerely,

Mandy Lemanczyk Ross
Phone: 515/964-3393 (home); 515/239-3780 (work)
Email: mross0531@home.com

Donald G. Hackmann, Ed.D.
Associate Professor and
Dissertation Advisor
Phone: 515/294-4871
hackmann@iastate.edu
APPENDIX C. SURVEY INSTRUMENT
Transition Practices Inventory

As part of a doctoral research study being completed at Iowa State University, this survey is designed to identify elementary to middle level school transition practices in Iowa schools, to what extent they are being used, and principals' perceptions about them. Please complete the following survey to indicate how your school implements elementary to middle school transition practices, and which middle school characteristics best describe your school. Thank you for your time and input in completing this survey. Please enter your PIN to proceed.

Please use the following scale to describe levels of implementation in Items 1-3 below:

0 = Not Implemented 1 = Occasionally Implemented 2 = Partially Implemented 3 = Extensively Implemented 4 = Fully Implemented
(does not exist at this time) (not on a regular basis, as deemed necessary) (implementation in process, not yet fully developed) (implementation nearly complete) (routine part of school program with continual refinement)

Level of Implementation at my school:

Not Occasionally Partially Extensively Fully
Implemented Implemented Implemented Implemented Implemented

1. Interdisciplinary teaming
(A team of 2-5 teachers sharing common students, common planning time, and housed in close proximity. If your school uses more than one delivery system, for example, self-contained at the entry grade and interdisciplinary teaming at other grades, please note this below.)

We use more than one delivery system. Please describe:

2. Advisor/Advisee program
(Teachers and students meet regularly in small groups to develop trusting relationships, and to increase engagement in learning, positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging.)

3. Exploratory programs
(Provide early adolescents with the opportunity to experience a variety of content areas outside the basic core curriculum. Some exploratory course may be "required" (required of all students at that grade level) and others might be "electives" (courses or content areas where students have the opportunity to select from a list of possible electives. The delivery of instruction for exploratory courses, whether required or elective, is sometimes similar and sometimes different than the delivery of instruction for core courses. An example might be an exploratory wheel consisting of quarter-long courses in industrial technology, family and consumer science, or art. Physical education would NOT be an example of an exploratory course.)

Please use the following scale to describe the your school's level of implementation in Items 4-27 below:

0 = No implementation 1 = Partial implementation 2 = Full implementation
(we do not have this practice at our school) (we implement this characteristic, but it is not completely developed at this time) (we implement every aspect of the characteristic as described in the statement)
4. Elementary students come to our school in the spring of the prior year for orientation activities.
5. Summer event(s) are held for students coming from elementary.
6. Middle level students go to the sending elementary school(s) to meet/orient future students.
7. Students coming from elementary follow/shadow a middle level student.
8. Penpal/pen-pal program between elementary students and middle level students.
9. Middle level administrator(s) go to the sending school to meet/work with the future students.
10. Middle level counselor(s) go to the sending school to meet/work with the future students.
11. Middle level teacher(s) go to the sending school to meet/work with the future students.
12. Middle level advisory lesson/unit, designed to ease student concerns related to "new" school environment, are presented throughout the year.
13. Students coming from elementary are paired with older grade students to provide a support "buddy".
14. Middle level advisory groups include students from different grades.
15. Looping (teachers move with students to the next grade level, rather than sending them to new teachers the following school year) is used at the middle level.
16. Interdisciplinary teams include orientation activities as part of their curriculum.
17. Staff from feeder elementary schools and your middle school communicate about the academic, social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs of incoming students (beyond those with IEPs, for example).
18. Elementary and middle level staffs have a process for sharing information regarding at-risk students.
19. Please describe any additional practices employed at your school to assist elementary students with the transition to middle school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level this practice is used at my school:</th>
<th>No Implementation</th>
<th>Partial Implementation</th>
<th>Full Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

20. A parent orientation meeting is held at the middle level school.
21. Parent and students shadow a current middle level student together.
22. Parent meetings throughout the year for purposes of communication and ongoing orientation.
23. Meetings/workshops/classes are conducted to help parents understand the needs of the early adolescent.
24. Parents are involved in the school (through volunteering, guest presentations, etc.), in activities focused on easing students' transition into the school.

25. Parents are included as full members of advisory groups and/or school-based management teams, with activities focused on easing students' transition into the school.

26. Parent-teacher organization meeting address issues related to needs of the early adolescent.

27. Please describe any additional practices employed at your school to help parents assist their elementary students with the transition to middle school:

28. Please indicate the extent of the involvement of each of the following people in developing your school's transition practices including ongoing assessment and refinement of those transition practices (circle all that apply).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement:</th>
<th>Not Involved</th>
<th>Peripheral Involvement</th>
<th>Routinely Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant/Associate principal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance counselor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead teacher/Interdisciplinary team</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of middle level staff members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of middle level and elementary staff members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please explain)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

29. As you have considered implementing various transition practices, to what degree have you relied on the following resources:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Use:</th>
<th>Not Used</th>
<th>Some Use</th>
<th>Integral for Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turning Points (1989)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This We Believe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning Points 2000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal articles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with other middle level school personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with elementary school personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with college/university personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation/survey of students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please name or describe):</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
30. Other transition resources used in your building/district that have not been described above (please explain):

Please take a moment to describe yourself and your school.

31. Grade levels in your school (circle all that apply): 6 7 8 9

32. Number of elementary schools that feed into your school: ______

33. Number of students in your entering/lowest grade: ______

35. How many middle level schools are in your district, including yours? ______

39. Indicate the highest degree you've completed.  
   ______Bachelor  ______Bachelor+some graduate work  ______Masters  ______Masters+additional hours  
   ______Educational Specialist/Certificate of Advanced Studies  ______EdD/PhD

40. Please indicate the total number of years of teaching and administrative experience you have at the middle level: ______

41. Please describe components of your school's transition practices that you believe are particularly effective for easing incoming students' transition into your school.

42. What changes do you foresee or would you intend to make to your school's transition practices?

43. Please share any additional comments regarding middle level transition practices, related either to your school specifically or in general.

Many thanks for your input and assistance in this study.
APPENDIX D. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Potential Qualitative Follow-up Interview Questions

How have principals who have self-identified high use of transition practices in their schools determined which transition practices to use? Have their decisions been based on student need, parental input, or other factors?

1. Please verify for accuracy the list of transition practices for your school that I’ve compiled based on your responses to the on-line Transition Practices Inventory you completed earlier. Once you’ve verified that this list is accurate, please explain why you selected these transition practices. What data or other evidence did you use to determine that you would use these practices?

2. Think about the use of transition practices when you first arrived in this position and now. How are these practices different? How did you go about making the changes, if any? Why do you choose to use transition practices? Have you had any firsthand experiences that made you realize the need to use transition practices? How were student and/or parent needs and concerns identified for the purposes of planning transition practices? What evidence, if any, did you use to identify transition practices that addressed student:
   - Self-esteem?
   - School climate including teacher/student relations?
   - Student academic achievement?
   - Other?
3. Which of your transition practices do you feel are most beneficial to promoting student achievement? What evidence do you have to support those beliefs?

4. What transition practices would you add or delete from your current practices? What evidence do you have that would suggest the need for any changes?

5. How do your student demographics impact your choices of transition practices?

6. In what ways do staff members from the elementary schools communicate with middle level staff about student needs? In what ways have you worked with elementary schools to suggest changes in their practices to assist students’ transitions?

7. What individuals are involved in planning and implementing transition activities, and to what extent? How have you solicited parent input to assist with developing your transition practices?

8. If you are in a district with more than one middle level school, do you and the other middle level principal(s) plan/coordinate transition activities? If so, tell me about how you do this.

9. What evidence have you collected to show that your transition practices have been effective in easing students’ movement into your building?

10. How have your experiences with individual or groups of students influenced your use of transition practices in order to better meet student needs?
APPENDIX E. COMMENTS FROM SURVEY INSTRUMENT
Question 1. If your school uses more than one delivery system, please describe.

The entry grade level in the building is semi-departmentalized.

Three teams per grade with common planning and team time. Three special needs teachers assigned to each grade level.

We are not currently scheduling our exploratory classes with academic teams.

Traditional 7 period day with homeroom.

We have no pure teams, but basically the same groups of teachers service like grade level students.

Traditional junior high schedule for 7th & 8th grade.

Teaming had to be stopped this year due to budget cuts.

We team teach English and reading with regular and special ed students.

Grade 7 social studies/language arts are the ONLY teamed delivery system; all other aspects are "traditional" junior high organization.
Question 19. Please describe additional practices employed at your school to assist students with transition to middle school.

Adolescent skills class new to the district, students’ orientation.

During the counselors’ visits at the elementaries, they show a “virtual tour” of the school through PowerPoint. Students may also tour the students live during registration in the late summer.

In spring, orientation program held for incoming students; it is student led.

Parent/student meeting in the spring followed by a parent-only meeting. April, May, June newsletters sent to fifth grade parents.

Open House Night for parents and students. Invite 5th graders to special events at the middle school.

After-school programs and pre-school orientation with parents and students.

Selected 6th graders meet with 5th graders, conduct building tour, and relate “what you really need to know about middle school” during spring orientation.

Our incoming 6th grade orientation, “MYFI” has been presented at the National Middle School Assn. National Convention.

Planners with handbook in. Principal and advisors discuss and study rules in the middle school.

Orientation Night with parents and teachers before school begins. Exploratory classes with guidance counselor.

Camp Middle School in Fall + video orientation.

School is open two weeks before school starts for students to visit as many times as they wish. Schedules and locker given to students two weeks before school starts. Night meeting 2 days before school starts to meet teachers while parents are present.

Students are invited for the middle school musical and any other activities planned throughout the year, i.e., Egyptian Interactive Museum.

Principal meets with 7th grade classes after the school gets going to answer questions about rules, policies, and procedures.

We have a parent meeting and an activity night for the new students to meet their teachers and a series of short middle school meetings for the parents.
We send a three-sided locker to the elementaries so students can practice unlocking their combinations.

½-day orientation for 7 graders, Back to school night for parents, Complete curriculum and class expectations for each individual class given to parents. Testing done for placement in advanced classes.

Elementary is included in all of our assemblies. Fifth grade will attend our quarter awards programs.

School web page, teacher assignment page updated daily,orientation night for students and parents and teachers.

Students come to our middle school in the spring of their fifth grade year for a tour, to meet teachers, and to have lunch in our cafeteria. They see video about our classes and activities and are taken on the tour by older students who attended their attendance center. We have students come to our middle school in the fall of the two years preceding their expected arrival (fourth and fifth graders) for Fall Family Fun Night. This provides familiarity with the building and our staff, while students are with their family members for comfort level.

Parents and students of fifth graders come to a special orientation/open house two days before school begins, so they can meet teams (teachers) find rooms, find lockers, etc.

Additional visits by students with special needs to acquaint them more fully with their future spec. ed. teacher.

A team of middle school community agents routinely visits feeder elementaries during the school year in order to connect with incoming students, provide students with comfortable and credible contact persons, and provide transitional kinds of experiences for them. The goal of this group of McKinley representatives is to make weekly contact with elementaries the entire school year via on-site visits and meetings with identified students.

Some of our co-curricular programs reach out to elementary schools to assist in transition to middle school.

Sixth grade orientation is held 2 days prior to the opening of school—schedule walkthroughs, locker assignment, lunch procedure, etc.

Parent/Student Orientation Night. PowerPoint presentation given to visiting elementary students in the spring as part of visit. Our “Peer Helpers” give personal tours.

Intermediate students annually prepare and present a “PowerPoint” presentation to elementary students when they visit our building and answer questions. Elementary
students write a letter describing themselves to intermediate teachers in the spring. They serve as an introduction. We also have a PTA sponsored "mixer" activity for all new 6th graders in the fall.

Principal meets with PTAs of feeder schools.

August Fun Night for in-coming sixth graders and parents- well attended.

Incoming 5th grade students have a half-day orientation program prior to the arrival of returning students.

Summer cookout for all new students. Food donated by business partner.

In the summer, students report to school to register for classes. At that time many tour the building to find classrooms and learn the layout of the building. The first day of school involves only the incoming class so that the students do not need to worry about upper classmen on the first day of school.

Conferences before school starts in Aug. individually by advisor. Open door individual conferences in the spring with guidance staff.

We meet with elementary teachers and staff. We attend special needs staffing for at risk students.

Orientation for students and parents.

Homerooms are scheduled three times during the first two days of school to assist students with reading schedules, finding and opening lockers, navigating lunch.
Question 27. Please describe additional practices employed at your school to help parents assist their elementary students with the transition to middle school.

Research info for parents on transition; helpful hints, understanding needs, etc.

Tours of building scheduled for incoming parents.

Parent Involvement Committee developed, mini-courses require parents as teachers.

We have a special ed student/parent meeting with staff and conduct building tours.

Parent advisory group helps with some major unit projects.

Newsletters with much information. Team meetings with parents.

Parent orientations (spring)/ Parents luncheons (spring)/ A back to school night (fall 1st thing).

Incoming parent meeting in the spring of the preceding year.

Numerous school improvement, projects and committees involving parents.

Fall Family Fun Night brings parents into the schools.

Parents and students come to an evening orientation/open house two days before school begins so parents can again walk around the building (in addition to the first parent meeting in the spring), find their student's locker, classrooms, meet teachers, etc.

Family picnic for students, families, and teachers of incoming 6th graders so staff can share expectations and routines.

Middle team generated parent activities, conferences, fun and information nights...these activities personalize our school and improve parent involvement, welcome and investment in our school.

We are a K-8 building, which results in partial implementation at PTA meetings etc. since we are also working at meeting the needs of elementary parents. We do have a Parent Communication Network that provides activities for students and parents of intermediate age students. We also have team members attend EVERY 5th grade IEP for students that we know will be transitioning to our building.

School service workers in eighth grade go to feeder elementaries to be reading buddies and assist kdg. teachers.

Before/after school and summer program.
Parent University - we teach strategies in dealing with adolescents.

Orientation programs, Open House.

Homerooms are scheduled three times daily during the first 2 days of school. These homerooms are used to assist students with schedules, lockers, and lunch, as well as to address the handbook and diversity/harassment issues. On the third day of school, we follow an early dismissal schedule and use the last 1.5 hours to do team building activities within our 6 teams.
Question 29. Other resources used for implementing transition practices.

Elementary 5th grade staff.

We usually survey 6th graders: What do incoming 6th graders need to know?

We ask each of our 6 feeders to pick the top ten 6th grade questions reg. Evans M.S. when we visit each feeder for orientation (spring) we start by having 7th/8th graders (from that feeder) answer the questions the 6th graders listed.

Consultation of parents.

Middle level conferences and workshops.

Survey of parents and staff.

District curriculum facilitators.

AEA school improvement consultants.

We simply look at what we know as concerns of students. Our staff has been at this profession many, many years.

Question 30. Other transition resources used in your building/district that have not been described above (please explain).

Attendance at conferences.

Most of our activities have just evolved from a need.

District support is strong. We have a transition team which meets monthly at the District level. Much of this focus is on the middle school to high school transition.

Parents of incoming students invited to a carnival in the spring so they can meet other middle school parents.

Administrative work-study group meets 3-4 times/year.

The district has a computer program that they use and we access to track transitioning students who are Exceptional Education students, students with a 504 and/or students in the "process" of Solution Focus (Level A-D).

AEA personnel.

Feeder pattern team of support staff, reading specialists and such.

Mailings in the summer to talk about the upcoming year. Sports camps and band camps that help get kids used to being a part of the school.

Our best input was from parent group.

Best was parent survey and involvement.

Experience of staff.
Question 41. Please describe components of your school's transition practices that you believe are particularly effective for easing incoming students’ transition into your school.

Parent meeting.

Visitation to the site during school session. Late summer visits with parents to go through schedules.

Teacher and counselor attitudes about making students welcome and successful.

Principal going to feeder school, student led orientation program.

Student visits to our school.

Shadow days, open house, and 6th grade interdisciplinary unit.

Open house with parents and students.

Visits to the middle school building.

Understanding of student needs.

Using middle school students in discussing the transition to middle school.

7th graders develop handbooks to give to the incoming 6th graders to introduce them to the junior high.

In addition to the spring orientation process (1 section of 5th graders per day), we schedule another orientation (locker assignments, agenda/handbooks, tour, run mini schedule) the day before school starts in the fall.

MYFI uses peer guides and 6th grade teachers - extensive training of both.

Student orientation and parent orientation.

The scavenger hunt we offer during the school day for the 5th graders and the evening party help the most.

Student and parent orientation night, meeting with elementary guidance counselor and 6th grade team, student orientation day, special education students coming to the middle school for a half day visit, special ed. staff meetings between buildings.

Counselor visit, parent meeting, shadowing/MS visitation, Camp MS, video orientation, class meeting.
One day devoted to fifth grade transition/visitation in the spring. One evening in spring for parents and students to visit middle school.

Shadow day. School, schedule, locker given to students 2 weeks before school starts.

Orientation activities, principal communication, advisory.

1. Spring orientation at the feeder school-then a visit/tour of Evans. 2. Spring parents orientation. 3. Transition classes in August for 6th grade. 4. Elem. Teacher & guidance meeting w/ our (Evans) guidance & administration in spring to discuss each 6th grader.

Interdisciplinary team orientation activities.

First day assemblies, principal meets with newcomers in social studies class.

The guidance counselor and I meet with all the incoming students to discuss scheduling and middle school issues. We set up a pen pal writing experience for the new middle school students with eighth grade students. We have an activity night for parents and students. The students have planned activities with the teachers in the gym, while parents go through a series of 15-minute meetings learning about the middle school and what to expect from early adolescents. We finish the night with ice cream sundaes, also critical to middle school education is good treats. We invite parents to register at the middle school and to tour the building and practice with the padlock on lockers. We have an open house early in the year. During parent/teacher conferences we invite students to take part in the conference. We also do student-led conferences in the spring.

Summer Mission Transition program for at-risk students, visiting elementary schools with middle school students, and orientation night in August.

The visits to UMS by students and parents, and the locker going to elementary.

Spring visits, ½ day visit the day before school starts.

Student visitation and orientations seem to satisfy all needs.

6th graders talking to 5th graders.

Elem. students have at least three opportunities to visit middle school.

Open house/student tours.

Orientation and inter-building visits.

All.

The student visitation in the spring, the “carnival” for incoming families in the spring,
and the orientation/open house two days before school begins. The orientation/open house is especially effective because students’ schedules (including team of teachers, classrooms, lockers, classes) are available.

MS student ambassadors who visit elementary schools with our counseling staff.

I believe our school’s outreach program where staff members routinely visit and connect with students has significant merit here. Credibility with students and parent gained from doing this has been very helpful. Additionally, we offer a summer school program at no cost that specifically targets incoming sixth graders that has been very popular and helpful. Last summer 250 students were served in this manner.

Visitation in both the spring and summer seasons.

Pre-school registration and orientation/spring visits to the 5th grade classrooms, and their visits to the middle school.

Summer camp for at risk students entering the school.

Team bonding activities are the focus of the first few days of school; team enrichment activities.

Face-to-face meetings for elementary and middle level teachers. We use this information to “form” our sections of students. We also have approximately 30% of our middle level students who attended our building grades K-5 who are spread throughout the sections and can serve as resources to other students.

Principals visit with the 5th graders at their current school.

Face-to-face meetings with incoming students and parents, tour of facility.

Spring visitations.

Practice run of schedule, meet all their teachers, meet counselors, orientation.

Visits to feeder schools, orientations.

Teacher transition meetings between elementary and middle level.

Parent Orientation, elementary visits, registration process, peer help program, first day-7th grade only-focus on orientation to the new building.

Comprehensive involvement of parents, team leader, guidance, students and principals.

5 part orientation conferences to tours.
Daily homerooms for first two weeks, give locker (hall) on day 4-establishes pattern of getting around before adding combo stress! Drop in summer tours, keep same homeroom teacher for both years.

Multiple contacts prior to beginning school and orientation practices in the classroom once school begins.

Principal meets with parents in groups of 15-20 after parents had the chance to go to their child's classes.

Elementary visits the spring before 6th graders enter - orientation/open house the week school begins - parents days (parents spend the day with students going to classes, eating lunch, etc.

Visit elementary classrooms, spring orientation visit, orientation in T.A. with help from 8th grade peer helpers.

Parent & student orientation programs, elementary and middle staff meetings.

Elementary visits to the middle school have been the most effective tool.

Summer activities.

Having 5th graders visit our school in the spring and meet with teachers and students.

We hold 3 homerooms each of the first 2 days of school to help with schedules, locker, and lunch. We give each team 1.5 hours of team building time on the 3rd day of school.
Question 42. What changes do you foresee or would you intend to make to your school's transition practices?

Lots of change is needed. I answered the question regarding the past practices in this district.

Pair up incoming students with someone from the next grade level to become a "mentor/buddy."

None at this time.

Parent involvement.

Perhaps visiting elem. as admin/counseling team.

Middle school students going to elementary schools.

More parents with students in spring and fall.

Summer activity probably August.

Involving parents and assigning mentors.

Continue to modify and receive feedback from teachers, parents, and students.

We are always looking for more positive involvement from parents.

We plan to hold a student/parent orientation night for incoming 6th graders with the junior high staff. The students/parent will go through a shortened schedule to familiarize them with teachers and course expectations.

None at this time.

New MS will open in 2003 - coordination issues.

We are now grade alike and I will change my orientation to include the lowest level grade.

I plan on taking the 6th grade student council members to the feeder schools with me this spring to meet with the 5th graders.

More visits to elementary.

Working on a middle school night.
1. A greater emphasis on “walking thro” by 6th graders during summer.
2. Greater emphasis on social development-espec. Entrance year (7th).

None.

None at this time.

We will continue to address the needs of middle school students in the parent meetings.

Splitting orientation night times provide individual orientation for each of our 7th grade teams. This would provide a more intimate setting, and less people in our halls.

More communication between elementary and MS professionals.

None this year.

None.

No changes at this time.

We will be incorporating an after school component second semester.

Parent involvement in early activities about adolescents might help. Their main expressed concern is safety in a bigger setting and isolation from older students.

We debrief in early June to review effectiveness and any changes.

I am very satisfied with what we are presently doing. Students feel welcome and comfortable here. Parents do as well.

Probably leave as is.

Include shadowing as a part of the 5th grade spring orientation.

Increase the numbers of students involved and the programs tried.

If funding is provided for teaming, we (particularly teachers) could be more effective in providing support for students and parents.

More teacher time together to discuss scope and sequence of reading/math curriculum.

The need for more sharing between elementary and middle school teachers.

Possible shadowing by younger students of middle school students.
Probably data to become more digitized to be processed more readily on computer.

None.

Continue to update homeroom curriculum. Continue to get feedback from parents/students.

Nothing major.

Changes may be in the area of addressing parent concerns before the school year starts.

5th grade staff & middle school staff increased dialog.

Use of e-mail.

Shadowing, parent and student involvement.

Closer collaboration with elementary/middle school teachers.

Our student council will help us find identify ways to make the transition smoother and to reduce the conflict between 7th and 8th graders. I would like to see a mentoring environment created so that our 8th graders feel connected to the 7th graders.
Question 43. Please share any additional comments regarding middle level transition practices, related to your school specifically or in general.

Transition is difficult for students and parents regardless of what you do. To ease the stress, all parties need to be informed.

It's a great age group and this is a great school!!!!!!

This is my 3rd M.S. In each advisement had died away (or does not function real well). I believe our teacher training institutes must begin to emphasize as part of their mission in the middle-
1. Social development of M.S.'ers and how to address it.
2. 2-3 areas (content) of preparation-I don't need "content specialists"- I need teacher who can integrate curriculum & are versatile enough to teach more than one area.

Many of the activities that we do have come from attending the Regional Middle School Conference. I would suggest that any new middle school teacher/administrator attend this conference to learn from experienced middle school teachers.

Our schedule is traditional but our philosophy is middle level.

We are a small school system, everyone knows everybody.

Thank heavens this arrived during a break. I can rarely get to them otherwise! I wish you would not send money!

The transition to an increased workload and need for organization is something we continually work on in sixth grade. Perhaps we need to do more in the last part of 5th grade to help students develop these practices.

We conduct similar strategies with our high schools.

Our sixth graders handle the transition quite well the last few years.

I wish we could get our high schools to do half of what we do to ease transition between grades 8 and 9.

Looking to more family activities.

The most important factor in the school is to hire top-notch teachers. As an administrator, I am no more effective than my weakest teacher.

We need more looping and are working towards it.
Transition from 8th to 9th is critical for high school retention, suggest 9th grade teaming to help solve drag out problem. That is another dissertation topic.

We are always trying to find more effective ways to help our new 7th graders acclimate!
APPENDIX F. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM
1. Title of Project: A study of principals' perceptions of transition practices from elementary to middle level

2. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree that all key personnel involved in conducting human subjects research will receive training in the protection of human subjects. I agree to request renewal of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

Amanda Lemanick Ross
Typed name of principal investigator
3/17/01
Date
Signature of principal investigator

ELPS
Department
N229D Lagomarcino Hall
Campus Address
515-239-3780; mross@ames.k12.iu.us
Phone number and email

2a. Principal investigator
☑ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☑ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3. Typed name of co-principal investigator(s)
Dr. Donald G. Hackman

Date
Signature of co-principal investigator(s)

3a. Co-Principal investigator(s) (check all that apply)
☑ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☑ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3b. Typed name of major professor or supervisor (if not a co-principal investigator)

Date
Signature of major professor or supervising faculty member

4. Typed names of other key personnel who will directly interact with human subjects.

5. Project (check all that apply)
☐ Research ☑ Thesis or dissertation ☐ Class project ☐ Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project)

6. Number of subjects (complete all that apply)
117 # adults, non-students # ISU students # minors under 14 # other (explain)
# minors 14-17

7. Status of project submission through Office of Sponsored Programs Administration (check one)
☐ Has been submitted ☐ Will be submitted ☒ Will not be submitted

7a. Funding Source: self

8. Brief description of proposed research involving human subjects: (See instructions, item 8. Use an additional page if needed.) (Include one copy of the complete proposal if submitting to a Federal sponsor.)
This study seeks to understand what transition practices are used to address the needs and concerns of students entering identified middle level schools in the state of Iowa and develop an understanding of how these schools develop, implement, and refine their transition programs. A web-based survey will be used to collect data. Middle level principals at identified Iowa schools will be mailed a cover letter requesting their participation. If principals request, they will be able to opt for a paper version of the same survey. Upon completion and analysis of the survey, 3-4 middle level schools whose transition practices are deemed "exemplary" will be contacted and asked to participate in a qualitative follow-up interview by the researcher. Subjects were selected using a database provided from the Iowa Department of Education, whereby middle level schools were identified by grade levels (grades 5-9, inclusive) and by numbers of elementary feeder schools (two or more elementary feeder schools required). Similar grade-level groups were clustered, and schools with grade 5 as the entering grade level were omitted due to a very small size of 6 schools meeting the pre-identified criteria. Principals who choose to participate may elect to receive a summary of the completed study. Additionally, the researcher intends to include a one-dollar bill in each initial mailing of the cover letter as incentive to participate.

9. Informed Consent:  □ Signed informed consent will be obtained. (Attach a copy of your form.)
□ Modified informed consent will be obtained. (See instructions, item 9.)

10. Confidentiality of Data: Describe below the methods you will use to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained. (See instructions, item 10.)

On each cover letter, participants will be assigned a code number, which they will need to enter onto the website in order to gain access to the web-based survey. This procedure seeks to eliminate non-participants from accessing the survey, thus contaminating the data. Additionally, the code number will be used to identify schools that display "exemplary" transition practices so as to conduct a follow-up interview at a later date. When reporting the findings of this study, no names of persons or schools will be included. Every effort will be made to maintain the privacy of participants and their schools and districts. Other than the principal researcher and her major professor, no other individuals are anticipated to be involved with data that would identify individuals or specific schools.

11. Will subjects in the research be placed at risk or incur discomfort? Describe any risks to the subjects and precautions that will be taken to minimize them. (The concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes risks to subjects' dignity and self-respect as well as psychological or emotional risk. See instructions, item 11.)

Subjects will not be placed at any risk and any discomfort incurred would be the result of their perceptions rather than a direct result of the research itself. Any risks to participants should be addressed and thereby eliminated by maintaining their privacy and confidentiality.

12. CHECK ALL of the following that apply to your research:
□ A. Medical clearance necessary before subjects can participate  □ H. Deception of subjects
□ B. Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to subjects  □ I. Subjects under 14 years of age and/or
□ C. Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects  □ Subjects 14-17 years of age
□ D. Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from subjects  □ J. Subjects in institutions (nursing homes,
□ E. Administration of infectious agents or recombinant DNA  mental health facilities, prisons, etc.)
□ F. Application of external stimuli  □ K. Pregnant women
□ G. Application of noxious or potentially noxious stimuli  □ L. Research must be approved by another
□ □ □ institution or agency (attach letters of approval)

If you checked any of the items in 12, please complete the following in the space below (include any attachments):

Items A-G  Describe the procedures and note the proposed safety precautions.

Items D-E  The principal investigator should send a copy of this form to Environmental Health and Safety, 118 Agronomy Lab for review.
Item H. Describe how subjects will be deceived; justify the deception; indicate the debriefing procedure, including the timing and information to be presented to subjects.

Item I. For subjects under the age of 14, indicate how informed consent will be obtained from parents or legally authorized representatives as well as from subjects.

Items J-K. Explain what actions would be taken to insure minimal risk.

Item L. Specify the agency or institution that must approve the project. If subjects in any outside agency or institution are involved, approval must be obtained prior to beginning the research, and the letter of approval should be filed.
Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Form

Checklist for Attachments

The following are attached (please check):

13. [ ] Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) the purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 18)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
   d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) that participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject

14. [ ] A copy of the consent form (if applicable)

15. [ ] Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

16. [ ] Data-gathering instruments

17. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:
   First contact: May 1, 2001
   Last contact: October 19, 2001
   Month/Day/Year

18. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:
   January 31, 2002
   Month/Day/Year

19. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer
   [Signature]
   Date: 3/21/1
   Department or Administrative Unit:
   [Departmental Executive Officer]

20. Initial action by the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
   [ ] Project approved
   [ ] Pending Further Review
   Date:
   [ ] Project not approved
   Date:
   [ ] No action required
   Date:

21. Follow-up action by the IRB:
   [ ] Project approved
   [ ] Project not approved
   Date:
   [ ] Project not resubmitted
   Date:

[Signature of IRB Chairperson]
Name of IRB Chairperson: Patricia M. Keith
Approval Date: [Date]
Signature of IRB Chairperson: [Signature]
Iowa State University
Continuing Review and/or Modification of Research Involving Human Subjects
(Please type the information on this form)

One copy of this form and changed documents should be submitted to the

SECTION I: PI/Project Information

1. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are
protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the
project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree that all key personnel involved in
conducting human subjects research will receive training in the protection of human subjects. I agree to request renewal
of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

2. Type of Submission: ☑ Continuing Review (fill in sections I & II) ☐ Modification (fill in sections I & II)
☐ Continuing Review & Modification (fill in sections I, II, & III)

3. Date of Last IRB Approval: 4/2/01

4. IRB ID #: 01-499

5. Title of Project (if title has changed since original approval, please provide both titles): A Study of Principals' Perceptions of Transition Practices from Elementary to Middle Level

6. Funding Source: Scottish Rite Fellowship: Department Stipend

7. Have key personnel been added since last approval? ☑ No ☐ Yes If yes, please list. (see part III for signature requirements) 

Amanda Lemansczyk Ross
Typed name of principal investigator
3/1/02
Date Signature of principal investigator
ELPS
Department
702 NE Hayes Drive, Ankeny, IA 50021
Address for correspondence
515-964-3393: mross0531@yahoo.com
Phone number and email

If student project:

Typed name of major professor or supervisor
Dr. Donald G. Hackmann
3/2/02
Date Signature

IRB Approval:

Rick Sharp
IRB Chair
Signature of IRB Chair
IRB Review Date 3/2/02
SECTION II: Continuing Review

8. Have there been any serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences since the last review?

☐ Yes, please explain. ☒ No

9. Previously approved procedures and measures will remain the same.

☒ Yes ☐ If no, please fill out section III.

SECTION III: Modifications (A modification is required whenever a change is made to the approved project, whether it be a title change or change in investigators, resubmission of a grant proposal involving changes to the original proposal, or changes in the funding source, etc.)

10. The following modification(s) are being made (check all that apply):

☐ Change in type of subjects (i.e. minors 14-17 to minors under 14): changed from _____ to _____.

☐ Change in informed consent document; attach copy with changes highlighted.

☐ Change in principal investigator; requires signature of new PI and verification of human subjects training, and signature of DEO for new PI.

New PI typed name _____

New PI signature ____________________________

DEO signature ____________________________

☐ Change in co-principal investigator(s); requires signature of new co-PI and attach verification of human subjects training

New co-PI typed name _____

New co-PI signature ____________________________

☐ Change in total number of subjects; changed from _____ to _____

☐ Inclusion of additional key personnel; type names and attach human subjects training verification

☐ Change in project sponsor (attach complete grant application for new or additional sponsor)

☐ Other (e.g., change in project title, adding new materials)

11. Describe the modification(s) indicated above in sufficient detail for evaluation independent of any other documents.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Iowa Department of Education (2001). [Iowa middle school data file as per electronic mail request]. Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education.


James, D. K. (1994). Meeting the social needs of sixth grade students moving into a junior high or middle school through an integrated activities program (Report No. PS 022 508). Nova University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 371882)


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." However, I'm convinced that it takes a village to write a dissertation. There are so many people that have helped or supported me along this journey, and they are an essential part of the completion of this study and my subsequent degree.

My sincere thanks to Dr. Donald Hackmann, my major professor and ally, for challenging me and at the same time demonstrating endless patience to get me to that next level. Dr. Ann Thompson, who served as my thesis advisor and encouraged me to do a thesis instead of a creative component "in case you want to pursue a Ph.D. later," has long been a source of encouragement and her faith in me was instrumental in my decision to pursue this degree. My thanks also go out to Dr. Mack Shelley for gently supporting and guiding me through the development of the statistical aspects of this study as it evolved into its final form, to Dr. Susan Hegland for her role as a critical friend and her statistical guidance during initial planning phases of this study, and to Dr. Jan Walker for coming to the rescue well into the process.

My appreciation also goes out to others who provided me with support in other forms including: Dr. William Jacobson and the Scottish Rite Foundation for believing in me and providing financial support to help make this accomplishment attainable; Dr. Robert Reason, my "stat guy," and to Linda Coffman and Dianne Peterson—my CNBC friends—for listening, encouraging, and being devoted friends.

But above all, my thanks goes to my family, who have lived this process with me daily—and without me, sometimes. My parents, Rita and George Lemanczyk, have reminded
me time and again how proud they are of my efforts and have offered their assistance in so many ways throughout this process. Thanks to my sister, Lisa, who provided long distance support, encouragement, and friendship like only a sister can do. And thanks to my brother, Mike, who provided needed comic relief on occasion. Matthew and Michael, my beloved sons, who have learned to turn the computer over on a moment’s notice without complaining and have done a lot of growing up while I’ve been working on this project. But most of all, my thanks go out to my husband, Jim. The list of things he has done over the past few years to assist me in completing this degree is nearly endless. But throughout the process, he has been patient, kind, and above all, an incredible friend and source of love and support. What more could I ask for?