COMMON PLAN TIME AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

In this study, supporting conditions necessary to study the common plan time phenomenon at the middle level school were present. This study investigated what occurs during common planning time for two middle school level teams of teachers. A middle school level team of teachers in this study consisted of four teachers that shared a common planning time together at least four days a week and taught the same set of students. Student outcomes for middle level schools that implement common planning time are higher overall self-concept (Warren & Muth, 1995) and greater academic efficacy (Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 1998). Teachers implementing common plan time report higher levels of job satisfaction (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999), and more positive interactions with their colleagues (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999). Schools report higher levels of student achievement (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1998, 1999, and Mertens & Flowers, 2003). The benefits for students and staff that practice the common plan time are plentiful. This study investigated what occurs during common plan time for middle school level team of teachers in an effort to better understand the connections between what occurs during common plan

 time and student achievement. The methodology used in the development of this study was a qualitative case study of two middle level teams of teachers. Multiple data sources in the study include observations of common plan time, individual interviews of the interdisciplinary team of teachers, and document analysis of lesson plans. Specifically, one sixth grade team and one seventh grade team participated in the study with a total sample of eight teachers.

The non-participant observer was an elementary level principal administrator from 2002 through 2011. The documented findings were examined. The interviewer was trained through the Middle Level Educational Research Special Interest Group (MLER SIG) during the summer of 2008. The research protocol and questions are copyrights of the MLER SIG 2007. The data collected in this study contributed to this national pool of research.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled "Common Plan Time at the Middle School Level" presented by Kelly Charles Flax, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the book *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey (1916) expressed his belief that "education is a necessity of life" (p. 1), the importance of which cannot be underestimated. As an educator, I agree with this belief. As a parent, I believe that from the first time a baby takes a breath of air, the learning process has begun. Parents are often the first teachers, and begin the learning process by labeling objects and singing nursery rhymes with their child. As the baby grows, interacting with others becomes an increasingly important part of the educational process and being able to function in society appropriately. Saul (1995) suggests that the primary purpose of education is "to show individuals how they can function together in society" (p. 138). As students enter the school age years, they are exposed to classroom norms and behavioral expectations that are established so that education can occur in a safe and secure manner.

Dewey (1916) believes that "teaching and learning are a necessity for the continued existence of a society" (p. 4). A quality education should be designed to "help students realize their deep connections to and responsibility for not only their own individual experience, but also for the other human beings who share this world" (Shaw, 2000, p. 1). As the child enters the school age years, the classroom society typically increases from a class of 20 kindergarten students to a team of 100 middle level students. At each level of education, elementary, middle and high school, the world in which the student functions in

society increases. Student expectations and responsibilities to themselves and others increase.

Dewey continues expressing his belief on education by stating, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must be what the community wants for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely" (Kohn, 1998, p. 569). It is easy to agree with this philosophy and realize that educating children is a process that should adapt to societal needs. A quality education can open the doors to opportunities and provide equal opportunities for success, equality, and quality of life. A quality education should provide the opportunity for all children to experience the happiness and joy that come with learning. A quality education should nurture the intellectual talents of the students within a caring environment.

I initially started my career as a high school teacher. My certification in mathematics was fifth-twelfth grades which were considered a secondary certification. Obviously, high school students are not in fifth grade, but I was certified to teach each level. As I moved to a middle school setting with grades consisting of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, certification requirements had changed. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) realized that young adolescent students have unique needs different than that of high school age students. As a result, I was required to earn middle level certification. During the time I was earning my middle level certification, I became familiar with an organization that focuses on middle level education. This organization is called the National Middle School Association (NMSA). More importantly, I realized that understanding the developmental needs of the young adolescent is crucial to becoming a great middle level educator.

During my middle level teaching experience, I discovered that middle level students have a strong need for approval, and become easily discouraged. Obviously, the middle level student is experiencing increased sexual awareness and the development of secondary sex characteristics is occurring (NMSA, 2003). Also, middle level students are moving from concrete thinkers to more abstract thinkers. In contrast, the high school student is more inclined to be considered abstract thinkers (NMSA, 2003). Although I only listed a few differences that I noticed between the middle level student and the high school age student, it was clear that I needed to train myself to better understand the young adolescent so I could become a better teacher. As I continued teaching at the middle school level, I utilized resources and research from the National Middle School Association.

The NMSA focused on providing guidelines and recommendations for educators to follow that assisted educators in providing a quality education for middle level students. Such an education has not always been available to many students with the traditional fifth-twelfth grades certification I received. Educators and organizations have looked for ways to improve the educational process, and the National Middle School Association began the process of providing a definition of a middle school, as well as providing detailed needs of the young adolescent.

National Middle School Association

In 1980, the president of the NMSA appointed a committee to provide direction to and clarify the purpose of middle schools. Two years later, the first publication from the NMSA's *This We Believe* was released. Since then, *This We Believe* has been reprinted several times, including a second printing in 1995. Many middle level schools have used *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) as a cornerstone for their curriculum and structure.

Eight years later, the NMSA released the third version, called *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2003). This version is designed to be "a living document, fully able to reflect our philosophy and understanding of young adolescents and the conditions that make effective middle level schools" (p. v), and now has become the cornerstone for developing and implementing a quality middle level school. This research will reference heavily both the 1995 and 2003 versions of *This We Believe*, with an in-depth look at each in Chapter Two.

The authors of *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) state "the purpose of all schooling in our society is to help students become good citizens, lifelong learners, and healthy, caring, ethical, and intellectually reflective citizens" (p. 5). One of the goals is to develop a citizen who is productive and successful in school and in his or her life after school. To meet this goal, NMSA (1995) believes every middle school should provide a "curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory," in which "varied teaching and learning approaches" are used, along with "assessment and evaluation that promote learning" (p. 11). *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) states, "Developmentally responsive middle level schools are characterized by educators committed to young adolescents" (p.11). Each of these recommendations is listed by NMSA to better reflect meeting the developmental and academic needs of young adolescents.

Although *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) is only 48 pages long, the recommendations provide for a vision of middle level education. The six characteristics of developmentally responsive middle level schools and six aspects that a developmentally responsive middle level school provides will be further examined in the review of literature. Basically, NMSA believes that a developmentally responsive middle level school will

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"promote the growth of young adolescents as scholars, democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient young people who are optimistic about their future" (p. 10).

Two similar and important resources for middle level educators are *Turning Points* (CCAD, 1989) and *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Published in 1989, *Turning Points* provided eight recommendations for middle level educators to follow as they educate young adolescents. *Turning Points 2000* is used as a valuable resource in guiding middle level educators in providing an education that ensures success for all. *Turning Points 2000* prioritized seven recommendations. The first three recommendations are these:

1. Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based upon how students learn best,
2. Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners, and
3. Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities. (p. 23)

All three of these recommendations are tied to the interdisciplinary team concept and the use of common plan time (CPT). Interdisciplinary teaming describes the organizational structure of core teachers assigned to the same group of students. In *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995 & 2003), it is recommended that middle schools organize relationships for learning. In essence, an interdisciplinary team is a group of teachers that "work together to maximize learning and provide for more connections across the curriculum" (NMSA, 2006, p. 24). When this organizational structure is implemented at the middle level, student achievement increases. Lee and Smith (1993) found in their research that "students in restructured middle level schools (teaming practice)

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scored significantly higher on achievement and engagement than students in non-structured schools" (Arhar, 1997, p. 52). More research supporting the benefits of interdisciplinary teaming practice will be discussed in the review of literature.

Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform (NASSP, 2006) continues to provide recommendations for middle level leaders to follow. NASSP provides a vision for improvement consisting of nine cornerstones strategies. The first three are listed by NASSP (2006):

1. Establish the academically rigorous essential learning's that a student is required to master in order to successfully make the transition to high school and align the curriculum and teaching strategies to realize that goal.
2. Create dynamic teacher teams that are afforded common planning time to help organize and improve the quality and quantity of interactions between teachers and students.
3. Provide structured planning time for teachers to align the curriculum across the grades and schools and to map efforts that address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of students, especially at critical transition periods (e.g. elementary to middle grades, middle grades to high school). (p. 8)

Turning Points 2000 (Jackson & Davis, 2000), *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995), *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2003), and *Breaking Ranks* (NASSP, 2006) provide recommendations for middle level educators to follow in providing sound education. It is no coincidence that curriculum and common team plan time as well as the use of appropriate instructional strategies are of major importance. All of these documents emphasize educators who are committed to young adolescents and who are properly trained to teach young adolescents. Many middle level schools have provided such a school by following the recommendations. But in the end, they are just recommendations, not mandated criteria, guidelines and/or

assessments. NMSA warns that the recommendations listed in *This We Believe* (2003)

should not be picked through, only implementing some of the characteristics. Instead, *This*

We Believe (NMSA, 2003) states that the 14 characteristics "are interdependent and must be

implemented in concert" (p. 2) for maximum student benefit. Similarly, *Breaking Ranks*

(NASSP, 2006) strongly recommends that each cornerstone be implemented to provide a

systematic way of improving student achievement and meeting the needs of the young

adolescent.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

According to Sue Swain, the objective of the *NCLB Act 2001* (2001) is that "every

child, regardless of any circumstance or condition of life, should receive a quality education"

(George, 2002, p. 3). This objective is strongly endorsed by the NMSA. In a publication by

Anthony Jackson and Gayle Davis (2001) called *Turning Points 2000*, seven

recommendations are made in designing and improving middle level education. Each

recommendation is designed to reach the ultimate goal, which is to "ensure success for every

student" (p. 25). Once again, the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) does more than offer

recommendations; rather it also mandates. It is important to note that each child should

receive a quality education, but it is the author's belief the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) does not

adequately provide an appropriate guidelines or mandates to meet this end. And, the *NCLB*

Act of 2001 (2001) has placed unrealistic expectations for educators and students to achieve

creating the notion that schools are failing to ensure a quality education for all students even

though research can support if recommendations from NMSA are followed and implemented,

students will achieve at a high level. This belief will be supported and elaborated in the

following chapter.

Ensuring success for every student is an important goal. With this in mind, a critical investigation of teacher practices is needed to determine how teachers interact with each other in preparing to implement curriculum and to best meet the needs of the young adolescent. Common plan time appears to be the one tool that facilitates this cornerstone for middle level teachers, as well as having middle level teachers trained specifically for middle level education. *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) calls for increased accountability. Along with that, H.R. 1 from the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) asks states to put a highly-qualified teacher in every public school classroom by 2005, which is consistent with the recommendations from *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995 & 2003) and *Breaking Ranks* (NASSP, 2006). Part of this mandate includes improving teacher training and development, which is intended to improve student achievement.

By studying how the recommendations and mandates from *This We Believe* (1995 & 2003), *Turning Points 2000* (2000), *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001), and *Breaking Ranks* (2006) affect teacher beliefs and practices, I offer this study as my contribution to the literature on middle level instruction. In particular, this study will contribute to the knowledge of middle level teacher practices specifically within the interdisciplinary team setting and their use of common plan time. Determining what occurs during common plan time is of utmost importance for this study.

Statement of the Problem

While teaching high school mathematics, I never really felt part of a team. There were other math teachers in the building, but there was never really any dedicated time that we could meet to discuss instructional strategies. I felt as if I was on an island not only within the mathematics field, but within the whole building. Finding a common time to meet

with other content area teachers to discuss student concerns or successes was just not part of the normal working day. As I learned more about the middle school concept and common plan time, I felt I was being called to teach middle level students. I was extremely excited to be a part of a team of teachers that had the ability to meet regularly to discuss student needs, and more importantly, teaching strategies to address the needs of the students. When my advisor recommended I perform a study on the common plan time phenomenon, I was elated.

This particular study will examine current practices and beliefs of middle level educators in the Midwest and will include two interdisciplinary teams of teachers for a total of eight educators. The study will investigate middle level practices of common plan time (CPT) of interdisciplinary teams of teachers. It is important to note that all of the research questions come directly from the Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group (MLER SIG, 2007).

The focus question is:

>What are teachers' understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of common planning time?

Secondary Questions:

>How do teachers use their CPT?

>How are teachers prepared professionally to use CPT?

>What are the perceived benefits of CPT?

>What are the perceived barriers of CPT?

Secondary questions will address current practices regarding common planning time and its impact on curriculum implementation. Secondary questions will be used to achieve a clearer understanding of the focus question, and address specific aspects of the common plan

time phenomenon. Recommendations from *This We Believe* (1995), *Turning Points 2000* (2000), *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001), and *Breaking Ranks* (2006) will be used to develop questions and address middle level practices. Research done and reported in the 1990's and 2000's by Mertens, Flowers, and Mulhall (1998 & 1999), Mertens and Flowers (2003) and Jackson and Davis (2000) and other middle level leaders regarding the practice of common plan time will be used to respond to these questions. Background information and studies from the comprehensive research of Alexander (1968b), Alexander and McEwin (1989), McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (1995), and McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (2003) will be cited.

Middle School Research

In 1968, William Alexander provided the first national comprehensive study of middle schools. This study has been used as a benchmark for data to be compared with more recent studies. Highlights of the study included number of middle schools and grade configurations, establishment of the middle school, curriculum opportunities, instructional organization, and reactions to the middle school. In the 1968 study, a middle school was defined as "a school having at least three grades and not more than five grades, and including at least grades six and seven" (Alexander, 1968b, p. 1). The number of schools meeting this definition totaled 1,101 in 1968, and data were secured for this study from 10% of the qualifying schools. The most common reason for the move to the middle school grade configuration was to "eliminate crowded conditions in other schools" (Alexander, 1968b, p. 1). Only 42.9% of the schools in the sample had been established in 1966 and 1967.

Alexander's study (1968b) provided information regarding the number of middle schools and grade configurations in each of the schools, but important data as to the type of

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instructional strategies were not completely investigated or discussed. From Alexander's study (1968b), "language arts, mathematics, physical education, science, and social studies were constants in all middle school grades" (p. 2). It was also found that the instructional organization of the middle schools consisted of fifth grade educators providing a self-contained organization. As students proceeded to sixth, seventh and eighth grade, departmentalization increased. Team teaching was seldom used at any grade level, nor was common plan time a regular practice. As common plan time became a more accepted practice, information regarding what actually occurred during the CPT was not reported. This study was designed to meet this need.

Alexander (1968b) concluded "the new middle school organizations in general fail to provide a program and instructional organization differing very much from those in the predecessor schools" (p. 2). Keeping in mind that the purpose of this study by Alexander (1968b) was to provide bench-mark data regarding the current status of middle schools, relevant data were found. But, a more complete picture is needed. Teacher beliefs and practices were not thoroughly researched. Nor was what occurred during CPT reported. This study became a starting point for the collection of middle level practices and beliefs, and has since been expanded upon to be more inclusive of middle level aspects such as the recommendations listed previously from the NMSA.

If the team concept was seldom used in 1968, information pertaining to that practice would be scarce. How teachers plan and implement curriculum was not thoroughly discussed, nor what actually occurs during common plan time. Information on the beliefs of middle level educators was not adequately researched. This study by Alexander (1968b) served as the foundation of many other studies, but further research is needed to expand on

Alexander's findings. As the middle level concept has evolved, new data have emerged that were not present in the 1968 study.

A study in 1988, Alexander and McEwin (1989) conducted a follow-up study of the middle schools using many of the same items as the 1968 study. One change was the inclusion of middle schools with a seven-ninth grade configuration (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003). The use of interdisciplinary team organization increased significantly (Dickinson & Erb, 2002). But the use of teaming in schools with a sixth-eighth grade configuration is significantly higher than in schools with a seventh-ninth grades configuration. According to McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (1995), 58% of sixth-eighth grade middle schools used interdisciplinary teaming, while only 28% of seventh-ninth grades middle schools used interdisciplinary teaming. Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) also found that interdisciplinary teaming is more likely to be found at the sixth grade level than at the eighth grade level. At the eighth grade level, implementation of curriculum is most often delivered in a single-subject manner. Determining why this phenomenon occurs needs to be researched, especially since the use of interdisciplinary team practice is increasing at the eighth grade. The question arises as to what is actually occurring when middle level teachers meet for common plan time?

Understanding the rationale for why middle level teachers deliver curriculum in the manner they choose is important. Interdisciplinary teaming "is a crucial component of the middle school concept because it encourages teachers to teach a diverse student body in developmentally responsive ways to accomplish important goals such as the integration of curriculum" (Dickinson & Erb, 2002, p. 313). The 1988 study begins to address curriculum

implementation and the interdisciplinary team concept, but does not fully address what occurs during the common plan time and a rationale for implementing curriculum.

In 1993, McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins conducted a report based upon data from the 1992-93 school year. Based on their research, a 25-year historical perspective was provided. This study provided a clearer picture of the practices occurring at the middle level. With regard to instructional practices, it was found that 90% of eighth grades in a sixth-eighth grades configuration used direct instruction on a regular basis. The number slightly decreased for sixth grade to 88%. The practice of interdisciplinary instruction was rarely used. In sixth-eighth grades middle schools, 57% of the teachers used interdisciplinary instruction less than 20% of the time. Teacher plan time was also researched. In general, less than 22% of the middle schools have two plan times. Of the schools that use an interdisciplinary team organization, only 34% have common planning time (McEwin, Dickinson & Jenkins, 1995). Information pertaining to how the training of middle level teachers impact the way they deliver instruction is not fully addressed. Likewise, information pertaining to what occurs during the common plan time for interdisciplinary team practice in developing curriculum and delivering curriculum is not fully discussed in previous studies.

Data provided in this section from Alexander's study (1968b) and McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (1995) is minimal but will be expanded upon in the review of literature. Information concerning teacher beliefs is not addressed or is partially addressed in each of the studies. Specifically, information relevant to how having a common plan time for interdisciplinary teams of educators impacts the way they deliver curriculum is needed.

Specifically, what are teachers' understanding of the purpose, goals, and value of common planning time?

More information is needed in several areas to create a larger understanding the middle school concept and to understand what occurs not just in the classroom but in the common plan time. Investigating the type of instructional methods used by teachers is needed. And, determining how common plan time is used in determining which instructional method is to be used to implement curriculum is an area where more information could benefit middle level educators. Information regarding the type of specialized middle level training is needed as well as training received by middle level educators. A more in-depth study of the type of instructional strategies used needs to occur. Studying how teachers use their common plan time needs to be further investigated to gain insight as to how teachers implement curriculum. Research used to determine what the teachers' understandings of the purpose, goal, and value of common planning time is needed. Lastly, how has training or education on the use of common plan time and middle level strategies affected the way curriculum is developed and implemented. Quantitative data such as the number of current middle schools in the U.S. at the time of each study is important, as well as the number of schools practicing the interdisciplinary team concept. But, this data did not address the research questions regarding the common planning time phenomenon.

A 2001 study (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003) provided a snapshot of current middle level practices, and compared data from Alexander's (1968b) and McEwin's, Dickinson's and Jenkins' (1995) studies. Important data have been found from all three of these studies, one of which focuses on selected instructional strategies. In each of the studies listed, instructional strategies (curriculum implementation) are addressed in varying degrees.

Introducing and discussing instructional strategies is needed in this current study since through the use of common plan time, the teachers may develop curriculum and implementation strategies to best meet the needs of their students.

Researching the various instructional strategies is important so the best practice is implemented. Implementing best practice should assist in meeting the mandates of *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001)*,* and recommendations from *Turning Points 2000* (2000)*, This We Believe* (1995 & 2003) and *Breaking Ranks* (2006). It was found in the 2001 study that 85% of the schools reported the use of direct instruction (teacher presentation, drill, practice, etc.) on a regular basis at the fifth grade level, 87% at the sixth grade level, 88% at the seventh and eighth grade levels, which are comparable to the 1993 study (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003). It was also found that cooperative learning activities (structured group work and rewards for student achievement) have increased in all grade levels, and so have independent study activities. Independent study is described as "working individually on selected or assigned tasks" (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003, p. 31). For two activities to have increased means something has decreased, and in this case it would be lecture activities.

Is this increase in cooperative learning activities due to teachers' understanding the purpose of common plan time? If so, what is occurring during the common plan time? In each of these studies, specific reasons as to why certain curriculum instructional strategies are being used is not fully explained or addressed. The research provides percentages of teachers using various types of curriculum implementation but does not fully address the underlying reasoning middle level educators use these curriculum methods or what influences middle level teachers to use specific instructional strategies to implement curriculum.

The 2001 study also revealed that Inquiry Teaching (gathering information, deriving conclusions) was used occasionally as an instructional strategy. It was found that 58% of the schools reported occasional use of this strategy in the fifth grade, 50% in the sixth grade, 48% at the seventh grade, and 47% at the eighth grade (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003). These data are important to meet the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001). However, this information does not explain how the beliefs of middle level teachers impact the way they deliver instruction. The rationale for teachers using certain instructional strategies is a missing piece not just in the 2001 study but in the studies conducted in 1968 and 1993 as well. A question remains as to what occurs during common plan time? Also, what are teachers' understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of common planning time? How do teachers use their common planning time? Is there any special professional training on how to effectively use common plan time? Are there any perceived benefits or barriers of the use of common plan time? The research I will perform will address these questions.

Another aspect of the 2001 study found that interdisciplinary instruction was used 1% to 20% during the instructional school day by 44% of the schools in 2001. This is a 16% drop from the 1993 study. When interdisciplinary instruction was used 21-40% during the instructional school day, there was an increase in student achievement from 24% to 35% from the 1993 study to the 2001 study (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003). Interdisciplinary teaming, which was mentioned in the introduction, is a crucial element of successful middle schools according to McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (2003). Numerous studies by Felner, et al., (1997), Felner, Mertens, and Lipsitz (1996), Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999), and McEwin, Greene, and Jenkins (2001) support the correlation between student achievement and common planning time for teachers, and that the implementation of

the teaming practice in a middle school equals higher the student achievement scores. What are missing in these studies are how common planning time is utilized and its influence on how teachers deliver instruction. This is information that can be used to assist educators in meeting the mandates of *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001), and recommendations from *Turning Points 2000* (2000)*, This We Believe* (1995 & 2003) and *Breaking Ranks* (2006).

This chapter provides a snapshot of a small majority of current practices at the middle level. Status, size of building, grade configurations, and building make-up are important, but more information is needed. The 2001 study (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003) provided a solid overview and comparison of middle level education and implementation, but it lacks a critical piece of the puzzle. It lacks explanation of why middle level teachers do and do not use the instructional methods previously mentioned. The research lacks solid information concerning teacher beliefs regarding instructional practices and other aspects of middle level education such as teaming practices during the team plan time. Teaming is mentioned specifically because this is a hallmark of middle level education. A better understanding of how instruction is implemented should include the teaming concept, how teachers work together, and their individual and collective beliefs about curriculum and delivery methods to successfully meet the needs if the young adolescent. This study will contribute to meeting this need.

The first step for teachers to improve teaching methods is to understand their current practice and training. Research from Brazee and Capelluti (1995) states that as students experience instructional strategies moving from the conventional middle school to interdisciplinary, to integrative and beyond integrative curriculum, student achievement increases. The research from McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003) reveals that much

improvement can be made in the area of curriculum implementation (integrative and beyond integrative) and teaching strategies. To move from direct instruction to more student-centered instructional methods, we need a stronger understanding of the beliefs that drive teachers to deliver curriculum in this manner. Why teachers implement the curriculum practices and instructional strategies needs to be understood before educators can appropriately move across the curriculum continuum.

According to Brazee and Capelluti (NMSA, 1995), understanding teacher beliefs is an important step towards improving teaching, and this understanding leads to increased student achievement. Brazee and Capelluti believe that curriculum change is difficult (1995). Curriculum change "requires a fundamental shift in individual beliefs about what the curriculum should be and how it can best be experienced. Therefore, any attempt at altering present curriculum must involve an intensive examination of a number of fundamentally held beliefs before something new can be explored" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 112).

Understanding what middle level curriculum, skills, knowledge, and competencies should receive priority is important when assigning a team of teachers to work with each other. Understanding what learning outcomes are necessary, and who should determine curriculum is important. How learning is organized, and teacher beliefs as to how much can be learned and who can learn, are just a few fundamental beliefs that need to be addressed. How these beliefs are developed and shared by a team of middle level teachers is just as important since research supports increased student achievement for students in a middle school using the teaming concept (Arhar, 1997).

Brazee and Capelluti (1995) provide a clear picture of the curriculum continuum. The curriculum continuum consists of five instructional strategies/practices. They are:

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Conventional Middle School Curriculum; Multidisciplinary/Interdisciplinary Curriculum; Integrated Curriculum; Integrative Curriculum; and Beyond Integrative Curriculum (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995). Understanding each model is important for middle level teachers in their efforts to ensure success for all students. Each model has a place in the education of all middle level children. The middle school concept of teaming lends itself to movement across the curriculum continuum. Providing a curriculum that emphasizes high standards for student achievement calls for implementing the curriculum using practices that best meet the young adolescent's needs. Understanding the middle level teachers' beliefs as to why they use the various models in their classroom can provide insight as to how instruction can be improved.

Understanding of the curriculum continuum is needed. The curriculum continuum will be discussed in-depth in the review of literature. The curriculum continuum is important to middle level instruction as it provides a clear picture of the middle level practices, particularly, the way teachers deliver instruction. Although this study is designed to explore middle level teachers' perspectives about what occurs during the CPT, how teachers use their common plan time, how teachers are prepared professionally to use common plan time, determine perceived barriers to common plan time, and to determine perceived benefits of common plan time, it will be interesting to see if there is any connection to the instructional strategies.

<div align="center">**Personal Interest**</div>

My education career began at the high school level. I taught various levels of mathematics from freshman through senior high school students. After six years of this experience, I accepted a position in the Sampson School District at a sixth-eighth grade

middle school. I again was teaching mathematics, as well as a course designed to integrate

the subject areas. When I taught high school, I often felt as if I was isolated. I had heard

about the team concept incorporated at the middle school in the Heartland School District

and was excited to experience this concept. My team consisted of four teachers, one for each

core subject. I found it interesting working with three other individuals with their own

thoughts and beliefs, which often did not correspond with mine. As a math teacher, at first I

was not as willing to integrate subjects since the math concepts were so crucial, in my eyes.

However, my beliefs changed quickly. As our team began experiencing the new state

standardized tests (Missouri Assessment Program), it became evident that students not only

needed to be great math students but needed to be able to put into words what, why, and how

they solved the problems presented. I realized that the mathematics score on the

standardized test was going to improve if the students were sound in language arts. My

beliefs on what students should know and be able to perform changed because of the state

assessment test, and I gained a better understanding of the developmental needs of the age

group I was now teaching. I discovered that for students to be successful now and in the

future, three teachers and I needed to work as a team to coordinate curricular activities that

required the students to use their knowledge across the curriculum areas. Life is not separate

courses occurring in isolation from each other but rather a mixture of skills in various

disciplines being applied simultaneously.

By having a common plan time, we were able to address individual student needs as

well as group needs. We were able to begin the process of implementing the conventional

middle school curriculum (Direct Instruction) and also moving across the curriculum

continuum. As we began moving to interdisciplinary and integrated curriculum activities,

student interest and performance to increased. As a mathematics teacher, I saw acceptable answers as a proof or work shown for a problem. That was no longer acceptable. This experience occurred over ten years ago. I need to further understand the current practice of common planning time as student learning is becoming more scrutinized by the public eye.

I have since moved on spending time as an administrator of a middle school and currently an elementary principal. I still have a desire to further investigate the middle school culture. The qualitative research I propose to perform will increase the body of knowledge in middle level research. Understanding the common plan time phenomenon and rationale for why and how teachers implement the curriculum is of high interest to me. Understanding what training middle level educators have received regarding to the middle level concept and common plan time is a driving force for the research.

Chapter two illustrates the history of the middle school movement, as well as describes aspects of exemplary middle level schools and common plan time. I will discuss *This We Believe* (2003), *Turning Points 2000* (2000), *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001), and *Breaking Ranks* (2006) extensively as well as the curriculum continuum as described by Brazee and Capelluti. I will also introduce and discuss research and studies from Lounsbury, Alexander, McEwin, Jenkins, and others. This chapter will provide relevant information and a clear understanding of current research related to middle school practice.

Chapter three outlines specifics of this qualitative study and describes the qualitative methods used to collect data for this dissertation. The research will be basic in nature, and will be conducted with guidance provided by training occurring in Chicago in July of 2008 under the guidance of the MLER SIG Research Team for this project. "The purpose of basic research is knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Researcher's who engage in basic research

want to understand how the world operates" (Patton, 1990, p. 152). Qualitative research in the form of a case study will be used to provide a detailed, thick description capturing the personal perspectives and experiences of the individuals (teams of teachers) in the study (Patton, 1990). Case studies "become particularly useful where one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information-rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question" (Patton, 1990, p. 54). Document analysis of lesson plans will be used to further gain data on the understanding of the middle school planning phenomenon. I selected research methods to address the project objective of what middle level teachers do when they meet for common planning time, and to address the research questions posed earlier in this chapter. I will also introduce the setting, sample, and limitations to the study.

Two interdisciplinary teams (one sixth grade and one seventh grade) of middle level teachers will be the sample. The sample will consist of four teachers from each grade level, for a total of eight people. I will collect data through a survey, and interviews with probing, open-ended questions, direct observations of the common plan time, and document analysis of lesson plans. The data will be collected using protocols developed by the MLER SIG 2007 and are included in the appendix.

Chapter four will explore data that will be collected. I will discuss themes that emerge from the triangulation of data and the experiences of the teachers regarding how their beliefs impact the way they implement curriculum. I will also discuss the benefits and detriments of the teaming practice and its impact on curriculum implementation. I will use

specific exerts from the interviews and direct observations as a foundation for explaining the phenomenon.

        Lastly, chapter five will offer conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the teaming practice, teacher beliefs, and the implementation of curriculum. My hope is that this chapter provides insight to middle level educators and administrators about the teaming process and its impact on student achievement. This research hopefully can provide guidance for other middle level educators to improve the common planning practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is designed to provide a brief history of the traditional junior high school model; provide a history of the development of the middle school; introduce middle level reports and publications that influenced the development of middle level schools; provide research on the current middle level practice, including characteristics of an exemplary middle school and curriculum models, the practice of common team planning; and provide an clearer understanding of *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001). The purpose of this background is to provide a basis of knowledge to support the research questions identified in chapter one. Publications will be introduced chronologically describing the middle school characteristics and how the middle school concept has progressed. The rationale for introducing the studies in the order of publication is to describe how the middle school philosophy evolved into the current practice. Through a description of the studies and publications of the middle level practice, I will demonstrate the need for the current study.

Another purpose of introducing specific studies and publications is to provide a good understanding of the materials that have impacted the beliefs and practices of middle level teachers. The influences of documents such as *This We Believe* (1995) and *Turning Points 2000* (2000), *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (2006), and related research have been used to construct developmentally responsive middle schools in which curriculum is designed and implemented to meet the needs of the young adolescent and the mandates of *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001). Since the three previously mentioned documents are influential to providing a

quality education for young adolescents, each will have a section of its own. As the researcher, I want to provide information independently, even though in the end, all documents are intertwined. I do not want to imply that only the research and publications described in this chapter are used in the construction of developmentally responsive middle schools, or as the sole influences on middle level teachers. Lastly, descriptions of the various curricular models will be introduced and discussed to provide further understanding of best practices which may have been developed during common team planning time.

The Traditional Junior High School Model

Before deciding how the system needs to be changed, we must first understand the current state of the middle school philosophy and practices. As Abraham Lincoln stated, "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it" (George, 2003, p. xi). Examining the traditional junior high school reveals that this model does not effectively meet the academic, social and emotional the needs of adolescents. A working definition of a traditional junior high school will be provided as well as research describing the inadequacies of this model.

A traditional junior high school consists of "mainly grades 7-9, but also 6-9 and 5-9, conceived primarily as a downward extension of secondary education, organized by subjects and departments, with a grade level configuration that usually includes 9th grade" (Van Til, Vars, & Lounsbury, 1967, p. 24). Prior to 1910, the schooling organization consisted of two schools: Kindergarten-eighth grades, and ninth-twelfth grades. With this organization, educators began realizing that the majority of young people left school between grades six and eight (Beane, 1993; Gruhn & Douglas, 1947; Van Til, Vars, & Lounsbury, 1961). At that time many educators perceived that six years of traditional elementary schooling for

young adolescents was appropriate, and academic coursework that lead to college or specific work skills could be introduced earlier than ninth grade. This belief created a practice for students in grades seven and eight to drop out before entering high school. To keep students in school longer, educators began introducing subjects that were normally reserved for ninth grade. Educators believed that if they covered as much ground as possible in the elementary schools, students would be less likely to drop out of school and would attend high school (Beane, 1993). Since students were dropping out of school before they entered high school, educators realized that a junior high school was needed to keep students in school.

The early junior high schools were seen as an opportunity for vocational counseling. The junior high school began the sorting of students into specialized subjects that these students would further pursue in high school (Gruhn & Douglas, 1947). There was little talk about the characteristics of the young adolescent. Educators assumed that students in junior high school were no longer children but young people ready to be trained in a specialized area. Therefore, the junior high school became a junior version of the high school, which focused on specialized training. The traditional junior high school curriculum model emphasized the separate subject model of curriculum, which did not always meet the needs of adolescents. This is not to say that the separate subject model was not completely appropriate in educating adolescents, but that when this model is the primary or sole method of delivering curriculum, problems occur.

Data supporting the notion that the separate subject model is a limitation of the traditional junior high school appears in the research of Aikin (1942). A comprehensive study of the separate subject approach and alternatives was the focus of the Eight Year Study performed by Aikin (1942). In this study, graduates from 30 experimental high schools

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"faired better in both academic and social measures in college than did matched peers from conventional subject-centered programs" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 21). Aikin (1942) also found that graduates from six high schools that differed most from the separate subject approach and used a variety of integrated approaches achieved higher than all other students. The Eight Year Study (1942) was geared for high school, but the junior high model is in itself a junior version of high school.

NCLB Act of 2001 (2001) proposes all children succeed regardless of economic circumstances. McPartland (1987) found "that increased departmentalization has negative effect on teacher-student relations, particularly for low-income students" (Arhar, 1997, p. 53). McPartland's research (1987) also suggests that interdisciplinary teaming, a middle school concept which will be introduced and defined later in this section, can alleviate negative teacher-student relationships and preserve or increase academic benefits for students (Arhar, 1997). Longitudinal study of levels of implementation of interdisciplinary teaming conducted by Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand and Flowers (1997) "suggests that higher levels of implementation (interdisciplinary teaming) are associated with increased achievement, fewer behavior problems, and student adjustment to school, particularly for at-risk students" (Arhar, 1997, p. 54). Gordon Vars (1992) has examined over 200 research studies comparing the results of integrated curriculum and the traditional separate subject approach. "Vars found that schools using integrated approaches had similar or better achievement than did schools with a traditional curriculum and instructional system" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 130). The traditional curriculum and instructional system are characteristics of the junior high model. Also, the junior high model does not have the

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interdisciplinary teaming aspect. Educators realized that perhaps the current junior high

school model was not meeting the needs of adolescents adequately.

    According to William Alexander (1995), the traditional junior high school model was

designed to be a transitional institution between the elementary and high schools. It is

appropriate for education to provide a transitional institution for learners from childhood to

adolescence. The elementary system provides for a self-contained classroom with a broad

scope of studies, while the high school offers departmentalized programs with greater

emphasis on subjects and specialization. The junior high system was created to make the

academic change (transition from elementary to high school) for students entering the ninth

grade.

    The junior high school model attempts to provide exploratory coursework for

children outside the realm of the general separate-subject bound education (math, science,

English, and social studies). The exploratory courses consist of foreign language, home

economics, and music, among others. Exploratory courses were positive aspect of the junior

high model that offered students a chance to broaden their scope of knowledge and

experience new things. Unfortunately, exploratory classes have been seen as inadequate

because they are normally only six, nine, and twelve or eighteen weeks long. Adolescent

students experience an intellectual growth that needs to be tapped when providing a solid

general education which may exceed a six, nine, twelve or eighteen week exposure to

exploratory coursework. This necessitates improving the curriculum to meet the intellectual

needs of the adolescents (Alexander, 1995). The traditional junior high school does not fully

recognize the unique developmental needs of the young adolescent as described by

proponents of the middle school concepts.

One of the functions of the junior high system is to provide a program to guide students from preadolescence to early adolescence. The junior high model is an effort "in leading children successfully through pubescence and from the dependency of childhood to a resourceful, responsible independence of the adolescent" (Alexander, 1995, pg. 21). The junior high model has met some of the demands in effectively educating adolescents, but it needs to be improved. "In good junior high schools, boys and girls have had more of the freedom of movement they need, more appropriate health and physical education, more chances to participate in planning and managing their own activities, more resources for help on their problems of growing up, and more opportunities to explore new interests and to develop new aspirations" (Alexander, 1995, pg. 21). Many of these concepts are similar to the middle school philosophy, but differ in the manner in which they are delivered to the student (interdisciplinary teaming, advisory programs, exploratory programs, etc.). It appears that the junior high school model is not providing a comprehensive educational program geared to meet the developmental needs of adolescents.

Society and educators realized that the traditional junior high school model has its shortcomings. William Alexander, a leader of the middle school concept realized this and continued the effort to improve the education of the middle level student. Alexander conducted numerous studies. As schools moved away from the traditional junior high school model, data regarding the middle schools were needed. William Alexander provided the first comprehensive study in this area. His study published in 1968 served as a basis for subsequent studies.

History of Middle School

William Alexander presented "A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized

Middle Schools" to U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in July of 1968.

The purpose of the study is described:

> This project was undertaken to provide bench-mark data
> regarding the current status of middle schools in the United
> States. Recent partial surveys and other data have indicated
> substantial interest in the reorganization of the now traditional
> school ladder arrangement of elementary-junior-senior high
> school (6-3-3). There has been lacking, however, any
> comprehensive data as to the number and location of
> reorganized middle schools, replacing the grade 7-9 junior
> high, and as to the organizational characteristics of the newer
> schools in the middle of the school ladder. (Alexander, 1968b,
> p. 1)

In many cases, the purpose of reorganizing the traditional school system to include

middle schools was "to remedy weaknesses of the junior high school" (Alexander, 1968b, p.

2). The data presented in the review of literature from this study will focus on the number of

current middle schools at the time of the study, curriculum opportunities, instructional

organization, and reasons for reorganizing into middle level schools, and the reactions to the

emerging middle schools.

The number of middles schools as reported in this study totaled 1,101. A middle

school was defined as "a school consisting of grades 5-8 or 6-8" (Alexander, 1968b, p. 2).

Thirty-three states had eight or less middle schools that met the middle level grade criteria.

In fact, thirteen states did not have a single middle school. The states with the most middle

schools and the number of middles schools in each are the following: Texas (252), Illinois

(142), California (131), Michigan (97), New Jersey (91), and New York (92). This

information states that 805 of the 1,101 were present in six states. Clearly the middle school

concept was not fully accepted throughout the United States in 1968. Alexander used

stratified random sampling to determine the 110 middle schools in his study. Of the schools

selected in this study, 75% had student enrollment of 300-1,000 students. Sixty percent of

the 110 middle schools had a grade configuration of sixth-eighth grades, 30 middle schools

(27.3%) had a fifth-eighth grades configuration (Alexander, 1968b).

The curriculum opportunities in language arts, mathematics, physical education,

science, and social studies were consistent in all middle schools. In many of the middle

schools, electives and other curriculum opportunities usually focused on music, art, home

economics and industrial arts. In many middle schools, the electives mentioned above were

required courses students took that occurred during the seventh or eighth grades. Curriculum

opportunities beyond the four core subjects were severely limited, especially in smaller

middle schools.

One aspect of the middle school concept is to provide exploratory opportunities

(elective courses). Elective courses were not always practiced at the time of this study.

Subjects such as reading, creative writing, typing, dramatics, speech and journalism were

often not offered as electives for students at any middle grade level. Vocal music and/or

instrumental music were required for many students but were available for students to take in

sixth, seventh and eighth grade in only one-third of the middle schools. In many cases, vocal

music and instrumental music were options in only grades seven and eight. Elective courses

such as foreign language, current events, study skills, and literature were almost non-existent

at this time. It appears from the description of the curriculum opportunities in middle level

schools that not much was different from what was already present in the traditional junior

high school model. Alexander (1968a) suggests that many middle schools "simply adopted

the pattern of their predecessor schools without deliberate effort to change" (p. 23). In other words, the middle schools at that time were in large part, still operating as traditional junior high schools.

In fifth-eighth grades middle schools, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies were taught in a self-contained elementary style. Middle level teachers began to departmentalize in the four core areas in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. As the student moved closer to high school, the more departmentalization occurred. This is consistent with the traditional junior high school model. In fact, of the 110 middle schools studied, 75% departmentalized in both seventh and eighth grade (Alexander, 1968b). Such practices as a common plan time were almost non-existent for teams of teachers. The middle school practice of interdisciplinary teaming was almost non-existent in 1968.

Several factors prompted schools to reorganize their grade configuration to that of a fifth-eighth or sixth-eighth grades grouping. Sixty-four of the schools in the study reorganized to eliminate crowded conditions in some schools. Forty-nine schools wanted to provide a program specifically designed for students in this age group. Forty-four schools wanted to better bridge the elementary and high school. Twenty-seven schools wanted to remedy the weaknesses of the junior school. In middle schools that were established in a new facility, team teaching was being used. But the number of schools in this category was small. Even though this is a small sample, a baseline for future schools to study occurred when attempting to build/restructure a middle school so that it is developmentally responsive to adolescents.

From this 1968 study, it is appears that not all schools reorganized to better meet the needs of the adolescents, but the middle school concept was emerging. It appears the

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primary reason for reorganizing middle schools had little to do with remedying the limitations of the traditional junior high school model but rather to alleviate crowded conditions in schools. Another reason schools changed to the middle level grade configuration was to provide a curriculum specifically designed for this age group. Also, an aspect that is missing from this study is information regarding teacher beliefs and training about how adolescents learn and about how to work as a team. Also, information regarding what occurs during common plan time in developing curriculum is missing. Even more simple information regarding what actually occurs in a team common plan time is missing. Understanding teacher beliefs and training on the middle school concept and on how adolescents learn could provide a better understanding of the middle level practices that are currently being practiced. More specifically, information on how the training received by middle level educators impacted the way curriculum is delivered was missing in this study.

Reactions to reorganizing into middle level schools were many. A lack of training and in-service of middle level teachers was seen as a major need if schools were to move away from the traditional junior high school model. Up to this time, teacher training did not address team teaching or interdisciplinary approaches in delivering curriculum. Even though a great majority of the middle schools in the study were not inherently different from junior high schools, the student body, staff, parents, and general public were positive toward the reorganization. Forty percent of the staff surveyed reported enthusiasm toward the move to the middle school (Alexander, 1968b).

The 1968 study marked the beginning of many middle level studies. A more recent study completed in 2001 by McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (2003) detailed the growth of

the middle level concept. This same group of authors also published a 25 year perspective on middle school practice and progress up to the 1993 school year.

1993 Study – American Middle Schools: Practices and Progress

In the 1968 study by Alexander, it was evident that teachers had not substantially changed the way they instructed middle level students. Since that time, McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) were able to document in detail middle level practices and progress. This study addressed four areas: interdisciplinary teams; instructional practices; faculty; and exemplary elements of middle schools. The purpose for addressing these areas is that it is pertinent to this dissertation's focus and secondary questions.

"Much of the visible work of middle schools is the daily instruction that students receive and how well they master the knowledge, skills, and dispositions contained in these instructional activities" (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995, p. 59). Instruction of middle level students is extremely important. Before this area is addressed, understanding the make-up of the middle school is needed with respect to the interdisciplinary team practice. In 1968, only 5% to 8% of the middle schools were organized in interdisciplinary teams with the core subjects of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Alexander (1968b) describes interdisciplinary teaming as a combination of teachers from different subject areas who plan and conduct instruction for particular groups of people. The number of interdisciplinary teams has changed quite dramatically over the last 25 years. McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) provide an example of the growth as presented in table 1 below. The numbers reflect percentages.

Table 1

Language Arts Organizational Plans

1968, 1988, & 1993

	Interdisciplinary Team			Departmentalization			Self-contained		
Grade	1968	1988	1993	1968	1988	1993	1968	1988	1993
6	8	33	59	35	44	29	30	18	11
7	6	40	53	74	66	43	1	6	5
8	6	31	45	74	71	50	1	6	5

1968: Alexander definition

1988: Grades 6-8

1993: Grades 6-8 (p. 62)

These data do not represent all middle level grade configurations (i.e. fifth-eighth, seventh-eighth, or seventh-ninth). Since the teams in this study were in the sixth-eighth grade configuration, I used the above chart. This study states that in most cases, the core subjects taught in an interdisciplinary team approach were language arts, mathematics, social studies and science.

This study did not state which grade level configuration was most effective to improve student achievement. Rather, the belief is that effective practices determine quality schools and increase student achievement. A study by Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) found an interesting correlation between grade level configuration and effective middle level practices. Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) concluded that grade configuration makes a real difference in

the education of young adolescents because middle schools (6-8 and 5-8 grade configurations) implement more of the recommended middle level practices. Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe and Melton (1993) report that 61% of the principals in their study believed that a kindergarten-fifth, sixth-eighth, ninth-twelfth grade level clustering is the most developmentally responsive.

According to McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995), the interdisciplinary team organization "is now recognized as appropriate for the youngest client in the 6-8 middle school, the young adolescent in the sixth grade" (p. 26). The 1993 study indicates that departmentalization has dropped since 1968, with the most significant decreases coming between 1988 and 1993. This is an example that middle schools were moving away from the traditional junior high school model. This study does not provide information regarding instructional practices such as separate subject, interdisciplinary, or integrated teaching strategies, or what occurred during common plan time and how this influenced teacher beliefs regarding the implementation of curriculum delivery modes.

"Common plan time" needs to be defined for better understanding. According to Kellough and Kellough (2008), "common plan time" is defined as "a regularly scheduled time during the day when teachers who teach the same students meet for joint planning, parent conferences, materials preparation, and student evaluation" (p. 394). Interdisciplinary teaming, according to Kellough and Kellough (2008), is an organizational pattern of two or more teachers representing different core curriculum areas such as mathematics, language arts, social studies and science. This interdisciplinary team shares the same students, schedule, areas of the school, and the opportunity to teach more subjects.

Research from this study does include teacher plan periods. In the sixth-eighth grades configuration, 22% of the middle schools have two plan times. Looking at the big picture of the middle school and teacher plan time, "only 34% of the schools (73% of schools using interdisciplinary team organization) in the total study provide two planning periods for most or all teachers" (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995, p. 39). The reason for the differences is that the latter includes the fifth-eighth, sixth-eighth, seventh-eighth and seven-ninth grades configuration. One purpose of organizing middle schools into interdisciplinary teams was to provide teachers the opportunity to collaborate in developing and implementing curriculum that best meets the needs of adolescents. With barely one-third of schools using interdisciplinary teams with two common plan times, the effectiveness appears to be limited. There was no rationale provided by the research as to why this practice appears to be limited.

McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) analyzed data further looking for answers. When they looked at sixth-eighth grades configuration that is organized into interdisciplinary teams, they found that 58% used two common plan times. This is a marked improvement compared to 22%. The 58% use of common plan times is also consistent with the 1998 study by Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) which indicated 54% of sixth-eighth grades schools using interdisciplinary teams having two common plan times. The use of two common plan times by interdisciplinary teams at the middle level has increased over the years, but more growth needs to occur with this practice. If middle schools are organized into interdisciplinary teams with teachers have common plan time, the door to appropriately meeting the needs of the young adolescent is opened. Teachers with two common plan times should have adequate time to develop and implement instructional strategies and move across the curriculum continuum that will be discussed later in this section. Missing from this research is what

occurs during the common plan times and how the common plan time impacts curriculum

development and delivery.

McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995, p. 34) provided data in Figure 1 that depicts

the use of four instructional strategies (direct, cooperative, inquiry, and independent study).
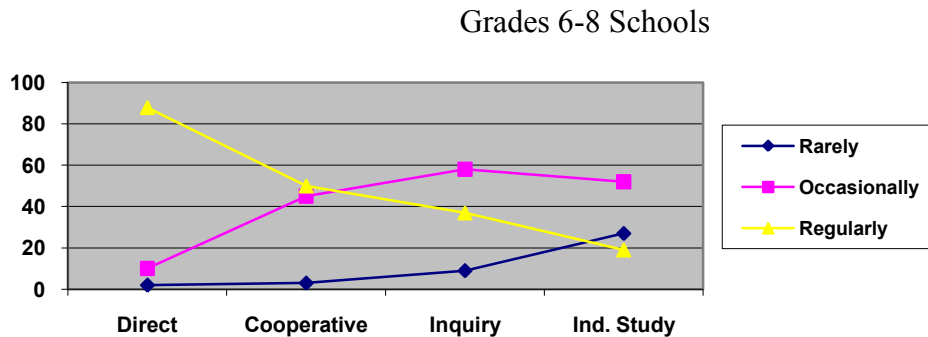
Grades 6-8 Schools

Figure 1. Percentages of Use of Selected Instructional Strategies

Figure 1 shows that direct instruction is used regularly by approximately 85% of the

schools in this sample. McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (2003, p. 31) provide definitions for

Direct Instruction, Cooperative Learning, Inquiry Teaching and Independent Study. Direct

instruction is defined as "teacher presentation, drill, practice, etc." Independent study is used

the least and is defined as **"having the student work individually on selected or assigned

tasks."** Cooperative learning is defined as "structured group work and rewards for

achievement." Inquiry teaching is described as "gathering information and deriving

conclusions." Independent study is used the least and is defined as **"having the student work

individually on selected or assigned tasks."** It appears that cooperative learning activities and

inquiry-based instruction are occasionally used at the same rate. The authors do not provide

a rationale for the use of each strategy, and do not differentiate between schools organized in

an interdisciplinary team or not. It does not appear in 1993 that middle schools have made

major gains in moving away from the traditional junior high school model with respect to implementing different instructional strategies. It does suggest that the middle schools are mirroring high schools with direct instruction as the primary curriculum delivery strategy.

Up to this point, the instructional strategies of direct, cooperative, inquiry, and independent study have been reported. As more research is performed at the middle level, the terminology has changed. Brazee and Capuletti (1995) describe the continuum of curriculum implementation. Descriptions of instructional strategies include the conventional middle school curriculum; multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary curriculum model; integrated curriculum model; integrative curriculum model; and beyond integrative curriculum model. Each of the models will be introduced, with discussion of the limitations and student benefits of each model.

To better understand why teachers teach the way they do, gathering data on teacher preparedness helps. *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21ˢᵗ Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) states that "if middle schools are to be transformed, expert teachers for young adolescents must be developed" (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995, p. 87). For teachers to implement developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, specialized middle level training is needed. Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) found that middle schools consist of a wide range of teacher certifications and licensures when compared to elementary and high schools. This means that middle level teachers may hold an elementary or high school license, but have no or limited formal training for the middle level. In many cases, the licensures or certifications were wide-ranging as well. For instance, middle level teachers may have a kindergarten-eighth grades certification or a seventh-twelfth grades certification. But middle school practice is markedly

different than elementary and high school. The needs of the young adolescent are wide, and need attention specific to this group of students. McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003, p. 36) have provided a picture of teacher training as seen in Figure 2.
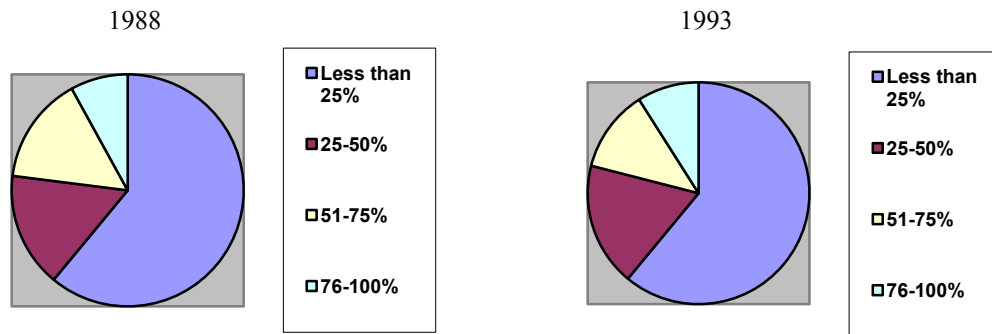
1988

1993

Figure 2. Percentages of Faculty with Specialized Professional Preparation

This pie chart represents data from schools with a fifth-eighth, sixth-eighth, seventh-eighth and seventh-ninth grades configuration. The data are consistent with the research from Epstein and Mac Iver (1990). It is easy to see that specialized professional preparation at the middle level is an area of concern. The 1988 chart and the 1993 chart almost look identical. Not much has changed with regards to specialized professional preparation over this span of 5 years. The 1993 study documents that "middle level schools continue to be populated with faculty without specialized middle level professional preparation' (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995, p. 90).

This study reports the practices over the last 25 years in which the data reflected what was occurring in 1993, the most current data at the time of the publication. The study does not provide reasoning for the practices nor was there a discussion of what influenced middle level teachers. This was not the purpose of the 1993 study. For educators to make improvements in middle level education, they need to understand the beliefs that drove

educators to instruct in the manner they chose. Information regarding what occurs during common plan times and its impact on development and implementation of curriculum is missing.

In 1995, the National Middle School Association continued the process of striving to improve the education of adolescents and provided a good picture of the developmental needs of adolescents which has been used to influence teacher practices. Up to this point, the studies in this section lacked a clear description of what actually are the developmental needs and characteristics of adolescents. Understanding the developmental needs is important for middle level educators as they attempt to properly instruct the adolescent. Fortunately, the National Middle School Association took the lead and published a critical document used to guide middle level educators.

This We Believe

In 1995, the National Middle School Association published "*This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools.*" This publication did not state specific research, but did provide a working definition of a middle school, which will be addressed later in this section. *This We Believe (NMSA, 1995)* describes five characteristics of adolescents. Many of the characteristics are listed previously in this document. It is important to understand that these are not all of the characteristics of a young adolescent. To provide a developmentally responsive education for middle level students, addressing and understanding these characteristics is necessary.

To begin discussing the middle school concept, a working definition of the middle school needs to be developed. A definition will be provided, but it comes in the form of general description of grade configurations, curriculum design, and recommendations that are

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used to characterize a middle school and meet the needs of the adolescent. From the authors

of *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995), recommendations are "not presumed to be all-inclusive

or definitive, nor does it offer a specific blueprint for the ideal middle level school" (p. 2).

Instead, latitude is offered to middle level educators that "know best what needs to be done to

apply these principles in their own communities" (p. 2). This latitude is used to design

programs and curriculum within their own school that best fits in meeting the needs of their

students.

According to the National Middle School Association's, *This We Believe* (1995), a

middle school is "mainly 6-8 schools, but also 5-8, 5-7, and 7-8; based upon developmental

needs (social and academic) of young adolescents, organized by interdisciplinary teams, with

flexible organizational structures, using varied learning and teaching approaches" (p. 11).

This We Believe (NMSA, 1995) continues by suggesting that a middle school is characterized

by the following: "a shared vision; educators committed to young adolescents; a positive

school climate; an adult advocate for every student; family and community partnerships; and

high expectations for all" (p. 11). Additionally, *This We Believe* recommends every middle

school should provide the following: "a curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and

exploratory; varied teaching/learning approaches; assessment and evaluation that promote

learning; flexible organizational structures; programs and policies that foster health, safety,

and wellness; and comprehensive guidance and support services" (p. 21).

The National Middle School Association (1995) realizes that these are only

recommendations, and that middle schools may make adjustments to meet the needs of the

adolescents and community it serves. Ultimately, the incorporation of the recommended

practices will meet the needs of the students ranging from 10-14 years in age. Following these recommendations provides a solid picture of what a middle school is and its purpose.

Educators need to understand the intellectual, moral, physical, emotional/ psychological, and social developmental of the adolescent is to properly address and educate young adolescents. The beliefs educators have toward adolescents can affect how curriculum is delivered, which is a critical aspect of this study. Therefore, a lengthy list of the areas mentioned will be listed. This is by no means all-inclusive, but the list provides a resource for middle level educators to better understand the students in their classrooms. Typically, citing several pages of one document is unusual. But in this case, I did not feel it was best suited to paraphrase the recommendations from *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) as each area is important to understanding the young adolescent.

In the area of intellectual development, young adolescents:
- Display a wide range of individual intellectual development
- Are in a transition period from concrete thinking to abstract thinking
- Are intensely curious and have a wide range of intellectual pursuits, few of which are sustained
- Prefer active over passive learning experiences
- Prefer interaction with peers during learning activities
- Respond positively to opportunities to participate in real life situations
- Are inquisitive about adults, often challenging their authority, and always observing them
- Are often preoccupied with self
- Have a strong need for approval and may be easily discouraged.

In the area of Moral Development, young adolescents:
- Are generally idealistic, desiring to make the world a better place and to become socially useful
- Are in transition from moral reasoning which focuses on "what's in it for me" to that which considers the feelings and rights of others

- Often show compassion for those who are down-trodden or suffering and have special concern for animals and the environmental problems that our world faces
- Are moving from acceptance of adult moral judgments to development of their own personal values; nevertheless, they tend to embrace values consonant with those of their parents
- Greatly need and are influenced by adult role models who will listen to them and affirm their moral consciousness and actions as being trustworthy role models
- At times are quick to see flaws in others but slow to acknowledge their own faults.

In the area of Physical Development, young adolescents:
- Experience rapid, irregular physical growth
- Undergo bodily changes that may cause awkward, uncoordinated movements
- Have varying maturity rates, with girls tending to mature one and one-half to two years earlier than boys
- Experience restlessness and fatigue due to hormonal changes
- Need daily physical activity because of increased energy
- Develop sexual awareness that increases as secondary sex characteristics begin to appear
- Have preference for junk foods but need good nutrition
- Are physically vulnerable because they may adopt poor health habits or engage in risky experimentation with drugs and sex.

In the area of Emotional/Psychological Development, young adolescents:
- Experience mood swings often with peaks of intensity and unpredictability
- Need to release energy, often resulting in sudden, apparently meaningless outbursts of activity
- Seed to become increasingly independent, searching for adult identity and acceptance
- Are increasingly concerned about peer acceptance
- Tend to be self-conscious, lacking in self-esteem, and highly sensitive to personal criticism
- Believe that personal problems, feelings, and experiences are unique to themselves
- Exhibit intense concern about physical growth and maturity as profound physical changes occur.

In the area of Social Development, young adolescents:

- Have a strong need to belong to a group, with peer approval becoming more important as adult approval decreases in importance
- In their search for self, model behavior after older, esteemed students or non-parent adults
- May exhibit immature behavior because their social skills frequently lag behind their mental and physical maturity
- Experiment with new slang and behaviors as they search for a social position within their group, often discarding these new identities at a later date
- Are dependent on parental beliefs and values but seek to make their own decisions
- Are often intimidated and frightened by their first middle level school experience because of the large numbers of students and teachers and the size of the building
- Desire recognition for their efforts and achievements
- Like fads, especially those shunned by adults
- Often overreact to ridicule, embarrassment, and rejection. (p. 18-23)

One question that arises from *This We Believe (1995)* is "why should middle level schools develop educational programs to meet the needs of young adolescents?" One possible answer is provided by Stevenson. Stevenson (1992) suggests that every child wants to believe in himself or herself as a successful person, and every youngster wants to be liked and respected. Stevenson continues to suggest that every youngster wants physical exercises and freedom to move, and every youngsters want life to be just. If the needs of adolescent are not met, problems often arise in the form of alienation from school, loss of self-esteem and sense of belonging, and inappropriate methods of coping.

The list provided should drive middle level educators' beliefs as to how they can appropriately educate young adolescents. The needs of the middle level student are many and are understandably complex. *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) does

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recognize that there is no single best recipe for implementing these recommendations as each school has unique needs that must be assessed and addressed accordingly. Rather this document provides recommendations in achieving the goal of providing a developmentally responsive education for adolescents. This document does not address the use of common team plan time or how educators develop and implement curriculum.

By combining this knowledge with information from *Turning Points 2000* (2000), current research, and mandates from *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001), teachers should be able to provide a developmentally responsive education for adolescents. Educators need to be current in the latest research and middle level publications. But the latest research and publications did not address the way teachers develop and implement curriculum. And, this 1995 publication did not report how the practices of middle level teacher impact the way curriculum was developed and delivered.

Turning Points 2000

Anthony Jackson and Gayle Davis revisited the *Turning Points* (1989) ten years after its publication. This 1989 document is rich in recommendations for middle level schools to follow to produce a school that meets the needs of the adolescent. The recommendations in *Turning Points* (1989) called for action by people in several main sectors of American society and at all levels of government. The report showed how these groups, working together, "could accomplish a fundamental upgrading of education to meet the needs of adolescent development" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. xi). In contrast, *Turning Points 2000* "is an in-depth examination of how to improve middle grades education" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. xi). *Turning Points 2000* (2000) focuses on combining the most up-to-date research

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and wisdom gained from practice. By meshing the two, it provides a framework for the comprehensive middle school.

The *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) recommendations are these:

1. Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.
2. Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
3. Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
4. Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
5. Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best.
6. Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
7. Involve parents and communities in supporting learning and healthy development. (p. 23-24)

The seven recommendations listed are rank-ordered. The recommendations are not listed in the order in which they should be implemented. For the purpose of this chapter, the focus will not be on all seven recommendations. This by no means diminishes the value of the recommendations not discussed in this study. Rather, each recommendation implemented is a piece of the puzzle to reach the ultimate goal of *Turning Points 2000* (2000). The ultimate goal of *Turning Points 2000* is to "ensure success for every student" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 25).

"To ensure the success of every student, instructional practice must address learners with diverse levels of readiness, rates of learning, preferred means of learning (learning styles), experiences, interests, and cultural backgrounds" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 65). To accomplish this, teachers must understand how students learn best so they can better design, implement, and deliver curriculum. How is this accomplished? Tomlinson (1999) suggests that for teachers to work effectively with the diverse levels of readiness, they must learn from the students they teach, a role reversal where the teacher becomes a student, learning from the student.

Using instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners is a recommendation that builds upon the first recommendation. Once educators understand how students learn best, instructional methods can be designed and used for students to reach a high level of achievement. Some of these instructional methods are described in detail later in this chapter.

Staffing middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching adolescents and engaging teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities are important. The term "professional development" has been used several times in this chapter, but no definition has been provided. "Professional development" is defined for the purpose of this report as:

> the entire range of activities and learning that teachers engage in, both inside and outside the school, on school time and their own time, in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skill. The term encompasses both activities designed to teach a particular pedagogical skill – often referred to as training activities – and those intended to advance teachers; conceptual knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other key elements of middle grades education. (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 95)

According to research by McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins, 1995; Scales, 1992; Scales and McEwin, 1994, fewer than one in four middle grade teachers have received specialized preparation before they begin their careers (Jackson & Davis, 2000). This makes professional development activities extremely important. Research by Elmore and Burney (1997) provides strong support for the need of continued professional development. The study supports the stance that quality professional development on quality teaching and student outcomes improves student achievement. The Elmore and Burney (1997) study specifically states "a decade of significant investment in comprehensive professional development in this predominantly low-income district has dramatically improved the instructional skills of teachers in core curriculum areas, leading to steady gains in achievement scores" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 116).

Professional development is needed, and can influence teachers' beliefs and practices. Middle level teachers need specialized training before entering the classroom followed by continued professional development once they are actually teaching in the middle school. *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) recommends having teachers that are experts at teaching young adolescents. Jackson and Davis state that "specialized education for middle grade teacher is the first key step in the continuum to develop highly effective teachers of young adolescents" (p. 105). Ferguson (1991) concluded in a study consisting of over a thousand school districts that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teacher's netted greater improvements in student achievement. Spending money is not always the answer. However, data from 60 different studies show that investments in high-quality teacher education and training improve student achievement more than other reforms,

including increasing teacher salaries or decreasing teacher-student ratios (Elmore & Burney, 1997).

The last recommendation discussed in *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) is to organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose. There are many cases in which a sixth-eighth grades configuration middle school may consist of 1000 or more students. The size of the school can be intimidating to an adolescent. To address this concern, many middle schools have been organized into teams of students and teachers. Thus, effectively making a large school function as several small communities of learners is required. This practice is discussed further in this section. It has been supported by research that student achievement increases when students are able to develop quality relationships with their peers and teachers.

Research by Lee and Smith (1993) found that the degree to which students are engaged and motivated at school depends to a great extent on the quality of relationships they experience there. Organizing students on a team of 100-150 other students does not ensure success for all unless it is combined with other practices such as high-quality curriculum and expert teachers. However, organizing a middle school using the team concept creates a climate of intellectual development and a community of shared educational purpose which promotes and improves student achievement.

Goodenow (1993) found in his research that "students try harder and achieve at a higher level if they feel that their teacher is interested and supportive and that they belong to a group of peers and adults that encourages them to succeed and provides help when it is need" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 122). Goodenow (1993) also found that adolescents derive

most of their academic motivation from their sense of support from others within the school community environment. School community refers to the team of teachers and students, as well as the whole school. Simply placing a student on an interdisciplinary team does not mean the student will improve academically. Nor does it mean students derive its only source for motivation to learn. Research simply states that when students are placed in an environment of caring adults and peers, student achievement increases as well as the motivation to learn (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Goodenow, 1993). A more specific description of the teaming practice is described later in this chapter.

It is hard to fully understand the importance of having trained teachers knowledgeable of how students learn best. Staffing middle schools with teachers that are experts at teaching middle level students and using appropriate teaching strategies to implement curriculum is crucial. These same teachers are integral in developing positive relations with students so they do not only feel connected to the school community but engaged and motivated in the learning process.

Status and Progress in a New Century

This study was performed by McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003). The study is important in that it reflects a comprehensive picture of current middle level practices. It also provides comparative data to the 1988 and 1993 studies mentioned earlier in this section. Perhaps the best part of this study is the comparative data as to the percent of schools utilizing selected types of instructional strategies, which is a reflection of teacher beliefs.

This study brings to light many aspects of the current middle level practice and reflects the beliefs of *This We Believe* (1995 & 2003), *Turning Points 2000* (2000) and addresses initiatives from *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001). The information is useful but does not

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fully address teacher beliefs and instructional practices. Nor does this information address how these documents impact teacher beliefs and the way curriculum is delivered.

According to the study by McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003), middle schools with grade configuration 5-8 totaled 1,364, which are 592 more schools as compared to the 1970-71 school. Schools with a sixth-eighth grades configuration totaled 8,690, as compared to the same group in 1970-71 which had 1,662 schools. Lastly, with a seventh-eighth grades configuration, there were 2,323 schools in 2001. In 1970-71, there were 2,450 schools with this grade configuration. In 1970-71, the total number of middle schools (fifth-eighth, sixth-eighth, and seventh-eighth) was 4,884. In the 1986-87 school year, there were 8,093 middle schools. In the 1992-93 school year, there were 9,790 middle schools. For the 2001-02 school year, the number of middle schools totaled 12,377. As these data show, the number of middle schools has continued to grow in popularity and practice.

This study provides crucial information. For instance, interdisciplinary team organization is at the heart of the middle school practice. In this study, 77% of the middle schools utilize the interdisciplinary team practice, which is an increase of 25% from the 1993 school year. In 1988, 30% of the middle schools utilized the interdisciplinary team concept. In general, the most common practice is for an interdisciplinary team to consist of 4 teachers, usually a math, science, social studies and language arts. Two-person teams are rarely used. As students move into seventh and eighth grade, the teaming concept was practiced more. For instance, 28% of sixth grade teachers were on a team, while at the same time, 39% of seventh grade teachers used the team concept and 37% of eighth grade teachers practiced this concept (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins 2003).

With the use of the team concept, 41% of the teachers were able to have ten common plan times a week. Forty percent of the teachers practicing the team organizational concept had five common plan times a week. This information is important in that it shows that the team provides middle level teachers the opportunity to work together in addressing the needs of the adolescent. When a common plan time is implemented, instructional practices such as interdisciplinary or integrated lessons/units are more likely to occur. This increased practice of the team organization concept is noteworthy, but missing from this research is the details of what occurs during the common plan times.

Interdisciplinary instruction practice has increased from 1993 to the 2001 school year. In 1993, interdisciplinary instruction was used 1-20% of the school day by 60% of the middle schools. This number dropped to 44% in 2001. In 1993, 24% of the middle schools used interdisciplinary instruction 21-40% of the day as compared to 35% of the middle schools in 2001. In 2001, 12% of the middle schools practiced interdisciplinary instruction 41-60% a day, while the 1993 data states that 8% of the schools did this. In 2001, 47% of the middle schools used interdisciplinary instruction 21-60% of the school day as opposed to only 32% in 1993 (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins 2003).

This study addresses instructional strategies as well. Specifically, direct instruction, cooperative learning, inquiry teaching, and independent study were surveyed. At all grade levels (fifth-eighth), direct instruction was used most often. In fact, 88% of the seventh and eighth grade teachers used direct instruction on a regular basis, which is comparable to previous studies. At the same time, cooperative learning strategies is used regularly approximately 60% time regardless of grade level. This is a 10% increase from 1993.

Inquiry teaching increased from 1993 to 2001. To further analyze data, McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003) provided Table 2 with data reflecting percentages.

Table 2

Percent of Schools Utilizing Selected Types of Instructional Strategies: 1993 & 2001

Sixth Grade						
	1993			2001		
Type of Instruction	RA	OC	RG	RA	OC	RG
Direct	1	10	88	1	12	87
Cooperative	3	43	54	1	38	61
Inquiry Teaching	9	56	34	8	50	42
Independent Study	31	51	18	18	51	31

    RA: Rarely or Never   OC: Occasionally   RG: Regularly

Seventh Grade						
	1993			2001		
Type of Instruction	RA	OC	RG	RA	OC	RG
Direct	1	9	90	1	11	88
Cooperative	3	47	50	<1	40	60
Inquiry Teaching	10	56	35	0	48	45
Independent Study	29	51	20	17	51	32

    RA: Rarely or Never   OC: Occasionally   RG: Regularly

Eighth Grade						
	1993			2001		
Type of Instruction	RA	OC	RG	RA	OC	RG
Direct	1	8	91	1	11	88
Cooperative	4	48	48	1	40	59
Inquiry Teaching	10	56	34	8	47	45
Independent Study	29	51	20	17	51	32

    RA: Rarely or Never   OC: Occasionally   RG: Regularly

(p.32)

As the middle level practice continues to grow and improve, teacher preparation is an area that needs to be addressed. This study by McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003) also

brings to light useful information regarding teacher training which is provided in Table 3

provides information.

Table 3

Percent of Teachers with Specialized Middle Level Teacher Preparation

Percent with Special Preparation	Percent of Schools		
	1988	1993	2001
Less than 25	58	62	45
25-50	17	18	17
51-75	13	11	15
76-100	13	9	24

(p. 36)

Specialized teacher training does not appear to have improved in recent years despite

recommendations from *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) and *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson &

Davis, 2000). A concern is that most middle schools have teachers that have not received or

have received minimal specialized preparation. This is a concern since the needs of the

adolescent are numerous. If teachers are not receiving specialized training to teach

adolescents, are they able to appropriately meet the numerous needs of the adolescent? Table

3 does not answer this question, and therefore, additional information is needed.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

When President George W. Bush signed *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001), the focus was on

four areas. The four areas are these:

      1.   Accountability for student achievement of academic
           standards;

2.   Increased flexibility and local control;

3.   A greater role for parents in their children's education; and

4.   Greater emphasis on the use of scientifically based instruction. (George, 2003, p. 1)

NCLB Act of 2001 (2001) "advances the notion that all students can achieve, and it also identifies effective strategies that are believed will result in the success of every student" (George, 2003, p. 5). This section will focus on accountability for student achievement of academic standards (which includes teacher certification and qualifications) and a greater emphasis on the use of scientifically-based instruction.

Accountability for student achievement of academic standards is not a new concept. As mentioned previously in this chapter, setting high educational standards is not only a recommendation but also a necessity. Setting the high standards may not be as difficult as adhering to the high standards. Determining the success of student achievement in relation to the high standards is not simple. *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) mandates "annual testing of children to measure progress toward achieving the high standards" (George, 2003, p. 1). This same act requires each state to submit an "Adequate Yearly Progress" report, often referred to as AYP.

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) requires each state to "define adequate yearly progress for school districts and schools" (George, 2003, p. 8). Improvement is expressed in measurable student achievement that each school and district must achieve in the time frame described by *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001). Ultimately, every child is to be at the proficient level at the end of the 12 years with respect to the state assessments in reading/language arts and math. The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) requires that by the year 2014, 100% of all students are proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics, with assessments occurring at each

grade level, 3-8. Educators facing this challenge/mandate must address their fundamental beliefs as to how students learn best and how they can teach students most effectively.

According the Educational Research Service (George, 2003), the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) may have unintended or unintentional consequences that may be detrimental to the success of students in reaching the high standards set, and assessing student achievement. For instance, one potential unintended consequence of the law might be that some schools are tempted to shift to "drill and practice" or test preparation curricula. "School and district leaders need to be aware of many rich curriculum strategies that can be employed to help students increase learning – without resorting to curriculum narrowing. Leaders need to be strong in the face of intense pressure to raise test scores, and remember the importance of maintaining a robust, comprehensive curriculum." (George, 2003, p. 4)

The statement that some schools are tempted to shift to drill and practice or test preparation curriculum is disturbing. According to *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995) and *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), curriculum needs to be student-centered. Drill and practice is appropriate in some cases throughout the school day, but student achievement increases when curriculum implementation is active and related to real life experiences. The point being made is that if the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) mandates greater emphasis on use of scientifically-based instruction, educators must adhere to this. Is drill and practice the method to achieve higher student achievement? Is drill and practice scientifically-based instruction proven to improve student achievement? Understanding the influences and beliefs that drive teacher practices is crucial. Understanding how the mandates of *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) impact the way teachers teach is needed.

According to an article titled "Research-Based Classroom Practices and Student Achievement" by Susan Trimble (2003b), it is stated that the development and implementation of integrated curriculum increases student achievement. Properly implemented cooperative learning strategies increase student achievement. Scientifically-based teaching strategies increase student achievement. Trimble's (2003b) research found that there are several processes of teaching and learning that are associated with increased student achievement. "Promoting student engagement with an orientation to task along with effective questioning contributes to student involvement" (p. 54) is important. Trimble (2003b) also found that "teachers using interdisciplinary practices, promoting learning in context and coordinating and integrating curriculum with teammates foster higher student achievement" (p. 54). Drill and practice or teaching to the test was not mentioned in this paragraph. The term "teammates" implies the middle school practice of interdisciplinary teaming, a common middle school practice that has been proven to increase student achievement when proper curriculum implementation occurs.

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) does provide a definition of evidence-based education. Evidence-based education is "the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction" (George, 2003, p. 10). Professional wisdom is "the judgment that individuals acquire through experience and consensus views" (George, 2003, p. 10). Lastly, empirical evidence is "scientifically based research from fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, and neuroscience, and especially from research in educational settings" (George, 2003, p. 10). By integrating professional wisdom with empirical data, local school districts are provided the flexibility to make appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of their constituents.

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) does provide information regarding curriculum and instruction. The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) "requires school districts to examine model programs that have been identified by scientific research as beneficial for disadvantaged students and to incorporate such programs and practices as they develop both curriculum and instruction" (George, 2003, p. 44). *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) is a researched based document that describes a blue print for middle schools to implement to meet this mandate. A blue print and characteristics of exemplary middle schools is addressed later in this chapter. The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) does not name specific strategies, but lends itself to state and local control in researching and implementing scientifically-based instructional strategies and curriculum that increases student achievement.

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) "requires states to develop plans that will guarantee that all teachers in core academic subjects (defined as English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography) are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year (George, 2003, p. 31). Highly qualified teachers are defined as "those that have obtained full state certification or passed the state teacher licensing exam" (George, 2003, p. 31). The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) recognizes that student achievement can be directly linked to quality of the school staff. For this reason, mandating the employment of highly qualified teachers is imperative.

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) impacts professional development of staff members as well. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2003), there are 8 key elements of professional development. They are the following:

1. All activities are referenced to student learning,
2. Schools use data to make decisions about the content and
    type of activities that constitute professional development,

3.   Professional development activities are based on research-validated practices,

4.   Subject matter mastery for all teachers is a top priority,

5.   There is a long-term plan that provides focused and ongoing professional development with time well allocated,

6.   Professional development activities match the content that is being instructed,

7.   All professional development activities are fully evaluated, and

8.   Professional development is aligned with state standards, assessment, and the local school curriculum. (p. 7)

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) requires that states develop plans to achieve the goal that all teachers of core academic subjects be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year. This information is repeated for a reason. Research later in this chapter will reveal that in many cases, middle level teachers are teaching core subjects in which they have no certification. This poses a problem, which must be addressed. The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) also mandates that states must include in their plans annual, measurable objectives that each local school district and school must meet in moving toward the goal. Specifically, each state must report on their progress in the annual report cards. In the state of Missouri, this is measured through Annual Yearly Progress Report which requires each district to submit to DESE a report card on several key areas the center of which is student achievement.

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) mandates specific to middle level educators is as follows:

> New middle or secondary teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree and be able to demonstrate content area mastery in the subject they are teaching through a state exam, as well as demonstrate successful completion of graduate work, an undergraduate academic major, or advanced certification or credentialing. Elementary, middle, or secondary teachers not newly hired must hold at least a bachelor's degree and must also

demonstrate academic content area knowledge. This
demonstration may be subject to an exam, but must be based upon
multiple measures of teacher competency and made available to
the public upon request. (p. 33)

The *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) is lengthy with several mandates. George W. Bush

"describes this law as the cornerstone of my administration. Clearly, our children are our

future, and as President Bush has expressed, too many of our neediest children are being left

behind" (p. 1). To completely dissect it is a monumental task that each state has been

mandated to do. For the purpose of this research, not all areas are addressed. Several areas

that impact teacher beliefs and affect how curriculum is implemented are introduced. It is

important to remember that the *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) does mandate scientifically based

proven instructional strategies, high student expectations, highly trained educators, and

increased student achievement. All of these points are consistent with the goals and

recommendations of several educational organizations such as the National Middle School

Association.

This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents

The National Middle School Association (2003) continues to provide a living

document "to fully reflect our philosophy and understanding of young adolescents and the

conditions that make effective middle level schools" (p. v). This is the purpose of *This We*

Believe (2003). In 1995, NMSA recommended several aspects or characteristics that were

needed to have an exemplary middle school. Since that time, NMSA recognizes that 14

characteristics that are interdependent and must be implemented in concert to achieve a

successful middle level school for students (2003).

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Beginning on page seven of the 2003 version of *This We Believe*, the National Middle School Association states that successful schools for adolescents are characterized by a culture that includes following 14 aspects:

- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
- Courageous, collaborative leadership
- A shared vision that guides decisions
- An inviting, supportive, and safe environment
- High expectations for every member of the learning community
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning
- An adult advocate for every student
- School-initiated family and community partnerships.

Therefore, successful schools for young adolescents provide

- Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory
- Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity
- Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning
- Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning
- School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
- Multifaceted guidance and support services. (p.7)

The National Middle School Association provides a rich resource for research and data. "NMSA Research Summary #20: What Works to Improve Student Achievement" by Susan Trimble (2003a) provides solid information regarding classroom practices and achievement. Trimble targets three areas to improve student achievement. The three areas are clear academic focus; teaching strategies; and support for teaching and learning. This research reiterates what has already been recommended. Middle level teachers need support and training in teaching strategies that best meet the needs of the adolescent. Later in this

chapter, a clearer picture of curricular models that better describe best practices will be provided.

Trimble (2003a) found that "learning goals that are performance based contribute to increased student learning by focusing on targeted outcomes" (p. 2). When teachers provide students with examples of high quality work and share of assessment criteria used to determine how a student can earn an A or B, student performance increases (Trimble, 2003a). Another aspect from this research summary on the topic of clear academic focus is a task-oriented classroom. Lee and Smith (1993) found that classrooms that emphasize completing work are associated with higher student achievement. When the work is personalized to the student's needs, student achievement increases. This classroom takes on a business-like approach, and provides positive student gains.

Although this is a short summary of the revisited *This We Believe* (2003), it is important to note that as middle level practice continues to grow, we learn more about how to best educate the adolescent. As educators continue to research the middle level practices and the development of the adolescent, more recommendations will be made in addressing teaching strategies and demands on the student (i.e. standards from *NCLB Act of 2001*). The next text to be discussed provides insight on middle level education. *Breaking Ranks* (NASSP, 2006) provides actual research and thoughts from educators who have not only implemented parts of *This We Believe* (1995) but simultaneously weaved the recommendations into their everyday practice.

Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform

The National Association of Secondary School Principals published this text. It is "designed to provide middle level principals and other school leaders with a field guide to

school improvement" (NASSP, 2006, p. v). This publication attempts to provide a guide and align strategies for middle schools to follow and focuses on solid educational practices for young adolescents. The goal is for middle level leaders to address all aspects of educating the adolescent simultaneously.

"The challenge for schools is to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment so that students know what standards they need to meet and are then given the support to become engaged in achieving those standards" (NASSP, 2006, p. 175). A key phrase in the preceding quote is 'engaged in achieving those standards.' This can be interpreted as making learning personal for the student, creating student-centered curriculum, instruction and assessment. Making learning personal involves instruction that promotes and achieves student self-awareness and exploration.

The Education Alliance at Brown University lists three components of personalized learning:

1. Self-awareness: What the student learns about his or her values, ambitions, talents, knowledge, and special skills.
2. Explorations: What the student learns from classes and field experiences about the world.
3. Confirmation: What the student learns about defining pathways available to the future she or he has begun to imagine. (NASSP, 2006, p. 47)

How can this be done? One recommendation is for middle level educators to have common plan to discuss the strengths, weaknesses and interests of each child. The educators need to research each student to better understand the individual interest each student has. Understanding individual interests is needed for students to be engaged in learning. Student interests may not be content-specific. As a result, it is important for middle level educators

to integrate curriculum. NASSP (2006) suggests that to have engaged student learning, the curriculum should be:

1. Authentic
    - Product-oriented
    - Quality standards set in advance
    - Requires application of skills
    - Open-ended and problem-based
2. Thoughtful and reflective
    - Requires analysis, synthesis, evaluation
    - Has multiple outcomes
    - Requires new ways of thinking
    - Judged on quality criteria and evidence
3. Creates dissonance in learner
    - Uses real-world problems
    - No clear answer; only high-quality ones
    - Requires new behavior, skills, and learning
    - Entertains the possibility of failure
4. Individualized
    - Permits student to pursue interests
    - Is differentiated
    - Provides support
    - Requires self-evaluation (p. 178-9)

With the curriculum recommendations, the next step is for middle level educators to take inventory of their instructional practices. Bryan Painter and Jerry Valentine developed an Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) in 1996, which was revised by Valentine in 2002 and 2005. Ultimately, "the IPI was designed to profile school wide student engagement with learning and was not designed for personnel evaluation" (NASSP, 2006, p. 188).

A more complete explanation of the Instructional Practice Inventory (Valentine, 2005) is provided in Table 4. The purpose is to further describe the engagement level of learning and what it may look like at different levels of implementation. This is important because it relates to curricular models that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Table 4

Instructional Practices Inventory Categories

Broad Categories	Coding Categories	Common Observer "Look-fors"
Student Engaged Instruction	**Student Active Engaged Learning**	Students are engaged in higher-order learning. Common examples include authentic project work, cooperative learning, hands-on learning, problem-based learning, demonstrations, and research.
	Student Learning Conversations	Students are engaged in active conversations that construct knowledge. Conversations may have been teacher stimulated but are not teacher dominated. Higher-order thinking is evident.
Teacher-Directed Instruction	**Teacher-Led Instruction**	Students are attentive to teacher-led learning experiences such as lecture, question and answer, teacher giving directions, and video instruction with teacher interaction. Discussion may occur, but instruction and ideas come primarily from the teacher.
	Student Work with Teacher Engaged	Students are doing seatwork, working on worksheets, book work, tests, video with teacher viewing the video with the students, etc. Teacher assistance or support is evident.
Disengagement	**Student Work with Teacher not Engaged**	Students are doing seatwork, working on worksheets, book work, tests, video without teacher support, etc. Teacher assistance or support is not evident.
	Complete Disengagement	Students are not engaged in learning directly related to the curriculum.

(p. 5)

The purpose of Table 4 is to focus on student-engaged instruction which includes

authentic project work, cooperative learning, demonstrations, etc. To get to this point,

NASSP (2006) recommends that interdisciplinary teams have time to plan and collaborate

together. NASSP states that "routine planning and collaboration among and across teams is

essential" (p. 184). At the same time, the interdisciplinary teams need to understand the goal of common planning time.

The importance of introducing this NASSP publication is simple. It provides solid picture of what engaged student learning is. At the same time, it does not address what occurs during common plan time and how this impacts the development and delivery of curriculum. Addressing what occurs during the common plan time is a key component of this research project. Understanding what learning should look like is important. Understanding how a team of middle level educators plan and develop curriculum is crucial for the successful implementation of curriculum to provide engaged student learning. This understanding requires further discussion of what an interdisciplinary team is and the use of common planning time for middle level educators.

Interdisciplinary Teaming and Common Planning Time

Interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time are key components of the middle school concept and need further examined. Interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time go hand-in-hand, and for that reason, will be discussed together. It is the assumption that interdisciplinary teams of teachers plan, coordinate, evaluate curriculum and instruction across academic areas. To better understand this practice, Erb and Stevenson (1999) have provided principles for organizing effective teams. The principles are these:

1. Keep teams small in terms of number of teachers and students.

2. Provide sufficient individual and team planning time for teachers.

3. Allow teams to design their students' daily schedule.

4. Assign teams to their own area of the building.

5. Allow teams to work together for multiple years. (p. 65)

Furthermore, characteristics of highly effective teams are provided by George and Alexander (2003). The characteristics are these:

1. Student-centered focus.

2. Strong commitment to academic achievement.

3. Collaborative policies and accountability systems.

4. Strong sense of team community.

5. Regular communication with parents.

6. A proactive approach.

7. Teachers who work professionally and collaboratively. (p. 42)

Understanding the key principles and characteristics is essential, but the principles themselves do not explain what occurs during the actual common planning time. Research will support middle schools with interdisciplinary teams using common planning time have higher levels of student achievement and student self-esteem (Felner, et al., 1997). Likewise, Mertens and Flowers and Mulhall (1998) found through their research that schools that are strongly engaged with interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time showed that student achievement scores improved substantially. This same research also concluded that student self-reported outcomes such as self-esteem, behavior problems and academic efficacy improved.

Mertens and Flowers (2003) reported on a self-study that set out to measure many aspects of school reform, including curriculum, school climate, professional development and school organization, to name a few. Middle level schools in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi participated in the self-study, which included 121 schools. The

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relationship between interdisciplinary team practice and classroom practice was investigated, and it was found that when the frequency of interdisciplinary teams utilizing common plan time increased, the classroom practice of integrating curriculum increased (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). The research also suggests that to integrate curriculum more fully, the interdisciplinary teams need to meet more frequently (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). What is not discussed in this research is what exactly occurs during the common planning time. Do the interdisciplinary teams utilizing common planning time have set goals during common planning time, and have they received any training or professional development on how effective teams operate?

The next step in the Mertens and Flowers 2003 study was to determine whether there is any effect on student achievement for schools implementing interdisciplinary team and common planning time. The research revealed that interdisciplinary teams that have been practicing common plan time for at least three years have higher student achievement scores as compared to those with less years of this practice or decreased level of implementation. Furthermore, it was found that "when teams are engaged in teaming of several years, and have the necessary time to plan, they report higher levels of team and classroom practices. Therefore the sustained impact of teaming and higher classroom practices can produce higher student achievement" (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 11). This research brings to light that to reach sustainable change, the process of interdisciplinary teams utilizing common planning time may need to develop over several years for teams to become more effective in developing and implementing curriculum in the classroom.

Mertens and Flowers (2004) stated in a NMSA Research Summary #21 Interdisciplinary Teaming that "common planning time is deemed critical to the success of an

interdisciplinary team because it provides teachers with an opportunity to plan collaboratively" (p.2). Flowers et al. continue to state that "team teachers should have common planning meetings at least four times per week for at least 30 minutes per meeting" (p. 2), which is considered to be at the advanced level. Jackson and Davis (2000) believe that at the advanced level, interdisciplinary teams coordinate instruction and assessment during common planning time which effectively improves student achievement.

Jackson and Davis (2000) believe that during this common planning time teams are able to coordinate and integrate curriculum. There was no stipulation that the teams needed to fit in one mold such as a two-person, three-person, four-person or grade-level wide team of teachers. Nor was there any stipulation regarding team size. The researchers listed in this paragraph are did not discern how the common planning time looked. How do the team members interact with each other, and how do they actually develop integrated units of curriculum?

Some student benefits of teachers utilizing common planning time is that teachers can plan lessons that address the same concepts across disciplines so that students gain exposure to material through different teachers and in different contexts. Through common planning, teachers also attend to students' developmental needs based on collective knowledge. In the end, student achievement improves. Mertens and Flowers (2003) believe that common planning time is a critical component of interdisciplinary teaming and that "interdisciplinary teaming is intended to create a context that enables students and teachers to know one another better and allows teachers to better support and understand the educational needs of students" (p. 2).

Arhar (1997), Dickinson and Erb (1997), Lee and Smith (1993) referenced in chapter one and chapter two all concluded that "students and teachers in schools that have implemented teaming and its associated practices with some degree of integrity consistently report more positive and productive learning environments" (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p.5). Their conclusions support the importance of the interdisciplinary team practice and show that common planning time positively impacts student achievement. To expand upon the knowledge of the middle level practice of teaming and common planning time, this research focus is on what occurs during the actual plan time. To continue, understanding each curricular model is required to further understand how teachers interact in developing curriculum for students.

Curricular Models

This section is designed to explain the continuum of curricular models that middle level educators can implement to create learning experiences for adolescents. Creating a culture in which educators are able to move across the continuum of curriculum models and implement the most optimum instructional methods will be discussed. This section will begin with the description of each model on the continuum of curriculum models, which include: the conventional middle school curriculum, the multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary curriculum, the integrated curriculum, the integrative curriculum, and beyond the integrative curriculum. Once each model is introduced and described, an explanation of the need for implementing curriculum models beyond the conventional middle school curriculum will be presented. This section will end with describing the roles of various individuals who are involved when implementing various curriculum models.

The Conventional Middle School Curriculum

The conventional middle school curriculum "is characterized by all the regularities with which we are familiar – a separate subject approach, textbook as the primary source of information, teacher in charge of everything, planning, teaching, and evaluating" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 29). This model most likely represents how the majority of individuals were taught during their middle or junior school years. Regardless, the meaning associated with separate subject approach needs to be described to provide a better understanding of the conventional middle school curriculum. The first step in doing so is to define a "discipline of knowledge." Throughout this section the conventional middle school curriculum and separate subject approach will be used interchangeably.

According to Beane (1997), "a discipline of knowledge is a field of inquiry about some aspect of the world-the physical world, the flow of events over time, numeric structures, and so on. A discipline of knowledge offers a lens through which to view the world-a specialized set of techniques or processes by which to interpret or explain various phenomena" (p. 39). An example of a discipline of knowledge is mathematics. Subjects are specific boundaries of knowledge within a discipline. For instance, the discipline of mathematics has several subjects that have specific logically organized subject matter such as algebra, geometry, and calculus. Each of these subjects has a specified amount of content to that subject.

The conventional middle school curriculum (separate subject approach) implies to the idea that a course or subject "covers content and skills that are prescribed by external guides or textbooks and which, presumably, are needed for success in high school" (Stevenson & Carr, 1993, p. 3). The separate subjects approach "offers little more than a disconnected and

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incoherent assortment of facts and skills" (Beane, 1997, p. 41). Within each subject, there is a limited amount of knowledge to be learned, taught or discussed. A disadvantage to this is that "there is no unity, no real sense to it all" (Beane, 1997, p. 42). There is not as strong of connections other subjects, and in many cases, the separate subject approach does not model real life experiences. Students taught conventionally may not be able to make connections to their own personal experiences. Some teachers might be able to assist students in making connections to their own experiences, but in this model, this task is not as easily accomplished.

Even though the conventional middle school model has limitations, it still has a place in educating young adolescents. This may appear to be a contradiction, but the conventional middle school curriculum model can be effectively used with multidisciplinary, integrated and/or integrative curriculum and can be a portion of the student's educational experience. Teachers need to be wary about solely using the conventional middle school model. The conventional middle school model is not the curriculum model that best integrates student learning with student needs (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995).

The disadvantages of the conventional middle level curriculum become apparent when an adolescent is faced with a real life problem. In real life problems, rarely does the solution appear in the form of one discipline or subject. Instead, the solution almost always is derived through a combination of disciplines. Thus, when educators move across the continuum of curriculum models, stronger connections to real life interests and problems are developed (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995). Even though an educator is using the conventional middle school model, this does not mean he is a poor teacher. It may mean the teacher has

not received proper training in other models or is not willing to implement other models (comfortable with using the conventional middle school model).

In the conventional middle school curriculum model, "young people, and adults, have been led to believe that the purpose of education is to master or collect facts, principles, and skills that have been selected for inclusion in one or another subject area instead of learning how those might be used to inform larger real-life purposes" (Beane, 1997, p. 41). The separate subject approach is characterized by students as one in which they are "made to memorize specialized vocabulary or sub-skills rather than learning what each discipline is really about and what its interests are" (Beane, 1997, p. 41). If multidisciplinary teams use this model exclusively, students may not be maximizing their potential to learn and make connections to their experiences or interests. When this model is used appropriately with integrated and/or integrative curriculum approach, student gains should be easier to achieve (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995).

A concern of the conventional middle school model is that it "offers little more than a disconnected and incoherent assortment of facts and skills" (Beane, 1997, p. 42). Granted, good teachers do not purposefully let this happen. The unity between the subjects or connection to the lived experiences of the student, and for that matter, the teacher, is not as strong in this model. From personal experience as a middle level math teacher, I know that students often question how math is relevant in the real world. Repeatedly hearing this caused me frustration (the students were already frustrated since they could/did not understand or make connections to the real world). My response was to provide examples – connections to the real world. I found myself beginning to focus on topics – real life experiences in which the facts and skills I attempted to teach could be used. I also found

myself working with other teachers in other subjects. I was moving away from the conventional middle school curriculum model.

Another fault of the conventionally model is not necessarily with the knowledge in the conventional middle school model but with how that knowledge is appropriately introduced into adolescents' lives (Beane, 1997). The conventional middle school model is not normally based upon student interests; it is a pre-determined plan or set of information that has been deemed worthy for students to know. The separate subject curricular approach does not assist the adolescent in his/her search for self and social meaning (Beane, 1997). It separates itself from student interest, even though the adolescent is eager to discover the world in which he or she lives and develop his or her own identity. The child is not at the center of the educational experience. Rather, he or she is a passive learner. Dewey, Jackson, Davis, Beane, Alexander, and many other educational scholars strongly argue that learning must be an active process.

Although middle level teachers can use this model, the purpose of the middle school is to provide learning experiences. This is what is lacking in this model for the student. "The division into subjects and periods encourages a segmented rather than an integrated view of knowledge. Consequently, students are asked to relate to in schooling becomes increasing artificial, cut off from the human experiences subject matter is supposed to reflect" (Lounsbury & Nesin, 1999, p. 14). The need to move from using solely the conventional middle school curriculum model is summed up well by Peter Abb. Peter Abb stated:

> We need to break the illusion of separate subjects. Education
> is about life. Life is a fabric of relationships…the child should
> grasp this through his experience. Subjects that break off areas
> of knowledge and set up as independent islands have deceptive

power. Traditional teaching of subjects…is death to the understanding. (Lounsbury & Nesin, 1999, p. 27)

Multidisciplinary/Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

The next progression in the continuum of curricular models is the multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary curriculum model. In this model, multidisciplinary/ interdisciplinary curriculum "refers to the linkage of content from different disciplines. Its proponents claim that interdisciplinary curriculum can help manage the knowledge explosion by reorganizing what is taught and can assist children in making meaningful connections among school subjects" (Martin-Kneip, Muxworthy, & Soodak, 1995, p. 227). This is one step removed from the conventional middle school curriculum model in that separate subject matter is now aligned to provide connections across disciplines. "Interdisciplinary" refers to "curriculum design that makes connections across disciplines" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 136). This is an improvement from the conventional middle school curriculum model but is still limited in meeting adolescents' needs because it is not truly reflective of student interests (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995; Jackson & Davis, 2000). In this section, "multidisciplinary" and "interdisciplinary" will be used interchangeably.

The multidisciplinary curriculum model is still separate subject bound, but the separate subject teacher's work together to reinforce themes that are being explored in each other's class. Oftentimes, a team of teachers will develop a theme and present knowledge across the separate subjects, thus reinforcing the concepts being introduced or discussed in the other classes. In a best-case scenario, interdisciplinary curriculum blurs the distinction between specific disciplines (Stevenson & Carr, 1993). "At their best, such units blend students' ideas and interests about the topic with general and discipline-specific resources"

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(Stevenson & Carr, 1993). It is important to note that the themes or topics are developed from teacher input. Students are still subjected to ready-made curriculum, the conventional middle school curriculum model. There are some positives to multidisciplinary curriculum, specifically, interdisciplinary teams.

"Interdisciplinary" also refers to "the organizational structure of teams that include teachers from different disciplines" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 136). An interdisciplinary team may consist of a math teacher, science teacher, social studies teacher and language arts teacher, but is not limited to this combination. An interdisciplinary team may work together as a whole or in smaller teams when delivering curriculum. In this case, a team of teachers will determine a theme or topic. An example of this might include the social studies teacher discussing the development of the Constitution. The social studies teacher will be introducing the authors of the Constitution, origins of thought, etc. The language arts teacher will coordinate the lessons that may include other readings from the authors of the Constitution. Or, the language arts teacher might discuss poetry that grew out of that time period. Another possibility is that working from the information learned in social studies class concerning the Constitution, the students might be required to develop and write a school constitution as a project in language arts. The purpose of the two working together is for the students to make connections between the two subjects, and for the teacher to reinforce a common theme or topic.

What does not happen in this case is student input. In the multidisciplinary curriculum model, students do not develop the themes based upon their own interests. Instead, the students are following/learning a prescribe set of knowledge. Also, connections to the real world are not as easily made.

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Multidisciplinary teaming does lend itself to flexible scheduling, which is a positive step. In the conventional middle school curriculum model, classes are approximately 45 to 50 minutes in length. The National Commission on Time (1994) and Learning published *Prisoners of Time* in which the authors identified five factors that were detrimental to academic performance. The two factors listed are these: "the fixed clock and calendar is a fundamental design flaw that must be changed"; and "Educators do not have the time they need to do their job properly" (p. 5). Flexible scheduling alleviates these detriments in that now educators are not bound to instruct in a 45–50 minute time frame, the fixed clock. Flexible scheduling can include classes of 60 to over 90 minutes, or whatever time the multidisciplinary teams deems appropriate. This provides ample time for students to complete science projects, develop and discuss topics in detail without fear of the bell ringing too soon. With this flexible scheduling, more individualized instruction can occur, students have time to reflect and collaborate on what they are experiencing, and it is easier for curriculum to be delivered in an integrated manner (Brown, 2001). With the extended learning periods, it is easier to insure that students have time to make connections among separate content areas (Brown, 2001). If a teacher has difficulty managing time or using time wisely, flexible scheduling will most likely not be the cure! Flexible scheduling is an opportunity for educators to have extended time so topics can be discussed further with less worry of the class ending too soon.

When educators begin the process of multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary teaming, George and Alexander have suggested guidelines. George and Alexander (1993) have developed a list described as the "Ten Commandments of Interdisciplinary Team Organization." They are as follows:

1. Interpersonal Compatibility – arranging team so that members are comfortable with one another is crucial – must be constantly nurtured.
2. Balance – subject strengths, personality style, ethnic background, sex, age, and certification – in terms of teachers and students.
3. Planning Time – at least one common planning time per day.
4. Team Leadership – skilled team leader able to work with both teachers and administrators.
5. Personal Characteristics of Members – individual members must like teaching at this level and enjoy their role as team member. They must be optimistic and mature in terms of patience and tolerance.
6. Attitudes Toward Students – pro-student attitude committed to student success. Explore every alternative to improve and motivate.
7. Attitudes Toward Teammates – diverse but unified. Accept differences, listen respectfully, willing to compromise, agree with school philosophy, show appreciation, and welcome new members.
8. Relative Autonomy – reasonable room for teams to create their own policies, schedules, activities, curriculum plans, systems for monitoring student behavior and academic performance, and for ensuring parent involvement.
9. Principal Involvement – keep a tight grip on loose reins. Attend team meetings, observe, consult, listen, model and encourage.
10. Continuing Education – in-service sessions support the refinement and extension of teamwork. Training in interpersonal communications skill, conducting effective meetings, and the nature of middle school students. (p. 292-294)

The multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary curricular model is still separate subject bound but is moving in the right direction in meeting student needs. But improvements are still needed. Theodore Sizer (1992) recommends that the basis of restructuring schools is the principle of personalization. Sizer states "teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum extent feasible. To that end, a goal of no more than eighty students per teacher should be vigorously pursued" (p. 24). Following the ten commandments as listed can assist

in personalizing the educational experience. Multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary teams can partially meet personalized aspect of education in that a core group of teachers may have approximately 80 students to develop strong relationships. But the education itself is not necessarily personalized. This is an important shortcoming of the curricular model that is addressed in the integrated and integrative curriculum model.

Integrated Curriculum Model

John Dewey (1938, 1956) emphasized that learning should be focused on real life issues and social problems that are relevant to young people. Learning must have an immediate purpose or importance to the student. This kind of learning will better prepare students for solving problems as citizens. Perkins (1992) explains that "teaching of the subject matter involves much more than teaching bits and pieces of content. Learners need an integrative sense of the subject matter. They need an overarching mental image of its structure, so that they see how its strands interweave to make a whole fabric" (p. 117). Accomplishing this integrated curriculum requires a deeper understanding of what "curriculum integration" actually means. "Curriculum integration is a curriculum design that is concerned with enhancing the possibilities for personal and social integration through the organization of curriculum around significant problems and issues, collaboratively identified by educators and young people, without regard for subject area boundaries" (Beane, 1997, p. x-xi). "It is not an advanced level of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary planning and teaching; it is not an occasional problem-based unit" (Lounsbury & Nesin, 1999, p. 1).

"Curriculum integration is not simply an organizational device requiring cosmetic changes or realignments in lesson plans across various subject areas. Rather, it is a way of thinking about what schools are for, about the sources of curriculum, and about the uses of

knowledge. Curriculum integration begins with the idea that the sources of curriculum ought

to be problems, issues, and concerns posed by life itself" (Beane, 1995, p. 616). Beane is

arguing that curriculum integration should grow from the interests of the student. This will

assist in the student's constructing knowledge out of his/her personal experiences.

According to John Lounsbury and Gert Nesin (1999), there are four characteristics of

integrated curriculum. They are the following:

1. Students and teachers collaboratively plan the curriculum and how it is pursued. Students and teachers may start with preconceived notions or views of what they want to accomplish or might happen, but authority to manipulate the preconceptions into actual plans or actions is not used.
2. Themes provide the organizing center for learning activities. Students provide input as to what themes they would like to investigate. Contrary to opinion, when students are asked about their opinion and concerns, "students respond in a consistently profound way and construct themes of real significance.
3. Learning takes the place in a democratic classroom community. Democracy is more than voting in the classroom. It is the valuing of every students opinion and adjusting until decisions are acceptable to each individual. Curriculum integration is an educational approach that fosters active learning in a democratic environment.
4. Separate subjects no longer define the curriculum. Real life problems students' face is not subject specific. For this reason alone, separate subjects should not be the predominate fixture in middle level education. (p. 2)

Before continuing, it is important to again explain the difference between

interdisciplinary instruction and curriculum integration. Interdisciplinary instruction usually

involves teachers deciding the topic or theme, which is dependent upon the curriculum they

are expected to cover. Multidisciplinary curriculum focus on themes based upon mandated

curriculum and then educators decide how best to teach the students. This curriculum is

often developed during common plan time (Lounsbury & Nesin, 1999). Integrated

curriculum is the process of selecting or creating themes that evolve from students' personal and social experiences or concerns. The themes are usually larger and focus on concepts such as change or cooperation or conflict (Lounsbury & Nesin, 1999). Integrated curriculum draws upon elements of the required curriculum as well as other needed and relevant material. The themes are developed with input from the students.

Integrated curriculum addresses state-mandated standards through the use of backward design. Backward design begins with the question, "what is it we want students to know?" By using backwards design, "educators start with the academic standards that define what students should know and be able to do, then decide on the assessments that will allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge and skills, and finally, develop the instructional experiences that will prepare students to show what they have learned" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 40). In other words, if we know the standards and expected competencies on which students will be tested, we can develop instructional experiences based upon these standards and student interest and input. This method attempts to address student accountability towards state standards. The backward design method can be used in other curriculum models as well.

Using the state-mandated standards as a starting point, the curriculum is outlined in broad-based themes, which become the focus. When engaged in tracking these themes, students work with teachers, work with other students in small groups, and participate in other learning activities. Small group activities, cooperative learning activities, and other learning activities do not solely occur in integrative curriculum. The teachers do not receive a break from their duties in the model. Instead, they begin acting as facilitators to the

students. The teachers assist students in gaining understanding, and they tutor and monitor progress rather than instructing the whole class (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 34).

Benefits of the integrated curriculum model have been discussed, but additional research regarding the student perspective has been performed. Ashland Middle School implemented an integrated unit, and a study on Ashland found that 64% of the students surveyed indicated that they learned more when instruction occurred as an integrated unit than they did through their usual curriculum format. And 24% of the students that completed the integrated unit stated that they learned as much as students participated in the regular curriculum (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995). In the area of practical knowledge, 49% state that they gained a lot, with 46% stating they gained some practical knowledge (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995). In this review, "practical knowledge" was not defined. This provides another example of increased student achievement when using the integrated curriculum model.

<div align="center">Integrative Curriculum</div>

The integrative curriculum model is the next step in the curriculum continuum. "Integrated" and "integrative" sound similar, but there are distinct differences. In both the multidisciplinary model and integrated curriculum model, units / topics are generally teacher conceived or developed. Integrated curriculum begins the process of developing units and lessons based upon student desires, but integrative curriculum achieves this. Integrative curriculum is the model, which "focuses on finding the answers to authentic questions of young adolescents" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 34). A good description of integrative curriculum is described below.

In integrative curriculum where there is no artificial division of knowledge into separate subjects, students are the prime curriculum developers as they answer questions which reveal what is most important to them, what issues of the larger world are of interest to them, as well as those topics and issues which are important but are not included in their questions." (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 33)

Integrative curriculum goes beyond the blurring of subject lines, which is the case in integrated curriculum. Integrative curriculum does not discard subject matter but rather re-positions it in a new form (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995). Students are still held accountable to state standards, which can be addressed with the use of backwards design.

In the integrated curriculum model, a team of teachers is able to develop their expectations of the curriculum through the use of a common plan. Students will need to participate in the planning, which means the teachers will need to relinquish some of the control. The reason for student participation in the planning is to allow them to have ownership in the curriculum, and provide assistance to the teachers concerning student interests and desires. During this time, students can assist in designing culminating activities for the units, as well as assist in the evaluation process. Culminating activities may consist of authentic assessments of student work. Some examples of this may include projects, demonstrations, exhibits, and plays (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995), all of which are significantly different from the standard multiple-choice test. The integrative curriculum model relies heavily on the collaboration between the students and teachers.

The integrative approach is "primarily of cooperative or individual task involving research, document or presentation preparation, concrete manipulation, and product evaluation" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 105). From this, student learning is largely experiential and student discovery. The teacher needs to act as a facilitator in this process to

help guide the student "to appropriate information rather than impart the entire scope of the topic" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 105). This facilitation assists students in also being accountable to state standards. With students participating in the evaluation process, backwards design approach can be used. Students will know which standards they will be held accountable to and can assist in developing units and the evaluation tools.

Beyond Integrative Curriculum

Beyond the integrative curriculum model is perhaps the curriculum model least used at the middle level. This model places "huge responsibilities on the students to recognize, plan, carry out, and evaluate what they want and need to learn" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 34). In this model, students are largely self-directed, and "pursue their own studies based upon self interest or needs of that particular classroom or school" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 34). Examples of this could include a research laboratory in which an individual or group of individuals work for an extended time period, focusing on the work-at-hand. They are self-guided in that the information they learn guides their work.

This stage on the continuum is rarely reached in schools, but is much more likely to occur once students have experienced the opportunity of integrated and integrative curriculum. The student now has much more responsibility in setting the direction for his or her own learning (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995). In fact, the roles of the teacher and student become somewhat reversed since the teacher has less emphasis on providing the direction the learning will take. This model is truly student centered and student motivated. The teacher is not the center of the educational process.

This curriculum model does focus on students researching and investigating problems on their own. "Human beings are a problem-solving species and there are certainly a large

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number of problems to be solved" (Brazee & Capelluti, 1995, p. 135). Students can choose problems that are relevant to them and be able to choose their own devices or methods when attempting to solve the problems. This model takes advantage of student motivation and interest in that students are selecting the research topic and searching for the answers.

Final Thoughts

Understanding the complex nature of the adolescent is crucial to this research. Just as important is being knowledgeable about how the middle school concept evolved, and about the philosophies and recommendations that served as a foundation to the current middle school concept. With legislation impacting every school in America, no educator can afford to turn his or her back on children. Legislation from *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) dictates that best practices occur when delivering curriculum. Understanding the curricular models and benefits or barriers of each is important to understand as an educator.

To ensure failure is to hurriedly move to the middle level concept and to hurriedly move across the curricular models without proper education, training, and planning. According to the National Middle School Association (2000), "it's when we try to take the junior high label off the school and just slap up the middle-level sign that it doesn't work" (p. 16). In essence, if we try to be superficial in the change process and do not address the details of instruction, positive change may not occur. Perhaps my thoughts on this can be best summed up by Carol Smith (a member of the NMSA's curriculum committee). She states "the problem is that people went out and dabbed in middle-level concepts and picked some parts that worked without much difficulty, and they figured they were finished" (NMSA, 2000, p. 16). To avoid this, the process of change and planning make take much more than a few months to occur (if at all).

Thorough investigation of the middle level concept and junior high model must occur which will be time-consuming, but beneficial in reaching the goal of providing what is best for students. Understanding the purpose of common plan time is one aspect of the middle school concept crucial for the success of the middle school. Knowing what occurs during common plan and understanding the perceived benefits and barriers of common plan time is important. Therefore, in this change process, stakeholders might need to understand that for lasting change to occur, the process may take years to successfully accomplish. The research I will perform will become part of the pool of knowledge from which middle level educators can use to better educate the young adolescent.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this research is to explore what middle grade teachers do when they meet for common plan time.   With increased accountability on schools to document student achievement, the middle grades teachers' understanding of the purpose, goals, and value of common planning time is essential. Gathering information on what occurs during common plan time and the teachers' understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of common planning time is vital information for middle level educators to improve upon educating the young adolescent and increasing student achievement. A specific example of student accountability comes directly from *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (2001) which mandated that beginning with the 2005-06 school year, "states must administer annual statewide tests in mathematics and reading/language arts to children in grades 3 through 8, and at least once during grades 10-12, and must provide individual student test scores" (NCLB, 2003. p. 14). Providing avenues for interdisciplinary teams to develop curriculum is important as well as understanding what occurs during common planning time.

There are benefits for students that are in middle schools using interdisciplinary teams with teachers that have common plan time. According to Lipsitz (1984), students are better known by their team of teachers. Additionally, when students receive instruction from teachers on interdisciplinary teams with common plan time, this group of students has a higher overall positive perception of their school (Warren & Muth, 1995). Likewise, teams of teachers that actively use common planning time to develop curriculum have higher levels

of student achievement (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999; Mertens & Flowers, 2003; Mertens, Flowers & Mulhall, 1998). Middle level educators know there are benefits to having interdisciplinary teams of teachers utilizing common planning time. The objective of this research is to explore the phenomenon of common planning time in middle schools, and to research what middle grades teachers do when they meet for common planning time.

Research Design – Qualitative Methodology Case Study

The studies and reports by Jackson and Davis (2000), McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins (2003), and Alexander (1968b) discussed in chapter two were quantitative, and the data presented included percentages of schools using interdisciplinary teams, number of middles schools and percentage of schools using common plan time. Quantitative data are used to determine the success or failure of some event, or in studies in chapter two, describing middle level practices. To answer the research questions posed in chapter one, my research will focus on the collection of data through the use of qualitative approach. Qualitative methods "consist of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observations; and (3) written documents" (Patton, 1990, p. 10). The qualitative research I performed used all three methods for collection data.

This dissertation used a qualitative methodology case study approach to gather data about two interdisciplinary middle level teams of teachers using common planning time. The case study approach to qualitative analysis is a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data (Patton, 1990). The purpose for the case study approach is to look beyond quantitative data, numbers, and percentages. According to Patton (1990), the case study approach in qualitative research is designed to "facilitate the search for patterns and themes within a particular setting or across cases" (p. 384) to answer or better understand the

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phenomenon at hand.   This qualitative research is designed to help educators understand

why something occurs rather than just presenting the phenomenon. This approach provided a

more in-depth, critical look at the beliefs of middle level educators in an interdisciplinary

team setting to determine their understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of common

plan time. The goal is to increase the knowledge on how teachers use their common

planning time as well as understanding perceived barriers and benefits of common plan time.

The research design consists of Basic Research (Patton, 1990). The purpose of this

research is to increase the body of knowledge concerning the practice of the middle school

concept. The purpose of Basic Research is to gain "knowledge for the sake of knowledge"

(Patton, 1990, p. 152). As discussed in chapter two, more data and research needs to be

collected to understand what occurs when teachers meet for common plan time. In addition,

this research addresses the type of training middle level teachers have had on the use and

purpose of common planning time. As a basic researcher, I want to better understand and

explain what occurs during this phenomenon with middle level educators, as well as,

contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of middle level research. Therefore, my

dissertation consists of Basic Research using a Qualitative Methodology Case Study

approach.

The Qualitative Methodology Case Study design allows me to study the selected

issues in depth and with detail. Quantitative methods "require the use of standardized

measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited

number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned" (Patton, 1990,

p. 14). The Qualitative Research proposed is not be limited to predetermined perspectives or

experiences that can be measured. Qualitative data are gathered through the use of in-depth,

open-ended interviews, direct observations, and document analysis (Patton, 1990) to answer

the research questions listed:

1.   What are the teachers' understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of common planning time?
2.   How do teachers use their common planning time?
3.   How are teachers prepared professionally to use common planning time?
4.   What are the perceived barriers to common planning time?
5.   What are the perceived benefits of common planning time?

The observation protocol and interview protocol are located in Appendix A and

Appendix B accordingly. Appendix C is the Description of Observed Behavior which is

helpful in coding the events observed during the common plan time observation. The

interview protocol and observation protocol was developed by the Middle Level Education

Research Special Interest Group. My research replicates this study, and also requires the use

of document analysis. One aspect of common plan time is for teachers to develop curriculum

and prepare for student instruction. By analyzing the plan books of the teachers, another

perspective of an outcome of the purpose of the common plan time may be realized.

Document analysis is used when studying the lesson plans of the middle level

teachers. According to Patton (1990), a benefit of document analysis is that the researcher

can "increase knowledge and understanding about the program" (p. 233). By reading the

lesson plans prior to the interviews and common plan time observations, valuable

information is obtained. Analyzing the lesson plans brought to light basic information, but it

serves as a source for me to use to better understand what I observed during the common

plan time, as well as what I learned from the interviews. Having access to some basic

background information allows for the researcher to be informed as to what has occurred,

what may occur, and to better understand the common plan time phenomenon. Lastly, document analysis provides a "behind-the-scenes look at a program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through the documents" (Patton, 1990, p. 245).

Setting

The educators work in a sixth-seventh grade middle school located in the suburbs of a large Midwest City. The middle school concept has been in place in the Sampson School District for over ten years. Students attending Harmony Hill Middle School have earned high marks on state assessments. The Sampson School District has earned state recognition for excellence in student achievement during the last five years. The common planning time observations and individual interviews occurred within the Harmony Hill Middle School in a secure location designated by the building administrator. Students attending Harmony Hill Middle School rank in the 91st percentile according to MAP Data on student achievement presented to DESE. The Sampson School district ranks in the 88th percentile according to MAP data presented to DESE when compared to other Missouri Public Schools. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participating school district and middle level school throughout this research process.

Participant Selection / Sample

The data source in this dissertation is through the collection of open ended, in depth individual interviews, direct observations of common planning time of two middle grades interdisciplinary teams (eight teachers) from one middle school, and document analysis of teacher plan books. There are two sets of interdisciplinary teams each consisting of four teachers. Eligible interdisciplinary teams that have common planning time were ascertained

with the assistance of the principal of the corresponding school. Team A consists of four sixth grade teachers that work at Harmony Hill Middle School. Team B consists of four seventh grade teachers that work at Harmony Hills Middle School. The sixth and seventh grade student population in the Sampson School District is approximately 560 students with a total student population kindergarten through twelfth grade of 3,600.

To strengthen the sample, I met with the building principal to discuss each team's student achievement levels and the level of implementation of the middle school concept specific to common planning time. The purpose of this is to insure an accurate observation and that the research actually reflects what is occurring with each middle level team of teachers. I met with the perspective sample once I was authorized by my committee and the research proposal to the SSIRB was approved. I made contact and gained permission from the district from which the research occurred. Once I gained approval from the SSIRB, I met with the participants and gained approval to begin the research as each team member received a copy of the Informed Consent and agreed to participate in the research. Basic demographic information such as total teaching experience, total teaching experience in a middle level setting, and teaching certification types. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of each participant throughout this research process.

Team A representing the sixth grade interdisciplinary team consists of one male and three female teachers sixth grade. The social studies teacher, Mary Wilson, is a Caucasian female with five years of experience, all of which are at the middle level. The areas of certification are secondary (7-12 grades) and middle school (5-9 grades) social studies. The science teacher, Tim Johnson, is Caucasian male with nine years of experience, four years of which were at the middle level. He earned his middle level certification in Science (5-9

grades). The mathematics teacher, Jen Brown, is a Caucasian female with 29 years of experience, 22 of which are at the middle level. The area of certification is K-8th grades Lifetime. The language arts teacher, Michelle Kramer, is a Caucasian female with two years of experience all of which are at the middle level. The area of certification is middle level (fifth to ninth grade).

Team B representing the seventh grade interdisciplinary team consists of one male and three female teachers. The social studies teacher, Joan Crump, is a Caucasian female with 11 years of experience, all of which are at the middle level. The area of certification is middle level (fifth-ninth grade) Social Studies. The science teacher, Bill Wright, is a Caucasian male with 13 years of experience, eight years of which are at the middle level. The area of certification is middle level (fifth-ninth grade) science. The mathematics teacher, Tawny Jones, is a Caucasian female with three years of experience, all of which are at the middle level. The area of certification is middle level (fifth-ninth grade) mathematics and secondary (seventh-twelfth grade). The language arts teacher, Sherry Olsen, is a Caucasian female with twenty-seven years of experience, 15 of which are at the middle level. The area of certification is middle level Language Arts (fifth-ninth grade) and Early Childhood (Pre-K to third).

Informed Consent – Provisions to Ensure Safety

Permission to conduct the study is obtained by following the guidelines set forth by the University and the school district. The Superintendent of Schools is informed of the study with permission being granted (see Attachment B). The principal of the sample school was contacted once approval was granted at the Superintendent level, and efforts to ascertain acceptable teams from each grade level occurred. Each participant is given an Informed

Consent Form (see Attachment A). Both the Project Information Sheet and Informed

Consent Form were reviewed with each participant before data are collected.

Collecting the Data

Initially, I acted as a non-participant observer when observing the common plan time

of each grade level. The Observation Protocol is Appendix A with the Observation

Descriptors located in Appendix C. I also interviewed each teacher individually. The

Interview Protocol is located in Appendix B. A copy of the lesson plans was received on

Friday. The individual interviews and observations of the common plan time occurred on the

following Monday and Tuesday. The purpose for open-ended questions is to gather data

from individual interviews and to provide the researcher the opportunity to delve deeper into

the emerging data. Qualitative research design "needs to remain sufficiently open and

flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry"

(Patton, 1990, p. 196).   I followed the interview protocol as designed by MLER SIG (2007)

and found in Appendix B, but reserved the privilege of asking additional questions when

clarification of a teacher response was needed. In qualitative research, the direction of the

research hinges on the information (emergent data) collected. Emergent data from interviews

is to be investigated when I felt it would clarify or enhance the data collection which

enhanced the study and provides flexibility and openness in the research (Patton, 1990).

An important aspect of qualitative interviewing is to "minimize the imposition of

predetermined responses when gathering data" (Patton, 1990, p. 295). The questions are

designed to permit the respondents the flexibility to answer using their own terms. The

questions in this research are designed to let the respondent take whatever direction of course

and use whatever terms they feel best represents their beliefs. The use of the responses is

used to develop themes and guide further questions within the interview session. Each interview is digitally audio recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes during the data analysis portion of the research. Once the interviews are transcribed, a copy is given to the perspective respondent providing the opportunity for clarification of statements, and most importantly, accuracy of transcription.

I performed direct observation as a method to "describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed" (Patton, 1990, p. 202). Since the research focused on what occurs during common planning time, direct observations is used to understand what occurs during common plan time. Also, the observations are used to provide credibility during the interview process. By doing direct observations, I will have less need to rely on preconceived notions of what occurs during common plan time meetings since I have observed the common plan time. The opportunity of discovering an aspect or idea that no one has ever really paid attention to is possible during the observations (Patton, 1990). Interviews and open-ended questions report perceptions of the respondents. Observations made include perceptions as I see it, and are coded using the descriptors as listed in Appendix C. These perceptions and teacher practices are used to present a more comprehensive view of the program being studied.

I performed my observations as a non-participant observer. I do not want to fully immerse myself with the experiences of the interdisciplinary teams in the study. Instead, I performed my observations as an onlooker or outsider sitting in the periphery writing notes and comments as to what I observed. The observations occurred after I performed the individual interviews. This provided an opportunity review the lesson plans, interview the

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teachers and then observe an actual common planning time. This allowed for the opportunity

to verify what was discussed or shared in the interviews as actually occurring during the

common planning time. This also allowed a better understanding of the comments that the

teachers made during the interviews process. This can be a limitation to the study since I am

only performing one observation for each team of teachers, which can lend itself to a

predetermined performance. But, under the philosophy that each educator is a professional,

deception is not a practice. My perception of the common planning time observation was

that I observed what typically occurs during this time. My perception was that the teachers

acted in a professional manner, and there were no predetermined behaviors to misrepresent

the normal day-to-day operations of the common planning time.

When entering the room for the common plan time observation, I did not address the

team of teachers. Even though my presence in the common plan time is not normal, my

observations focused on the teachers and the discussion being held. Teacher discussions and

behaviors were documented using the observation protocol found in Appendix A. The length

of the common plan time meeting observations ranged from forty to fifty minutes. The

length of each individual interview will lasted approximately thirty to forty minutes. In this

study, a limitation could be that I did not observe the teachers implementing in the classroom

what was discussed by the team during the common plant time meeting or what was

discovered during the individual interviews. In some cases of participant observations, six

months to years of observations and living with the sample is needed to gain a holistic

picture. Through the use of triangulation of data, a lengthy time frame of observations is not

needed in this research. By performing one observation of common plan time for each grade

level, a more definitive picture can be achieved to support information provided by the educators during the interview process.

Document analysis is the last piece to the research collection process. I collected a copy of the teacher's plan book. Specifically, I requested a copy of the teacher plans for the two weeks prior to the interviews. The purpose of collecting the documents is to assist with better understanding of what occurs during the common plan time and how it relates to developing lesson plans for the students. As the researcher, I want to be informed as to what the discussions I may observe during the common plan time observation. I also want to better understand the responses the teachers may make during the interview process as they may reflect on what is currently occurring in the classroom. To be informed, I read the lesson plan documents data prior to the observation and interviews. The lesson plans were analyzed after the observations and interviews have occurred.

The interview protocol addressed the research questions. The observation of common plan time assisted in gathering information regarding student instruction that has occurred and may occur. By analyzing the data from the lesson plan documents, a deeper understanding of what has occurred within the classroom may be realized. Document analysis is a key component to understanding what is occurring during the data collection process and provides basic information for the researcher.

Analyzing the Data

Triangulation of data collected provided a clear understanding of the phenomenon being studied, specifically, data from eight individual teacher interviews, direct observations of team planning time of two interdisciplinary teams, and through document analysis of weekly lesson plans. Triangulation of data is important to reveal a more complete picture of

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the event. According to Denzin (1978), the logic of triangulation is based on the premise that "no single method ever adequately solves the problems of rival causal factor.... Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed" (p. 28). Relying on a single source of information is a limitation to this study. Therefore, my research drew upon several sources to collect data and triangulation of data increased the validity of the findings.

According to Patton (1990), "triangulation is a powerful solution to the problem of relying too much on any single data source or method, thereby undermining the validity and credibility of findings because of the weaknesses of any single method" (p. 193). To insure valid and credible research, triangulation of data is used to enhance data quality and credibility. As mentioned previously, qualitative methods of collecting data can occur through in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observations, and document analysis (Patton, 1990). As a researcher, I am open to more than one way of looking at things. Triangulation of data meets this need for this research. Therefore, the sample included two different interdisciplinary teams and data is analyzed from interviews, observations, and document analysis. By gathering data from more than one team of teachers using common plan time, validity and credibility increased with regards to the research findings.

I used a program called NVivo 8 (QSR International, 2008) to organize and analyze the data collected from the interviews. The program has been used in several studies and was recommended by a committee member. This program was beneficial in finding themes that have developed from the transcripts. Since I used a standardized open-ended interview, answers from the teachers were grouped into topics or themes. The use of the NVivo 8

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program allowed for a more expeditious ability to scan through the transcripts in analyzing the answers for common threads or patterns.

Limitations to the Study

The limitations inherent in this study center on my personal and professional experiences. The setting of the study may be a limitation in that I currently am an elementary administrator in a neighboring district in which the research is being performed. Additionally, I worked as a middle grades teacher in this same neighboring district. With the movement of educators from one district to another, one of the teachers in the sample may have a prior conception of who I am and what I have done. Another limitation to the setting of the study is that there is a real opportunity for my return to the middle level administration of which could include one of the middle level sites in the study. Future administrative authority could taint the data collected. It is not known whether the respondents are aware of this opportunity at the time of the study. But, by virtue of middle level research itself, they may induce this possibility.

Lastly, a limitation to the study is my personal bias with regard to how my beliefs impact my actions as the researcher. For instance, understanding that schools are graded on student performance (MAP Test), high stakes testing influences decisions related to teacher training, etc. My increased knowledge of best practices or recommendations as described by NASSP and NMSA and my bias as to how to successfully implement curriculum and achieve student success may create a limitation to the study. Even though this is listed as a limitation to the study, it does merit a positive note. By understanding the state and federal guidelines and recommendations from NASSP and NMSA, I am able to understand the information gathered from the respondents in this area.

Conclusion

I am fortunate to have been trained through the MLER SIG, and to have the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the common planning time phenomenon. The training that occurred was beneficial in my preparation for the research. The instruction and course work I have received while attending UMKC has increased my understanding of the middle level concept, and has been professionally beneficial.

With this being said, I understand the importance of adhering to the protocols and analyzing the data effectively. As mentioned previously, this research will be my contribution to MLER SIG study that is and has occurred throughout the nation. I want it to reflect the level of professionalism that I have experienced during my doctoral coursework and process. Additionally, being able to attend a training session in Chicago that was held by the creators of the study was crucial for my understanding of the data collection and analysis process.

CHAPTER 4

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

I have laid the foundation as to the purpose and need for this project which is to

explore the teachers' understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of the common

planning time. Even though the CPT is not a new phenomenon, this practice is one that is

under constant scrutiny with major budget related concerns that effect education and schools.

Accountability for student success with *NCLB Act of 2001* (2001) is high which also requires

educators to be skillfully trained. By exploring the focus question, steps can be made to

improve the CPT implementation and effectiveness. To further explore the focus question,

in-depth questions and analysis of middle level educators occurred and more topics and

questions were posed. Investigation occurred on how teachers use their CPT, how teachers

are prepared professionally to use CPT, what are the perceived benefits of CPT, and what are

the perceived barriers of CPT?

Even though the methodology aspect of the research was described in chapter three, a

brief account of how this chapter developed is important to review. Document analysis,

interviews and observations are the methods I used to address the previously mentioned

questions. I was able to triangulate data to verify statements from the participants and their

relationship to the observation of the CPT and lessons when appropriate. Common themes

were developed from consistent statements from the interviews when supporting information

was not available from the observation of the CPT or lesson plan documents. During this

process, the participants were reminded and thanked for their honest answers during the

interviews, and at no time did it appear to be deception on the participants during the interviews, CPT observations, and presentation of the lesson plans. The setting of the individual interviews occurred in an office located within HHMS. The setting of the observation of the CPT occurred in the respective grade level classrooms of the team I was observing, and appeared to represent the standard operating procedure of the day.

Demographic Information

The participant sample consisted of two male teachers and six female teachers all holding middle level certifications in the content area they were teaching. The average years of teaching experience was 12.375 years for the eight participants. For the sixth grade team, the average years of teaching experience was 12.25 years with the least experienced teacher her second year of education and with the most experienced teacher in her 29th year of education. The seventh grade team's average year of experience was 12.75 years with the low of three years of educational experience and the high of 27 years of educational experience. Racial diversity was non-existent as all participants are Caucasian.

The sixth grade team has approximately 98 students while the seventh grade team has 94 students. Instructional time was spent strictly working with students on their perspective teams as this school did not participate in a cross grade level teaming practice. Each team had four common planning times that met each Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Monday was set aside for content area teachers to Skype with the same content area teachers from the other middle school in the district and was not considered part of the team CPT. There was some autonomy on the length of the common plan time for each grade level. Sixth grade typically met for 40 minutes while seventh grade set aside almost 50 minutes for their common planning time.

Teacher's Understandings of the Purpose of the Common Planning Time

George and Alexander (2003) have performed extensive research on the CPT. From this research, they have listed what they consider to be characteristics of highly effective teams. According to their research by George and Alexander (2003), characteristics of highly effective teams include:

1. Student-centered focus.
2. Strong commitment to academic achievement.
3. Collaborative policies and accountability systems.
4. Strong sense of team community.
5. Regular communication with parents
6. A proactive approach.
7. Teachers who work professionally and collaboratively.
   (NMSA, p. 1, 2004a)

The purpose of listing these characteristics is that throughout the research the theme to the responses by the teachers often relate back to this list. The focus question of the research proved to be a solid starting point for uncovering what actually occurs during the CPT. To uncover and further understand what is occurring during the CPT, a rich description of the CPT observation, CPT teacher interviews, and document analysis of lesson plans were analyzed.

The focus question for this research is:

What are teachers' understandings of the purpose, goals, and

value of the common planning time?

This addressed three topics pertaining to the teacher's understandings of the purpose, goals, and value of the CPT. As the data was analyzed, it became clear that regardless of grade level, the purpose and goals of the common planning time appeared to overlap with the same theme reoccurring. The purpose and goal of the CPT definitely has a student-centered focus

with a strong commitment to academic achievement to address and meet student needs behaviorally and academically. The purpose and goal of the CPT directly relates back to the characteristics listed by George and Alexander (2003), specifically that highly effective teams have a "student-centered focus" and "strong commitment to academic achievement" (NMSA p. 1, 2004a). This was strongly reinforced during the observation of the common planning time as well.

The purpose of the CPT as described by the school or district was the investigated so a better understanding of what the teachers perceived to be the purpose of the CPT could be revealed. The prevalent theme that developed from the interviews was for the team to collaborate and be unified in addressing each student so their individual needs are met. A seventh grade teacher summarized her thoughts on the purpose of the CPT by stating that the team is "to work together to get us all on the same page. To help the student that is struggling. To challenge students that are excelling so no kids are left out." Student-centered focus and commitment to academic achievement is stressed again, but this teacher also uncovers another element of the purpose and goal of the CPT which is for teachers to "work professionally and collaboratively" (George & Alexander, 2003). Student-centered focus, commitment to academic achievement and teachers working professionally and collaboratively was consistent with the thoughts of a sixth grade teacher when describing what she felt to be the purpose of the CPT. According to a sixth grade teacher, the purpose of the CPT is for the team "to meet together so we can do everything we can for the student to make them successful. We can meet together since we all have the same students. We can collaborate and discuss students." It is clear that the purpose of the CPT at HMMS was to

address student needs so they can be successful academically. In other words, the theme focused on having a student-centered focus to address student needs.

In addressing student needs, a couple of strategies were mentioned. The team met to discuss, develop and implement student behavior plans. The team met with individual students during the CPT to discuss with the student the behavior plans, academic progress, and to modify plans based upon student and staff input. This teamwork approach with the student provided ownership and accountability for the student. Part of the accountability piece for the student and team involved parent communication. A minimum of one positive parent phone call per team was to be made each Friday. The purpose for this was to share student success with the parents. Parent communication also occurred daily with students via email correspondence. According to my observation of the CPT, this was a routine practice and an effective way to keep parents involved in the student's academic and behavior progress. "Regular communication with parents" (NMSA, p. 1, 2004a) was evident and strongly supported during the CPT observation. Specifically, during the observation of the seventh grade CPT, emails to and from parents was revealed, and it was clear the lines of communication this parent was open and regular correspondence occurred.

The theme of student-centered focus and strong commitment to academic achievement was evident when further investigation of the overriding research question that addressed how the CPT has changed the way you teach if at all. In addition, has the CPT changed the way you manage your classroom and student behavior? In both instances, the majority of the participants agreed that the CPT has changed how they teach and how they manage their classroom and student behavior. The CPT has changed the way people teach and manage student behavior in that teachers have time to discuss what is working for the

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other teachers, and incorporate some of the teaching and/or behavior strategies within their own classroom. This was consistent with what I observed in both CPT meetings. A sixth grade teacher stated the following when addressing the two previously mentioned questions:

> Yes. If there is a student that I cannot reach or understand, I can work with another teacher that might be able to reach that child. I can work with the teacher to help understand how to better work with the student. I have been able to get some feedback and re-arrange how I teach that student.

The sixth and final question under this category addressed the value of the CPT. The theme regarding the value of the CPT time was clear. The CPT is crucial for student success and providing staff the opportunity to collaborate to meet the student needs. If the CPT was lost, the reaction from the participants was that it would be devastating, tragic and sad. The CPT is essential in addressing student and parent needs. Specifically the question of "How would you react if you lost your common planning time?" The response from Tim Johnson is below.

> I think it is hard to see how essential it is unless you experience it. It is a great thing. If we can show that there is enough good, it will continue. I think it would be a tragedy in schools to lose this. It is so good for the students and me. It would be a tragedy. The hard part would be how we accomplish what we are doing now without the common planning time!

Tragic, sad, disappointing, and traumatic are descriptive words used to describe the reactions by the participants. I feel it is important to mention a response of a sixth grade teacher to further impress the theme of the value of the CPT. His response was that he would "be disappointed. I know that is part of business. I work with dedicated people, so we would find time to meet anyway. But I would be disappointed." It is clear that the common plan time is a crucial component in their toolbox to address young adolescent student needs.

In summary, the purpose, goals, and value of the CPT are clear. The purpose is to address student needs or more specifically, the purpose of the CPT was a strong student-centered focus. The goal of the CPT is collaborate professionally to address the commitment to academic achievement. And lastly, the value of the CPT is simply invaluable to the success of middle level students. To better understand the CPT phenomenon, investigating what actually occurs during a CPT is needed. This leads to the next portion of the research. As the analysis continues, a reoccurring theme of student-centered focus and a strong commitment to academic achievement is revealed.

Teacher Use of the Common Planning Time

Research by Erb and Stevenson (1999) provided guiding principles for organizing effective teams. The guiding principles are listed as the following:

1. Keep teams small in terms of number of teachers and students.
2. Provide sufficient individual and team planning time.
3. Allow teams to design their students' daily schedule.
4. Assign teams to their own area of the building.
5. Allow teams to work together for multiple years.
   (NMSA, 2004a, p.1)

The purpose of listing the guiding principles of organizing effective teams is that HHMS has implemented the first four components recommended by Erb and Stevenson (1999). Over time, there is strong possibility that the last guideline will be implemented which will allow teams to work together for multiple years. In this case at HMMS, the first four principles are effectively in place, and allow for CPT to occur.

The current status of the teaming aspect at HHMS does include keeping teams small with four teachers on the team working with 90-100 students, and allowing for dedicated area of the building for each team. Dedicated time for individual and team planning is occurring,

and at no time during the research did any participant state that more time was needed. Rather, it was stated that having the individual and common planning time is crucial to student success. Lastly, having flexibility to design their students' daily schedule is evident, and this was reported not only in the teacher interviews, but during the observations of the CPT.

The secondary question of investigating how teachers use their CPT focused intensely on what the team spends their time working on during their CPT. Further questions delved into the topics that consume the majority of the CPT, major accomplishments of the team for the current school year, and finally, a question regarding teacher perceptions of what they consider to be the most effective use of CPT in an ideal school. The section progressed from the current state of activities that occur during the CPT to the dream of what would be an ideal world of the CPT.

Several themes developed from the investigation and the theme was consistent across the two grade level teams. It was clear that each day had time dedicated for individual and CPT with specific goal or format for each CPT. Ultimately, the teachers reported that during the CPT, they spend the majority of their time addressing student needs which is the main theme from this section. And this is consistent with the overriding theme that began with the first research question. The overriding theme is that the CPT is student-centered focused with a strong commitment to academic achievement. Further investigation of what occurs during the CPT will reveal this.

When addressing the purpose of the CPT, it is best to describe the agenda for each day. It was reported by all participants that each day has a predetermined agenda. On Monday, the team has the opportunity to Skype with the same grade content area teachers

from the other middle school in the district. This time is used for content area teachers to focus on curriculum development, addressing grade level expectations, and for consistency in the curriculum delivery. Even though the team does not formally meet together, having this opportunity during CPT time is a benefit.

I observed the CPT for Tuesday and saw teachers working together. It was clear during the observation of the CPT meetings that each team has a strong student-centered focus. It was also clear during the observations, that both teams were unified with a strong commitment to academic achievement. The topic of the Tuesday CPT time is to address student's issues. A typed agenda was presented to each of the team members with items listed to be discussed. In each grade level, at least three students were discussed. During my observation of the Tuesday CPT, I witnessed the counselor and principal participate in the meeting. This was consistent with what was reported by the teachers during the interviews as a common occurrence each Tuesday. The team discussed recent academic concerns or successes for the student. Parent communication and emails were discussed. The team focused on the current behavior plan for the student. In one instance, the seventh grade team held a team conference with the student. During the observations, the focus was student-centered and the discussion and planning focused on commitment to student achievement. During this conversation with the student, the teachers referenced homework which was consistent with the lessons plans previously presented to the researcher. While completing the observations, it was clear to see that what the participants reported during the interviews matched with what actually occurred during the CPT.

The conference with the student and team held during the CPT revealed a genuine sense of caring with high expectations for student academic and behavior success by the

teachers. This student conference lasted about 10 minutes and included discussion regarding her behavior plan, academic performance, and how the team and student would continue to communicate with the parent. As the observer, the student appeared to be trusting of the team which led me to believe the team had developed a solid relationship with the student. The student had opportunities for input, and provided suggestions to changing her behavior plan. She was able to share her perceptions of what was working and what was not working so well. As was reported in teacher interviews, one person spoke to the student at a time. This allowed for the student to not feel overwhelmed or attacked, but rather provided time for the student to process what was occurring during the meeting. At the end of the conference, the student left the room with a smile, and it appeared the team and student were on the same page and headed in the same direction to continuing her academic and behavior success. A follow up email to the parent was to occur as well.

On Wednesday, it was reported during the interviews that the purpose for the CPT was to analyze data from Study Island assessments and MAP assessments. I did witness some discussion of what was reported to be a Wednesday topic when I observed the sixth grade team CPT on Tuesday. The importance of this observation is that based upon student data, the team was allowed flexibility to design their students' daily schedule and had the flexibility to adjust the daily CPT agenda to meet student needs. I briefly witnessed a discussion during the CPT of the sixth grade team of Study Island assessment, and their discussion of scheduling various student groups based upon their assessments. I mention this since it directly corresponds to one of the guiding principles for organizing effective teams which is to allow teams the flexibility to design their student's daily schedule (Erb &

Stevenson, 1999). And by analyzing assessment data, the theme of the research of the teams having a student-centered focus was evident.

On Thursday, it was reported that the team purpose was to address field trips and to revisit student concerns. During the observation of the CPT for seventh grade, a brief description of an upcoming field trip to a local university campus occurred. This was consistent with the teacher interviews that having time to plan field trips provides the opportunity for students to have a seamless day with as many variables accounted for as possible. This time is crucial for students to maximize their experiences on field trips.

The purpose of Friday's meeting was two-fold. The team of teachers designated this day for parent contact. The purpose was to make at least one positive phone call to a parent regarding their student's success at Harmony Hills Middle School. In the interviews, several participants stated that all too often the first contact with a parent is negative, focusing on negative behavior and/or academic concerns. Part of the CPT for Friday was to share a positive experience with a parent. The minimum was one phone call per team per week, but it was reported during the interviews that each team has made as many as four positive parent contacts on any given Friday. This is a crucial element of the purpose of the CPT as well as a description of what occurs during the CPT.

Time was also dedicated to developing and finalizing Eagle Bonus activities and clubs. Each Friday, there is time built into the school day for students to participate in reward type activities or a club activity of their choice. But there is a stipulation. The stipulation is that the student must have earned this privilege by completing classroom expectations and work accordingly. The lesson plans revealed a high expectation for student academic accountability in that class work or homework was assigned in each class almost

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daily. For those students that did not meet the grade level expectations, homework club was provided. From this, it is evident that the team had flexibility in scheduling student events and daily activities.

It is important to reinforce that even though each CPT had a predetermined topic of discussion, the team had flexibility to address student issues. It was clear from the interviews that the team's number one job was the student-centered focus on what can be done for the student that is not getting it, not being successful. In other words, the CPT allowed for teachers to collaborate professionally to address and plan strategies for academic achievement. Therefore, the purpose of the CPT was to address student needs and accordingly, this was how the team spent the majority of their CPT. Even though the lesson plans were inclusive of topics discussed in class and associated work, I did not observe teachers evaluating the work. I was unable to witness the rigor of the assignments, but was able to report that there were assignments. If I had the opportunity to observe the individual planning time, this may have been revealed.

Throughout the research, the responses were extremely similar with minimal differences being reported between a sixth and seventh grade team. But when the topic of what each participant viewed as the major accomplishments of the team during the current school year, there was a difference in responses. The common theme for the sixth grade team focused on improving on the ability to work as a team, getting to know each other and the strengths each member has. The common theme for the seventh grade team was much more academic based.

The theme from the sixth grade team was two-fold. The first topic that came from the interviews was stated by Mary. Her response is listed below.

> Since we are a new team and never worked together, getting to
> know each other and how we can function as a team is a major
> accomplishment. As we have gone through the year, I can see
> improvements in our planning, and how we work as a team.

From her response, strides are being made in how the teachers are able to work professionally and collaboratively. Another teacher from the sixth grade team also stated that "just learning each other and how to work with each other is a major accomplishment. We are a whole new team." The purpose for introducing this is that it relates some responses from the participants that occurred in next portion of the research that investigated professional preparation and development.

Six of the eight participants did have a similar response to what they described as their major accomplishments for the year. This response was that they felt their major accomplishment for the year directly dealt with student success. This is consistent with the overriding theme that the CPT provides an opportunity for student-centered focus and strong commitment to academic achievement. According to Tim, "we have a couple of students that are improving in their learning because of our team. We have had meetings where we put plans in place to help the students be successful." This sentiment was echoed by Michelle as she reports the following.

> I think we have done a good job keeping tabs on the kids that
> are struggling, helping them be successful. Having the
> common planning time to pull up student grades to see how
> they are doing in each class nice. We use the common plan
> time to examine how each student is doing.

It was clear from the CPT observation and interviews that the teams analyzed student assessment data (Study Island and MAP), as well as current and past grades. It was clear that the teachers assessed student homework as well, and held the students accountable for this.

Having the CPT allowed an avenue for the teams to address student achievement which is the major accomplishment of the CPT. It is clear the theme from this section is that the teams used the CPT to focus on the students and addressed this time to meet the student needs, making efforts to improve academic achievement. Once again, there was a strong sense of a student-centered focus and strong commitment to academic achievement.

Professional Preparation for the Common Planning Time

Thomas Guskey (2003) states that the "ultimate goal of teacher professional development is improving student learning outcomes" (NMSA, 2004b, p. 1). Research by Killion (1999) suggests that "teachers who are well prepared and trained are more effective in the classroom and therefore have the greatest impact on student learning" (NMSA, 2004b. p.1). It is no surprise that professional preparation and professional development primary focus is to prepare educators to become highly effective in implementing curriculum and positively impact student achievement. Professional preparation continued with extensive professional development activities can insure that staff are and continue to be highly skilled in their field which is a mandate of *NCLB Act 2001* (2001).

The middle level professional instruction has addressed highly skilled educators in that since the late 1990's; all middle level educators are required to have specific training with respect to the middle level grades (fifth-ninth). It is not mandatory for middle level educators to have middle grades certification, although there are some educators that have earned a lifetime certificate that covers a broad grade level range, but this is not a common occurrence as the lifetime certificate has not been granted to educators for over 20 years. Current certification requirements are more specific in terms of a level of expertise in a specific content area and grade level area.

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According to NMSA, professional development for middle grades teachers should include three critical areas of knowledge:

- Content knowledge (deep understanding of their discipline),
- Pedagogical knowledge (instructional strategies), and
- Knowledge about the uniqueness of young adolescent learners. (2004b, p.1)

The purpose for listing the three critical areas is that the use or training in the CPT was not mentioned as a critical area of knowledge, but occupies at least 15% of the educational day. Training as to how to work as a team or how CPT should look was not addressed. The focus of professional preparation and professional development is on content area knowledge, instructional strategies, and understanding the young adolescent needs. As this topic was researched, the theme that professional preparation and professional development on the structure of the CPT, how the CPT should be implemented, and what should occur during the CPT was not strong across the board or was missing as reported by the participants.

Professional preparation in the teacher education program drew a mixed bag of responses with no common themes to draw upon. Either the experience was intense or no strong lasting memory of specialized training was reported. The first example of intense training was reported by a seventh grade teacher. He stated that his teacher education program was extensive as he was trained under the leadership of Thomas Erb. The name of the class that was most influential in preparing for the middle school concept of the CPT was called "Middle School Learning" where the students spent a large amount of time on effective middle school practice and development of interdisciplinary units.

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Another participant I interviewed shared that she had the fortune of actually seeing the middle school CPT as it happened. Her coursework allowed for the instructor to take the class into a functioning middle school to observe the CPT. This firsthand account of what the CPT is and how it should look was invaluable for this teacher. What is important to note is that both of these individuals are members of the seventh grade team. It was reported in the previous section that the seventh grade team considered a major accomplishment of the team was the ability to effective address student issues, data, and improve student achievement. Even though this team was in their first year of working together, working professionally and collaboratively for the common goal of student achievement appeared to be functioning at a high level. This might be directly attributed to professional preparation on the CPT.

For the remainder of the participants, no memorable or lasting thought of professional teacher preparation on the CPT was reported. Responses such as "I went through the middle school training and I think we covered the CPT", or "I have a lifetime certificate, and the middle school concept was not even in place at that time" were provided by members of the sixth grade team. The next step is to investigate professional development, and what ongoing training has occurred since the participants has been in a middle school that has implemented the CPT.

When asked if teachers are adequately prepared to implement CPT, the answer was unanimously "YES" from each participant. The response by Angela, a sixth grade teacher, is:

> Yes. But it is a learning process. I think we improve as we go
> along. We learn what works and does not work. We just
> evolve.

The responses by all of the participants were consistent in that all felt adequately prepared to implement CPT. But the response by Angela leads into the next question which investigates if any professional development has occurred to better prepare the teacher to use CPT.

According to the participants, a common theme developed. This theme is that the teachers have participated in numerous professional development activities, but no professional development activities occurred specifically addressing the proper use of CPT. This pattern mirrors what was reported with professional preparation specific to CPT. Professional preparation followed by professional development of the use of CPT was not reported to a high degree or was non-existent. This is an area of concern that is not new to the middle level. Research by Flowers and Mertens (2003) of 8,300 middle grade teachers in four U. S. states, found that the "frequency and depth of most professional development currently provided to classroom teachers falls well short of meeting their professional needs" (NMSA, p. 2, 2004b).

According to *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), it is recommended that it is important to staff middle grades schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development activities. When teachers had the opportunity to provide recommendations on additional preparation or skills needed to be more successful in implementing CPT, the general perception from the participants was additional professional development would be beneficial. More importantly, recommendations to how the professional development should look were provided, and this allowed for a common theme among the participants.

Additional training on what the CPT should look like was recommended by the participants. It was suggested that teachers have the opportunity to observe CPT of other

teams within the building and in other locations outside the district. The purpose of this was to gather information on how the CPT looks in other buildings, and what aspects can be improved upon with their current practice at HMMS. The second component to this professional development was to have experts observe their actual CPT and coach the team in areas of need. This was an open approach, and appears to show a genuine interest to become better at what the teachers are doing.

To summarize professional preparation, it is clear that no consistent professional preparation training occurred for the majority of the participants. It is also clear that no sustained professional development has occurred specific to the CPT. But it was felt by all that each teacher on the team has the appropriate knowledge and skills to adequately implement the CPT. Even though this was the sentiment, all participants were in agreement that continued training on the use of the CPT was needed. Although the research only reported on professional preparation and professional development specific to the CPT, it could be detrimental to generalize across the board that the teachers at HHMS are not participating in systematic approach to professional training or that they are lacking in expertise to teach young adolescents. Specific professional development activities for the school year was not investigated, and hence, not reported.

Perceived Benefits of the Common Planning Time

This topic addressed several areas of perceived benefits that included the teacher, students, the team and the whole school. The theme across the board was positive, with a common perception of unity, support, and consistency that benefits the teacher, students, team and whole school. In almost every case, the teacher responses reverted back to being able to assist students so that each individual can be successful. It was clear that the teachers,

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students, team, and school as a whole benefitted, but the constant theme was for the betterment of the students, the student-centered focus.

The first perceived benefit to be addressed dealt with the teacher's perceived benefits of having CPT. The general feeling was that of having the support of the other teachers when addressing your own personal classroom challenges. The comforting feeling that you are not all by yourself with all of these kids was reassuring. With the CPT, teachers know that they have time to confide with the team for support and suggestions with strategies to effectively address student behaviors and academic concerns is a huge benefit. Tawny was able to capture the essence of the benefits of the CPT for teachers.

> Addressing student concerns is a major benefit of CPT. Also, having time to plan and develop that camaraderie between the team is important. If the team is not working together, the students can sense that. If a team is divided, the kids can sense it and it is like having a divided home.

Student achievement was listed as a perceived benefit. By having the CPT, teachers were able to make the day and activities seamless for the students. The planning and preparation in advance allowed the teachers to be prepared for what events might occur for the day, creating a sense of unity and organization for the students. The teachers are able to be unified and consistent in their expectations of the students. It bears worth repeating that a perceived benefit of the CPT was that the team was able to maintain a student-centered focus and strong commitment to academic achievement.

Perceived Barriers of the Common Planning Time

This topic was multi-faceted in that it delved into barriers of the common planning time, but also negative effects of common planning time on students, the team and the school as a whole. As the data were gleaned for any common threads, two themes or areas of

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concern became evident. The themes or areas of concern of perceived barriers of the CPT were personalities and adhering to the building norms/expectations of the use of the common planning time.

Seven of the eight participants stated that personalities can be a barrier to the CPT. As it was simply stated in word for word fashion by two participants, "Personalities can be difficult." This concept flowed into barriers of the CPT for the students. If a staff member brings in personal baggage into the classroom, it could negatively affect the students. Although this was mentioned by some participants that this could happen, no specific examples were provided of this actually occurring. Several of the comments were prefaced with "It isn't happening on our team, but I have heard of teams that don't get along and it affects the classrooms." And the majority stated that there were no negative effects of the CPT for the students which is comforting thought.

Barriers to the team and school as a whole will be addressed together since the responses provided a common theme that seemed to direct affect to each other. Once again, no specific examples of what is actually occurring on the two teams interviewed were provided by the participants. It is clear that the participants are aware that negative relationships can be a barrier for the students, team and school as a whole. Bill, a seventh grade teacher, exemplifies this thought below.

> If the team is negative, the students can be victims of that. The students will then have four or five people on the same page against them instead of people working for them positively. If you have one person on the team that is not buying in, it can create a dynamic of us against them. When this happens, the team breaks down and the people will pair up against each other. I have not experienced this on my team. If the team is negative, it can affect the whole school. The kids on the team will know it. The kids on other teams will know it.

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"I have not experienced this on my team" is key and common response by the participants with regards to the previous statement. It does show wisdom on his part understanding staff behaviors and attitudes can easily adversely affect the students, team and school. The response also indicates that no perceived barrier negative effects of the current CPT practice at HMMS was reported with regards to student achievement or adhering to the student-centered focus.

Adhering to the building norms or expectations was another barrier of the common planning time. It was reported that some team members had difficulty sticking to the agenda. As stated in the characteristics of highly effective teams, teachers need to work professionally and collaboratively (George & Alexander, 2003). It was reported that on occasions, team members would deviate from the agenda bringing in personal experiences to the meeting. This can shorten the amount of time dedicated to addressing student needs, but to develop camaraderie, sharing personal stories is important.

Another barrier to the common planning time appeared to be the agenda itself. Each day had its set agenda, but in some cases, there was unfinished business from the previous day. The team was unsure if or when they should address the unfinished business, at the start of the next day's common planning time or was it acceptable to try to fit it in at the end of the meeting? On the positive side of this barrier, it was reported that this mostly was a result of team member efforts to address student needs.

When the topic of school or district level policies that affect the CPT was brought up, no one knew of any specific policy regarding the CPT. The only policy that was mentioned was the daily expectation by the administrator of topics to be discussed. No participant

reported that this was part of any district or staff handbook or policy. But all did state that the building norm was that their plan time had two components, individual and team plan time.

In conclusion, the common theme for this research line of questioning was that personalities can be a barrier to the CPT. It was perceived that team member's attitudes can negatively affect the students, team and whole school. It is important to note that no specific examples of personality conflicts or negative attitudes were provided describing the current team arrangements or current school year.

Final Thoughts

Even though the research occurred over a two day period, an increased understanding of what is occurring during the CPT was achieved. Several key concepts or themes arose from the focus question and secondary question. As stated earlier in this chapter, two common themes were revealed when addressing the focus question, and then continued throughout the rest of the secondary questions. It is clear that the teams studied at HMMS have a strong student-centered focus and a strong commitment to student academic success.

During this process, there were a few comments that seemed to capture the essence of what was occurring during the common plan time. Tawny's description seemed to capture this.

> Right now we have worked with some students where the four of us have clicked for the betterment of the student. Right now, we have a student in Team Recovery. We are all on the same page with that. That is tough when you have a student in Team Recovery. I feel like the four of us have been consistent with what we do with this student. The main accomplishment is consistency of care!

Consistency of care brings a personal aspect to the CPT for the team and students. A teacher's perspective on discipline is that sometimes delivering a consequence hurts the teacher more than the child. I compare this to the parent that levies a consequence to their child. Sometimes it is just no fun for all involved, but a necessary component of growing up, understanding the value of good behavior or actions. Outlasting the negative behavior and replacing it with a positive behavior can take time. Developing the personal relationship and trust of your teammates and students is a process. No one wants to see a child fail, and placing students in Team Recovery is a consequence. Working as a team and the student, unique strategies can be implemented to improve the likelihood of academic success.

Lastly, a comment made by Jen struck a chord when asked about the most effective use of CPT in an ideal school setting. Her response was that "in an ideal situation, no students would have any problems. So in an ideal situation, we could plan all sorts of activities for our students." It could be argued that the current practice at HMMS is close to ideal in that currently, the teams at HMMS have CPT to address and plan sorts of behavior and academic strategies and activities to be implemented for students to be successful. Time is precious or should I say CPT is precious for teachers to plan all sorts of activities for students to be successful? Regardless of the statement by Jen, throughout this process there was one constant. The teachers and team appeared to have a student-centered focus and strong commitment to academic achievement.

CHAPTER 5

COMMON PLAN TIME

As the research process developed, my thoughts drifted to some concepts that I felt warrants further research and understanding. I believe that the pool of knowledge on what actually occurs during the CPT increased and was extremely reliable in what it set out to achieve. The first concept that warrants further research relates to understanding the CPT. I was able to interview participants and witness two common planning times. Both activities were rich in information, but topics revealed in the interview process warrants additional CPT observation. During the interview process, participants talked about agendas assigned to each day. I was only able to witness 20% of what occurs during a normal middle level CPT. I believe further research specific to additional observation of CPT is warranted.

I believe additional research is needed to better understand and improve teacher development and training on the use of CPT. This training comes in the form of professional preparation and professional development. The research revealed that teachers do have specialized training and certification to educate the young adolescent. The research also revealed a weakness in the professional preparation in that only two of the eight participants could actually talk about their professional teacher training that related to the CPT. Continuing with this concept, no participant had experienced any professional development in the area of the CPT, how it should look, and how effective teams operate. Understanding the value of and to develop professional development activities to maintain and improve the current CPT practice is a crucial element that I feel would benefit educators and students. In

the paragraphs that follow, I will go into detail on continue research suggestions for the CPT, and investigate the professional training aspect of the middle level educator and the CPT.

Research on the Common Planning Time

The initial rationale for this research was to investigate the purpose, goals and value of the CPT, and I believe this research revealed great information about HMMS pertaining to the CPT. The value of the CPT by the participants was clear. All of the part participants felt that the CPT was crucial to the continued success of meeting the student needs. The participants valued the CPT, and felt the CPT provided an avenue for staff to work collaboratively to insure student success. Adding to the value of the CPT was that not did the students benefit from this practice, but the individual teachers, team and building as a whole also benefitted. That leads to the purpose and goals of the CPT. The purpose and goals of the CPT were clear, and directly focused on student success and what can be done to insure that success. But, several items were mentioned in the interviews that warrant further investigation. And this leads to my first suggestion that more observations of the CPT is needed to gain a deeper understanding of what occurs during the CPT.

By broadening the number of CPT's observed, a greater scope of what occurs can be understood. According to the teams interviewed, each CPT had a set agenda that was briefly described in Chapter Four. Important information from the daily CPT was not reported in that it was not part of the research. I was able to witness one CPT, and the topic was to address student issues. This was informative, but the topics of analyzing student data to assist in creating flexible scheduling for students, parent involvement, clubs, and developing behavior plans were not observed. The interviews reported these activities, but the ability to observe this in practice would improve the understanding of the purpose and goals of the

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CPT. This can be accomplished by lengthening the scope of the research to include additional CPT observations over several days, and in this specific case, one week since each day had a set agenda.

Another recommendation would be to continue to document what is discussed in each CPT, and to analyze these documents. This would provide additional information as to what occurs during the CPT, and provide an increased understanding of the perceived purpose and goals of the CPT. There is an increased pressure to improve student performance, and documentation of best practices needs to be re-visited to assure student success. By having teachers document what occurs each day during the CPT, a rich data source is available. These data can be analyzed by the current team and administration to further determine if what is presently occurring in the CPT is effective. An example of this is when staff met to discuss assessment data such as MAP or Study Island. By taking notes on the data analysis process and strategies implemented to achieve student success, the team or researchers can gain a longitudinal pool of data on what is effectively supporting the students. If the daily notes develop a theme of the same kids being discussed with little or no academic progress, then the team can analyze the interventions and teaching strategies and make changes accordingly.

The recommendation to observe more than one CPT and to perform these observations over a larger time span is suggested to improve the depth and scope of the research. Several times, responses to the research questions discussed events that occurred on the days that were not observed during the research. By observing a full cycle of CPT, perhaps one full week, a more concise picture and report of the CPT can be discovered. In the research, behavior plans were mentioned by all of the participants. I was only able to

observe one team and student conference. By having the opportunity to perform

observations over a longer period of time, more data can be reported regarding the

interactions of the team and student. Relationships are important at all levels of education,

but relationship building at the middle level is vital. Observing and reporting how staff

interacts with students and parents can lead to a better understanding of what occurs during

the CPT.

Lastly, it was reported by several participants that personalities can be difficult, and

in some cases, detrimental to the goals of the team, students and school as a whole. The

participants stated that this was not the case for their specific team, but they had heard about

it over the years. By observing multiple common planning times over a longer period of

time, the observer might be witness to difficult personalities and how it affects the CPT.

Observing team dynamics and overcoming personality conflicts are areas that need to be

investigated and analyzed. Observation of how team members react to a member that leads

the team off track is important to note. Recommendations on addressing shortcomings if this

is the case would benefit the effectiveness of the CPT, team, students, and whole school. It

was suggested by several participants that it would be beneficial to see what an effective CPT

looks like, how the team members interact. I agree with this, which leads to the next area I

wish to discuss, professional training.

Professional Training

When professional preparation and professional development was discussed in the

research, it became clear that this is an area that may need further analysis. As was reported

in the research, only two of the eight participants had any reportable lasting memories of

their specialized middle level training, specifically, what occurs during the CPT and how a

team can work together. The importance to the student of appropriate professional training and continued professional development is immense, and arming teachers to be masters at their game is priceless. In a study in Tennessee, it was found that low-performing students assigned to the top 20 percent of teachers learned two to four times as students with the bottom 20 percent (Hassel and Hassel, 2010; Sanders and Rivers, 1996). I think this is important since my observations of the CPT and interviews with the teachers revealed a common theme. The teachers are constantly working on strategies to improve student learning, and the students with management/behavior plans need all the support possible to excel.

"Professional development for teachers is the range of formal and informal processes and activities that teachers engage in both inside and outside of the school, in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills" (NMSA, 2004b, p.1). A key component of the middle school concept is the CPT. If staff are participating in the CPT practice, but have not had initial or continuous training to improve on the effectiveness and productivity of the CPT, then who suffers? The answer has many victims which include the students, the teachers, the team and the whole building. I refer back to the teacher interviews again when the participants were asked about professional preparation. Two of the eight teachers were able to describe in detail their middle level professional teacher training and exposure to the CPT. This is an area of concern in that all candidates had no knowledge of professional development regarding the CPT.

In conclusion, the daily structure is in place for the CPT, time set aside each day for a team of teachers to meet with an associated agenda. But the teachers need to know what an effective team looks like, how they plan, how they interact with each other, how to

effectively work with difficult personalities, and how they can continue to improve their CPT experience. With the mix of teachers on a team changing every year or every couple of years, training on how the CPT is to be used, as well as what can be improved upon with the CPT needs to be addressed in the professional development process. The structure and practice of the CPT at HMMS has a strong student-centered focus and strong commitment to academic accountability, improving the CPT practice through professional development activities can enhance teacher effectiveness and in return, student success.

Appendix A

Project Information Sheet and Informed Consent
MLER SIG National Middle Grades Research Project on Common Planning Time

Utilizing quantitative approaches, middle grades researchers have addressed the positive effects of interdisciplinary teaming with common planning time (CPT). Research has documented positive effects on student outcomes including student achievement, better social adjustment, and more positive school climate. Positive benefits to teachers include more positive work/school climate, higher levels of efficacy, and higher levels of engagement in interdisciplinary team and classroom instructional activities. While the results of this research are promising and support the need for common planning time, there still remains an unknown—what teachers do when they meet for common planning time. This, then, is the focus of this national research endeavor.

Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected over the life of this project. We will start with the qualitative data collection which includes data obtained through interviews, structured observations of team meetings, and demographic/contextual information. Data will be co-owned by the principal investigator and the MLER SIG. A national database will be constructed from the data that are submitted by researchers.

The interview and/or observation that you will be part of today will serve as data for a study of Common Planning Time in middle grades schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of common planning time at the local and the national level. Specifically, we are looking at what middle grades teachers do when they meet for common planning time.

If you choose to participate in this study, the interview should last from 45-60 minutes. The interview session will be audio taped and subsequently transcribed in order to review the interview thoroughly. After I complete my analysis of the data gathered through my research, I will contact you to briefly review the findings and ask for your feedback.

Participant's Initials _____

If you choose to allow me to observe your team meeting, I will use an observation checklist to record my notes and impressions of the meeting.

Participant's Initials _____

If you choose to allow me to collect and observe your lesson plans, I will use this as basic background information for the research.

Participant's Initials _____

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All information will be used for educational purposes only. Your name or school name will not be used in any showing or publication.

If you agree to participate please sign and return the attached form. There is no risk or benefit for your participation. Your part is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve not penalty or loss to you. You can contact the UMKC Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5370 for further information regarding your rights as a participant. At any time you can withdraw from this project.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Kelly C. Flax
21108 E. 50th St. Court South
Blue Springs, MO 64015

Attachment A

Project Information Sheet and Informed Consent
MLER SIG National Middle Grades Research Project on Common Planning Time

Utilizing quantitative approaches, middle grades researchers have addressed the positive effects of interdisciplinary teaming with common planning time (CPT). Research has documented positive effects on student outcomes including student achievement, better social adjustment, and more positive school climate. Positive benefits to teachers include more positive work/school climate, higher levels of efficacy, and higher levels of engagement in interdisciplinary team and classroom instructional activities. While the results of this research are promising and support the need for common planning time, there still remains an unknown—what teachers do when they meet for common planning time. This, then, is the focus of this national research endeavor.

Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected over the life of this project. We will start with the qualitative data collection, which includes data obtained through interviews, structured observations of team meetings, and document (team/team) information. Data will be co-owned by the principal investigator and the MLER SIG. A national database will be constructed from the data from each school led by researchers.

The interview and/or observation that you will be part of today will serve as data for a study of Common Planning Time in middle grades schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of common planning time at the local and the national level. Specifically, we are looking at what middle grades teachers do when they meet for common planning time.

If you choose to participate in this study, the interview should last from 45-60 minutes. The interview session will be audio taped and subsequently transcribed, in order to review the interview thoroughly. After completing analysis of the data gathered through my research, I will contact you to briefly review the findings and ask for your feedback.

Participant's Initials _____

If you choose to allow me to observe your team meeting, I will use an observation checklist to record my notes and impressions of the meeting.

Participant's Initials _____

If you choose to allow me to collect and observe your lesson plans, I will use this as basic background information for the research.

Participant's Initials _____

All information will be used for educational purposes only. Your name or school name will not be used in any showing or publication.

If you agree to participate please sign and return the attached form. There is no risk or benefit for your participation. Your participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not involve penalty or loss to you. You may contact the UMKC Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5076 for further information regarding your rights as a participant. At any time you can withdraw from this project.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Kelly C. Hay
21193 E. 50th St. Court South
Blue Springs, MO 64015

APPROVED
UMKC SOCIAL SCIENCES
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
INITIALS_____ DATE_____

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Appendix B

Letter to the Superintendent of Schools

September 7, 2010

Dr. Roy Moss
P.O. Box 304
Sampson, MO 64029

Dear Dr. Moss:

I am writing this letter requesting access to teachers in the Sampson School District as I prepare for the study I will conduct as part of my doctoral work at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. In the paragraphs to follow, I will outline the significance and purpose of my study, my plans for data collection, and an explanation of how I plan to maintain confidentiality of the district, schools, teachers, administrators throughout my study and the writing of my dissertation. I hope you find it possible to grant me permission to conduct this study with the help or the teachers and administrators in your district.

For my study, I would like to provide a positive experience for middle level educators and administrators as we continue to strive to meet the needs of the middle level students. I plan to study 3 interdisciplinary middle level teachers in the Sampson School District. The 3 teams of teachers will be from the same school, Harrmony Hills Middle School. I plan to conduct individual interviews, and observations of common plan time to determine what occurs during common plan time. I plan to conduct this study over fall of 2010. Upon gaining your permission to select teachers in this district, I plan to gain permission of the building principal and then selected teams of teachers. I plan to maintain strict confidentiality throughout my study using pseudonyms for the district, school, teachers and administrator involved. The results will be included as part of my doctoral dissertation with full confidentiality being maintained throughout. Once gaining permission to perform this study, I will meet with the principal of Harmony Hills Middle School to address the specifics of this study.

I respectfully request your permission to conduct this study in the Sampson School District. Please contact me at 816-564-7542 or by email at kflax@bssd.net with your response, and if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for my study.

Thank you for your time,

Sincerely,

Kelly C. Flax

MIER **Middle Level Education Research SIG**

National Middle Grades Research Project

Common Planning Time (CPT) Observation Protocol

School Name: _____ Date:

_____

School Address:

_____

Observer: _____ Team name:

_____

Meeting location: _____ Grade level:

_____

Time allotted for CPT meeting: _____ Meeting start time: Meeting end time:

_____ _____

Non-team members present:
(title/position)_____

_____

Topics to be discussed:_____
    (if known)

_____

Descriptive questions to answer while observing CPT meeting

1. What is the physical arrangement of teachers in the team meeting?

2. Is there an agenda for the CPT meeting? *[Note: if offered a copy, please include this with the data you submit to the national project.]*

3. Did a team member record minutes of the CPT meeting? *[Note: If you are offered a copy of the minutes of this or the past meeting, please accept it and forward with the data to be sent to the national project.]*

4. Were there any interruptions during the CPT meeting (e. g, announcements, fire drill, students needing to see teachers)? Please note the frequency of interruptions.

MLER SIG National Middle Grades Research Project

Please have the following table completed prior to observation of CPT meeting.

Description of Teachers in CPT Meeting

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Certification	Subjects taught	
1.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory
2.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory
3.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory
4.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory
5.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Certification	Subjects taught	
6.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory
7.	☐ Female ☐ Male	☐ White ☐ Black/ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian-American ☐ Native-American / American Indian ☐ Multiracial ☐ Other	☐ Elementary ☐ Middle level ☐ Secondary ☐ Special ed ☐ Other: _____	☐ Mathematics ☐ Science ☐ Language arts ☐ Social studies ☐ Reading ☐ Arts ☐Other:_____	☐ Enrichment/Gifted ☐ Health ☐ Phys Ed ☐ Vocational/Technical ☐ Electives/Exploratory

Observations of CPT meeting

Please indicate the amount of time (in minutes) spent on each activity and record all observations made for
each activity/behavior. Include specific, rich descriptions of all activities/behaviors you observe.

Code	Description of Activities / Behaviors	Comments & observations	Time spent (mins)
CI	Planning special team activities		
CI	Developing curriculum	For what subjects?	
CI	Coordinating and integrating curriculum across subject areas	For what subjects?	
CI	Integrating technology into the curriculum		
CI	Coordinating and/or developing student assignments		
A	Coordinating and/or developing student assessments		
A	Coordinating test preparation and state testing		
S	Discussing student learning problems/issues		
S	Discussing student behavior problems/issues		
P	Discussing activities related to parent involvement		
B	Reporting/discussing budget or fiscal issues		
B	Preparing student progress reports, report cards, attendance/behavior reports, etc.		
B	Reporting on school-wide committee meetings, team leader meetings, etc.		
B	Dealing with school-wide issues		
PD	Engaging in professional development activity		
OB	Engaging in other behaviors		

Summary Table of Observed CPT Behaviors

Please refer to the Table on p. 3 to calculate the total time spent on each category. For example, for the "Curriculum & instruction" category, sum up the six "CI" activities/behaviors on p. 3 and place the sum within the CI category in the table below.

Code	Summary Categories	Total time spent (mins)
CI	Curriculum & instruction	
A	Assessment	
S	Student	
P	Parent	
B	Business	
PD	Professional development	
OB	Engaging in Other Behaviors	

Researcher Summary

General impressions of what occurred during this CPT meeting follows.

Appendix D

Common Planning Time (CPT) Interview Protocol

Middle Level Education Research SIG

National Middle Grades Research Project

Common Planning Time (CPT) Interview Protocol

School Name: _____   Date:

_____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee Name & Number: _____   Team name: _____

_____

[Please identify this person with the number assigned in the
table on page 2 of the observation protocol.]

Interview location: _____   Grade level: _____

Duration of interview: _____hrs _____mins

Reminders:

The purpose of this interview is to engage in a purposeful conversation with the
participants regarding their experiences of common planning time. ***Before you start***
make sure that you have:

☐ *received a copy of the signed Informed Consent and given a copy to the participant*

☐ *checked the recorder settings for proper recording*

☐ *extra batteries and tapes if you are using an analogue recorder*

☐ *an extension cord for recorders that need a power source*

☐ *read the provided review of literature to become more knowledgeable about the*
topic you will be discussing in the interview

Demographic Information

1. How long have you worked as a teacher?

2. How long have you worked in a middle-grade school?

3. How long have you worked in this school?

4. Do you work full-time in this school?

5. With which grade level do you spend the majority of your time?

6. Do you work on a cross-grade team? (e.g., 6/7th grade, 7/8th grade)

7. How long have you worked with/on this team?

8. How many other teachers work with you on this team?

9. Approximately how many students are on your team?

10. What percentage of your teaching time is spent with students on your team?

11. Do you have regularly planned CPT?

12. How many times each week does your team typically meet for CPT?

13. Typically, how long (# mins) are your CPT meetings?

Teacher's Understandings of CPT (e.g., purpose, goals, value)

14. Has anyone from the school or the district explained to you why you have CPT? If yes, please explain.

15. What do you consider to be the purpose of CPT?

16. Has CPT changed the way you teach? If so, please provide an example.

17. Has CPT changed the way you manage your classroom and student behavior?

18. If so, please provide an example.

19. How would you react if you lost your CPT?

Let's move now to looking at how you use your common planning time.

Teacher Use of CPT

20.   What does your team spend time working on or discussing during common planning time?

Note to Researcher: If the interviewee needs a prompt for question "a," the list below is taken from the observation protocol and can be used to help generate conversation.

Prompts:

- Planning special team projects or activities
- Developing and using consistent curriculum
- Coordinating curriculum across subject areas
- Integrating curriculum across subject areas

- Developing interdisciplinary units

- Monitoring and coordinating student assignments and tests

- Developing consistent assessment standards across subjects

- Discussing student learning and behavior problems/issues

- Integrating technology into the curriculum

- Developing or coordinating communication with parents

- Plan or implement strategies to increase parent involvement

- Budget or fiscal issues

- Preparation of student progress reports, report cards, attendance/behavior reports, and so on.

- Updates/reports on school-wide committee meetings, team leader meetings, and so on.

21. What activities or topics consume most of your time during CPT? Please explain why these activities and topics take so much of your common planning time.

22. What do you view as the major accomplishments of your team during this current school year?

23. Does your team or representative meet with other teams? Please explain why those meeting occur or why not.

24. In what ways does the school principal or other district administrator (e.g., curriculum specialists, superintendent, middle grade supervisor, and so on.) influence your CPT work?

25. Describe the most effective use of CPT (what teachers would be doing, and so on.) in an ideal school setting.

Professional preparation is important to the success of any endeavor. The following questions relate to your teacher preparation program and the professional development experiences you have had since you started teaching. Again, I ask that you respond honestly to these items.

Professional Preparation

26. Did you receive any preparation in your teacher education program related to CPT? Please explain and provide examples.

27.   What professional development have you had to better prepare you to use common planning time? Did the idea for this professional development originate with the principal, the district office, or your team of teachers? Please explain and provide examples.

28.   What additional preparation and/or skills do you think you need to be more successful in implementing CPT?

29.   Do you believe that teachers at your school are adequately prepared (i.e., have the necessary knowledge and skills) to implement CPT? Please explain.

> *We are almost finished with the interview. I truly appreciate your time and the honesty of your responses. The next set of questions deals with the benefits you see from having common planning time.*

Perceived Benefits of CPT

30. What do you believe are important benefits of having CPT?

31. What benefits do you see resulting from CPT for teachers? Please explain.

For students? Please explain.

For the school as a whole? Please explain.

For the team? Please explain.

32. In what ways has CPT contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher? (*Prompts*: parent involvement, classroom management, instructional practice, curriculum planning, assessment strategies, job satisfaction)

33. How do you think your CPT influences student learning and achievement?

> *The final set of questions deals with the difficulties you have experienced with common planning time.*

Perceived Barriers of CPT

34. What do you find to be a difficult part of having CPT? (*Prompts:* lack of time, personalities, control)

35. Do you see any negative effects of CPT on teachers? Please explain and provide examples.

On students? Please explain and provide examples.

On your team? Please explain and provide examples.

On the school as a whole? Please explain.

36. What factors influence CPT effectiveness? (*Prompts:* personalities, certification/licensure type, teaching experience)

37. What distracts from CPT effectiveness? (*Prompts:* personalities, certification/licensure type, teaching experience)

38. Discuss any school or district level policies that affect the usefulness of your CPT.

> *Before we conclude, I have one final question that I would appreciate you thinking about.*

Final Question (Wrap-up)

39. Is there anything you would like to share with me that I did not ask?

> *I want to thank you for spending this time with me and sharing your thoughts and understandings about common planning time. You have made a significant contribution to the research on common planning time and I would be pleased to share the results of this research as they become available. If you think of something that you would like to share with me, I would be pleased to talk with you. We can arrange a time and place for that purpose. Again, thanks for sharing your perspective and experiences.*

Description of Observed Behaviors

Middle Level Education Research SIG

National Middle Grades Research Project

**Description of Behaviors Measured by the
CPT Observation Protocol**

Note to researcher: Review this list of descriptions prior to the observation and refer to it as needed during the observation. Below order follows that on p. 3 of Observation Protocol.

Planning special team activities—the coordination of team-wide activities such as fieldtrips, service learning projects, intramural sports, extracurricular events (e.g., assemblies, book fairs, after-school exploratory activities).

Developing curriculum—planning the curriculum. Curriculum includes the overall program of study and specific units of instruction. Units of instruction may be subject-specific, multidisciplinary, or integrated.

Coordinating and integrating curriculum across subject areas—discussing and aligning curriculum for multiple subject areas. Teachers on an interdisciplinary team (i.e., teams composed of different subject areas—English, mathematics, social studies, science) plan, integrate, and teach units on related topics at similar times, using topics, themes, and subjects to promote learning—though specific goals, objectives, assignments, or assessments are not aligned.

Integrating technology into the curriculum—planning and using technology as a teaching and learning tool. The goal of integrating the technology into the curriculum is to foster, expand, and enrich student learning.

Coordinating and/or developing student assignments—organizing subject-specific assignments around students' schedules. For example, planning and scheduling major assignments or projects to be conducted and completed at distinct times.

Coordinating and/or developing student assessments—organizing and scheduling subject-specific assessments to respond to students' time demands. For example, conducting weekly or unit assessments at distinct times.

Coordinating test preparation and state testing—developing and implementing a test preparation plan, organizing test preparation materials, teaching test preparation lessons, and/or conducting testing sessions.

Discussing student learning problems/issues—conferring about students' learning difficulties. Typically, the focus is on students' intellectual/cognitive ability or performance. For example, talking about a student's individual educational needs.

Discussing student behavior problems/issues—conferring about students' behavioral difficulties. Typically, the focus is on students' social, psychological, or emotional actions. For example, talking about a student's classroom behavior.

Discussing activities related to parent involvement—conferring about ways to enhance parental/family involvement. Examples include talking about strategies to enhance parent participation in school activities, broadening perceptions about what constitutes parent involvement, and planning specific activities to bring parents to school.

Reporting/discussing budget or fiscal issues—sharing team and school budget information with team members. For example, fieldtrip costs, instructional funds, and so on.

Preparing student progress reports, report cards, and attendance/behavior reports using common planning time to discuss and complete various school reports.

Reporting on school-wide committee meetings, and team leader meetings—devoting time to share information gathered at specific meetings.

Dealing with school-wide issues—discussing and formulating solutions in response to school-wide issues. For example, tardy policy, absenteeism, lunchroom behavior, dress code, and so on.

Engaging in professional development activity—participating in planned professional development during common planning time. For example, working with a consultant to evaluate student work, attending a session about strategies to engage English Language Learners, and so on.

Engaging in other behaviors—members of the team are not engaged during the team meeting. For example, taking personal phone calls, grading papers, talking with others about personal business, discussing weekend outings or good places to eat, planning wedding or baby showers, celebrating birthdays, complaining about school-related issues, and so on.

Appendix F

Interview Transcript Data Guidelines

Middle Level Education Research SIG

National Middle Grades Research Project

Common Planning Time (CPT) Interview Protocol

Interview Transcript Submission Cover Page

All interview protocol data are required to be transcribed prior to submission to the NMGRP. Please include a copy of this cover page for each interview that is submitted to the project.

If, for example, you observed a CPT team meeting that included four teachers and you decided to interview all four teachers. You would include four copies of this Interview Transcript Submission Cover Page — one for each interview conducted.

School Name: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee name & number: _____

Team name: _____

[Please identify this person with the number assigned in the table on page 2 of the observation protocol.]

Interview location: _____

Grade level: _____

Duration of interview: _____hrs _____mins*

Specific Guidelines for Interview Transcripts

- Transcripts of all interviews should be typed with one inch margins in MS Word format.

- Please include page numbers on bottom center of each page.

- Interview transcripts—with corresponding cover pages—should be submitted via e-mail to the Project Coordinator within eight weeks of when the interviews were conducted.

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VITA

Kelly Charles Flax was born on September 25, 1967, in Kansas City, Kansas. After attending public elementary and middle school in Andale, Kansas and Hays, Kansas, he graduated from Thomas More Prep – Marion High School in Hays, Kansas in 1986. He began his college work at Rockhurst University in 1986, and completed course work from 1987 to 1990 from Fort Hays State University earning a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Mathematics. Mr. Flax began teaching high school math in Paolo, Kansas. During this time, he was able to earn a Masters Degree in Education Administration from Fort Hays State University in 1994.

After serving as a teacher at Georgeff-Baker Middle School in Blue Springs, Missouri from 1996-1998, Mr. Flax pursued administrative positions in the Blue Springs R-IV School District. Mr. Flax has served as the Principal of the Middle Level Alternative School for two years, Assistant Principal at Brittany Hill Middle School for one year, Principal for eight years at James Lewis Elementary School, and is currently in his second year as the Principal of Thomas Ultican Elementary School, all within the Blue Springs School District.

During his time in the Blue Springs R-IV School District, Mr. Flax became a doctoral candidate in the Division of Urban Leadership and Policy Studies in Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City where he earned his Doctor of Education in May, 2011.