

PREFACE

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Guest Editors

While on every front in the field of middle level education there is a heightened response to the need for better education for young adolescents. Perhaps nowhere is it more critical to intervene in the educational cycle than at the point of ensuring effective specialized professional preparation for teachers of those adolescents. Recognizing teacher quality as the single-most important variable for student learning (Fallon, 2007), we would naturally “get the most bang for the buck” by attending to the ways and means through which the middle school faculty who are currently or will be shortly assuming responsibility for teaching millions of young adolescents are themselves being educated. Somewhat surprising, these voluble calls for specialized preparation have been made for nearly a century beginning before “the middle school movement” (Briggs, 1920), during the shift from junior high schools to middle schools (National Middle School Association, 1982), and they continue to be sounded today (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012). Thus we are reassured and gratified that the *Middle Grades Research Journal* under its new editorial team has elected to publish a special-themed issue on middle level teacher preparation so that the call may be heeded and substantive improve-

ment in the education of our nation’s young people soon realized.

Volume 7, Number 4 of the *MGRJ* includes 5 articles, 3 corresponding to the level of individual teacher development, 1 about a pedagogical tool used to develop special attributes of the middle grades teacher, and finally, 1 that explores a program with a history of effectiveness. When reviewing the writing that came into us from a call issued over a year ago we were struck by the tight scope of scholarship the submissions represented. This observation, as well as our own experience, suggests that the responsibilities of middle level teacher educators may be so expansive and onerous that conducting large scale research is simply not possible for those at teaching institutions who already must split their focus among multiple people (students, candidates, educators, colleagues), in disparate places (university, field), and within complex political arenas (accreditors, state and national policy agencies) virtually simultaneously. Given the necessity of having well-prepared middle grades faculty, and the extensive range of roles that teacher educators fill, this too may become an area that will need comprehensive attention and response in the not-too-distant future. In this issue of *MGRJ* we are delighted to share

the work of several scholars, our colleagues, who are advancing the field of middle level teacher preparation in addition to carrying out the work that ensures that young adolescents have exemplary teachers. At the same time we present these articles we underscore the immediate need for more research to help place our field on firmer footing. As we are able to enhance the scope of our research undertakings middle level teacher educators can then move forward with greater certainty to offer more effective programs and better prepare teachers who serve the needs of young adolescents.

The question as to why someone preparing for a career in education might choose to become an expert at the middle level was answered in two studies. The first, conducted by Molly Mee, Heather Rogers Haverback, and Jeff Passe, investigated the reasons a group of preservice teachers in a secondary program chose instead to become middle grades certified. The second article in this issue explores this phenomenon from the opposite angle. Nicole Thompson surveyed and interviewed elementary education majors as they progressed through a series of learning experiences directed toward becoming competent in middle grades teaching to ascertain whether they increased their interest or efficacy with regard to working with young adolescents. Finally, still at the level of individual matters of becoming middle grades teachers, Fanni Coward, Shirley Matteson, and Doug Hamman used case studies of two candidates completing a middle grades teacher education program as they developed professional identities consistent with the preparation standards of the Association of Middle Level Education. Their findings also served as an analysis of the degree of success of their program in terms of meeting all Association of Middle Level Education standards.

Case study was again invoked for the subsequent article but for this research, not as a method of investigation, rather as a pedagogical tool. Here identifying whether candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and disposi-

tions of professional middle level teachers and how best to do so was the purpose of Penny Howell's study. She assessed how an assignment for candidates to examine young adolescent development through case study, called Child Study Projects, enabled them to conceptualize developmentally responsive practices for teaching young adolescents. Similar to Coward et al. she became aware of aspects of responsive teaching that candidates were *not* acquiring, thereby enabling her to improve her own teacher preparation program.

This issue concludes with an article taking the widest perspective on middle level teacher preparation of the five. Rong-Ji Chen, Erika Daniels, Mae Chaplin, Moses Ochanji, Laura Stowell, and Janet McDaniel, who collaborate as authors as well as coimplementers of the only middle level teacher credential program in the state of California, explain how a set of principles grounded in philosophy of middle grades education and providing socially equitable learning experiences to young adolescents has allowed them for over 20 years to successfully navigate the challenges so many teacher educator programs face today. This may serve to inform and inspire those of us who must confront similar trials.

Once again, we express our appreciation for having a venue to bring important topics of middle level teacher preparation to the foreground for our colleagues to consider. As we near the century mark of a consistent cry for staffing middle schools with educators who can address the distinctiveness of 10- to 15 year-olds perhaps we will recognize that research in middle level teacher preparation is the appropriate location to apply a fulcrum if we are to work thoughtfully yet efficiently to improve educational outcomes for all young adolescents. To accomplish this we need to take up the subject of creating stronger linkages between higher educators in research and teaching institutions to forge opportunities for collaborative research efforts on middle level teacher preparation. We intend for this issue of *MGRJ* to open that conversation.

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