

**University of Washington, Bothell
Education Program**

**LIFE AND LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL
BEDUC 480**

UWB prepares innovative, ethical practitioners who are grounded in intellectual and professional communities and who are dedicated to educating diverse students.

Text: Walley, C. and Gerrick, W. (1999). *Affirming middle grades education*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

National Middle School Association. (1995). *This we believe: Developmentally responsive middle level schools*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

E-Reserve: Additional required readings and course materials are on electronic reserve.

Website: National Middle School Association
<http://www.nmsa.org/>

Middle School Journal: Three articles related to middle school teaching in math, science, language arts, and/or social studies.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Students taking this course will be expected to evidence knowledge related to the following areas:

- development and needs of young adolescents (ages 10-14) within the matrix of their social, cultural, and societal contexts;
- instructional practices supportive of young adolescents with emphasis on diversity of modes of learning;
- philosophical, historical, sociological, and political foundations of middle school education
- organizational structure of middle schools, e.g., teams, flexible block scheduling; integrative curriculum

COURSE METHODOLOGY

This course is linked to a 2-credit school-based practicum (BEDUC 452). While in the field, students will spend a minimum of 40 hours in either a middle school or a junior high school. Consequently, course work will draw on observations made in these school settings and also require implementation of some course assignments at school sites.

A lecture-discussion format will alternate with small group conversations about readings and assignments. Guest speakers such as middle level teachers, counselors, and administrators will be an important component of the course. Case studies and young adolescent literature will also be used.

The purpose of focusing small and large group discussions around field experiences, adolescent literature and cases, and guest speakers is to make more visible the relationships between the specific needs of young adolescents and middle school philosophy, organization and instruction.

COURSE READINGS and DUE DATES

- Week 1: The “excluded middle”—what is it? Has it been an opportunity for reconceptualized and progressive visions of teaching and learning to emerge?
- Week 2: Young adolescents—who are these people? How are they alike and different from the child who preceded them and the older adolescent who will follow?
- Week 3: Classroom learning community—what are the particular challenges facing middle school teachers as they work to establish a community of learners? How do teachers get to know their students and their peer relations in ways that translate to meaningful instruction?
- Week 4: Morally responsive teaching—what does that look like in a middle school environment? Should a teacher be intentional in developing moral reasoning in young adolescents and, if so, how?
- Week 5: Middle school structure—how does it support the development and needs of the young adolescent? How does the concept of teaching teams contribute to building a sense of community?
- Week 6: Teacher teams—why is teaming the keystone of restructuring in the middle school? What are the benefits associated with teaming and how does the advocacy role of the teacher change in relation to colleagues and in relation to students?
- Week 7: Interdisciplinary and interthematic curriculum design—how does this support and enhance learning opportunities? How does an integrative curriculum provide increased flexibility for teacher and learner and contribute to more meaningful relationships?
- Week 8: Teaching and learning in the middle school—what does it look like from the perspective of the teacher and from the perspective of the learner? What do real stories from the middle school tell us about the teaching/learning

relationship? How do teachers help their students learn to think about their thinking?

Week 9: Partnerships between educators and parents—how do teachers invite family participation in schooling in ways that honor today’s diversified family structures? In particular, how can young adolescents be supported in the challenging transition from elementary school to middle school?

Week 10: The successful middle school—what does it look like? What does research suggest about factors such as school climate, conceptual foundations, student achievement, openness to change, student-teacher relationships?

COURSE EVALUATION

Each of the course assignments below will constitute 20% of your final grade. The remaining 20% will be a function of the quality of your participation in large and small group discussions based on readings, videos, and responses to guest speakers. Sometimes short written responses will also be required.

Conversations with Young Adolescents. Historically the middle school years have been a challenging and often confusing time in the growth and development of young adolescents. Labels such as “hormones with legs” and “range of the strange” are detrimental to young people who are trying desperately to “fit in” and find their place in this new world of adolescence. You will interview three young adolescents (ages 10 – 14) who are attending a middle school or junior high school. Your interviews will focus on what they like and do not like about their school. For those things that they do not like, you will ask how they would make changes and why those changes would be an improvement. Use a pseudonym for both the students’ names and the names of the school. You should interview these adolescents separately, not as a group. Your paper should be 3 pages in length and should focus on what seems most important to young adolescents. The paper should be descriptive, not interpretive, and will be shared in class discussions. (20% of grade)

Teacher Team Interview. Teachers in middle level schools place heavy emphasis on collaboration in the day-to-day aspects of teaching with colleagues as well as external constituencies of families and community members. They often operate as student advisory teams as well as instructional teams. You will schedule interview time (which will likely require more than one session) to talk with a teacher team. You should find out when and how they function as a team and for what purposes. You should also find out the extent to which they interact with families and other community members in efforts to promote student success. Your interview should be summarized in a 4-page written report that will be shared in class discussions. (20% of grade)

Integrative Curriculum Plan. The middle school emphasizes an interdisciplinary and integrative curriculum. Therefore, teachers at middle level schools are encouraged to be endorsed in at least two teaching fields. You will be responsible for designing an integrative instructional plan for teaching a topic that incorporates knowledge from several broad fields. Consult with the teachers at your assigned school and incorporate their suggestions where appropriate. Modify the plan to incorporate reading and writing as feasible. If there is an instructional planning format used at your school site, then you may use that format. Otherwise, a suggested format will be provided. (20% of grade)

Adolescent Literature Comparison. Teachers of the middle grades want their students to read good literature that broadens the young adolescent's sense of the world and of themselves and that also connects with the school curriculum. This literature is not always the same as that chosen by young adolescents themselves. You will read a book, selection from a book, or an article that talks about using adolescent literature in the classroom. (The following website may be helpful in your search for this reading: <http://www.literacymatters.org/adlit/selecting/intro.htm>) You will also read a book that a young adolescent has read and recommends to you or a book that the school librarian says is popular with young adolescents. You will write a 5-page paper in which you discuss the similarities and the differences that you find between the readings. In your paper you will also address the question: Is there evidence that educators are successful in incorporating the interests of young adolescent readers within the context of the school curriculum? (20% of grade)

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