Beliefs and Practices of Middle School Language Arts Teachers.

Suzan Anderson

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/6718

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

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

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

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

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

Suzán Anderson
B.A., Southern University in New Orleans and University of Haiti, 1975
M.A., Xavier University, 1985
August, 1998

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
DEDICATION

This dissertation research is dedicated to my mother, Mrs. Sedonia Anderson, for without her prayers and constant words of encouragement, I would not have persevered.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. Gary Rice and Dr. Earl Cheek, you have become a part of my family. Through your strength, knowledge and perseverance, I have grown professionally. You never allowed me to give up during difficult times. Thank you for believing in me.

To Dr. William Pinar, who has worked with me since the beginning of my doctoral training. It was an honor to work with an accomplished writer.

To Dr. Peter Soderbergh for your support and expertise. To Dr. Laura Hardester, Dr. Darcas English and Dr. Addison Carey, your valuable assistance will never be forgotten. To Ms. Marla Jefferson, my typist, who worked above and beyond the call of duty. To Cristy Noel for her expertise as editor.

To the principals of Orleans parish, Mr. Martin Marino, Ms. Betty Anderson, and Mr. Leonard Parker. I wish to thank you for your support and insight as administrators.

Finally, to my family and friends who prayed for me. Your support gave me strength at my weakest moments.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ..................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ....................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................... vii

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................... 1
  Purpose Of The Study .............................................................................................. 7
  Historical Perspective - The Setting .................................................................... 9
  Significance ........................................................................................................... 12
  Research Questions ............................................................................................. 15
  Definition of Terms .............................................................................................. 16
  Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 20

CHAPTER TWO. RESEARCH ON TEACHING BELIEFS AND PRACTICES .................. 24
  Defining Beliefs and Knowledge ........................................................................... 25
  Characteristics of Teachers' Beliefs ........................................................................ 27
  Other Factors That Influence Teaching Practices ................................................. 31
  Teachers' Beliefs, Administrators' Beliefs, and Parental Beliefs ................................ 36
  Teaching Experience .............................................................................................. 43
  Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Adolescent Development ................. 46
  Integrated vs. Separate Curriculum ....................................................................... 50
  Meaning-Driven vs. Skill-Driven Curriculum ..................................................... 50
  Incidental vs. Explicit Learning ............................................................................. 51
  Heterogeneous vs. Homogeneous Grouping ....................................................... 52
  Ready Now vs. Getting Ready .............................................................................. 53
  Child-Centered vs. Teacher Directed ..................................................................... 53
  Autonomy vs. Heteronomy ................................................................................... 54
  Previous Knowledge vs. Previous Skill .................................................................. 55
  Thinking vs. Practice ............................................................................................. 55
  Human-as-Instrument vs. Test-as Instrument ...................................................... 55
  Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 63

CHAPTER THREE. RESEARCH DESIGN .................................................................... 67
  Selection of Participants ......................................................................................... 68
  Background Information of Language Arts Teachers ........................................... 70
  Selecting Classrooms for Observation .................................................................. 70
  Administration of Biographical Data, Observations and v

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1-1. SELECTED MILESTONES IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF EARLY ADOLESCENCE ..................................................3

TABLE 2-1. DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE ASSESSMENT INVENTORY ....................................................51

TABLE 2-2. DORMAN'S SEVEN NEEDS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS ....64

TABLE 2-3. TURNING POINT'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROPRIATE PRACTICES .......................................................65

TABLE 3-1. DIVISION OF SUBGROUPS .................................................................70

TABLE 3-2. DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS ............................................................71

TABLE 4-1. INSTRUCTIONAL SOURCES ........................................................................82

TABLE 4-2. DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION IMPLEMENTATION SCALE ...............................................................88

TABLE 5-1. IMPLEMENTATION AND STRATEGIES FOR APPRIATE INSTRUCTION .................................................................107

TABLE 5-2. TEACHER CATEGORIES ........................................................................109

TABLE 5-3. ATTENDANCE AND PRESENTATION TO CONVENTIONS WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS ................................111
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the instructional beliefs and practices of middle school language arts teachers as they relate to developmentally appropriate/inappropriate instruction. Developmentally appropriate instruction is defined as matching the curricula to the level of children's emerging mental abilities. If the learner is seen as a growing individual with developing abilities, then the aim of education should be to facilitate this development. This in turn means that the curricula must be studied and analyzed to determine that level of mental ability that is required to comprehend curriculum materials (Elkind, 1970).

There is some concern that what is considered to be appropriate instruction in the language arts curriculum and the middle school milieu may not be widely practiced (Wood & Muth, 1991; Irvin, 1990; Elkind, 1989). Research on beliefs and practices has shown that: 1) practice is greatly influenced by teaching (Clark & Yinger, 1979); 2) teaching is guided by thoughts, decisions and judgments (Clark & Yinger, 1979); 3) it is not clear how beliefs are formed, supported or weakened, or how individuals are influenced to embrace one's belief system over another (Nespor, 1987; Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990).

This study investigated the relationship between middle school language arts teachers' professed beliefs and practices and their actual classroom practices. Through an in depth examination of the data, this research produced findings that are deemed crucial for curricular organizational and instructional practices that reflect young adults' development. Researchers have
demonstrated that beliefs influence knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content and comprehension monitoring (Pajares, 1992; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Nespor, 1987; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Ennis, 1994). Such research may reveal how teachers interpret and define the goals and curricula for preservice teachers education programs. Research on the entering beliefs of novice teachers would help teacher educators with important information on how to determine the directions for curricula programs.

Attention should be given to understanding how beliefs interact with other beliefs in order to present a coherent pattern of thought and action rather than looking at beliefs only as isolated cognitive phenomena. Thus, understanding the belief systems of teachers, including how beliefs interact with one another (whether favorably or unfavorably may enhance the working of technical innovations when they are implemented.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Researchers and writers have suggested that learners’ developmental levels should provide the basis for school curricular and instructional practices, as well as the overall teaching-learning environment. For decades, the role of schools for ten to fourteen year-olds’ remained unclear. The problem may have resulted from the mindset that the elementary school should address the education needs of the childhood years and the secondary school should focus upon the adolescent years (Manning, 1993). Except for serving as a transition between the two, the middle level school lacked a clear rationale.

Historically, young people who actually had access to schooling received a common set of experiences without regard for developmental needs and interests (Manning, 1993). The lack of value placed on the childhood years contributed to children being treated and taught alike. John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau offered the first significant attempts to change the attitudes toward children and the childhood years. Locke, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), stressed the uniqueness of the childhood years and the importance of recognizing children’s developmental needs and interests. Similarly, Rousseau described in *Emile* (1763) children’s growth and emphasized the necessity of learning experiences based on developmental levels.

As recognition of early adolescence increased, education began calling attention to the need to base teaching-learning experiences on ten to fourteen

1

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
year-olds developmental characteristics. Educators also considered developmentally appropriate practices important in lesson plans and implementing instruction. Developmentally appropriate practices are defined by the following when instructional planning and implementation is considered: 1) adapting to the wide range of cognitive capabilities of students; 2) providing a wide variety of cognitive learning experiences, both concrete and abstract; 3) adapting to the constantly changing interests and limited attention spans of students; 4) stressing individualization and cognitively appropriate materials and activities; 5) providing reading experiences that adapt to a number of reading levels and stress holistic rather than skills approaches; finally, providing language arts experiences that emphasize communication skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and de-emphasize the study of grammar (Manning, 1993).

Developmentally appropriate practices address young adolescents’ increasing ability to think abstractly, hypothetically, reflectively and critically. Middle school language arts teachers need to provide educational experiences that allow learners to engage in higher levels of cognitive thought and activity. Lesson plans and teaching units should reflect consideration of students’ individual learning styles and varying intelligence. Rather than assume that young adolescents function in the concrete operations stage or the formal operations stage, teachers need to assess student’s levels of thought prior to reaching curricular and instruction decisions, thus ensuring developmental
appropriateness. Learning requires that adolescents be given the opportunity to manipulate and think about objects.

Table 1-1 Selected Milestones In The Acceptance Of Early Adolescence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>G. Stanley Hall published two volume work, <em>Adolescence</em></td>
<td>First recognition of adolescence as worthy period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>A. Blair and W. Burton published <em>Growth and Development of the Preadolescent</em></td>
<td>An effort to study a neglected field, psychology of preadolescence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>David Eichhorn published <em>The Middle School</em></td>
<td>Proposed the importance of basing instruction on development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>R. Havighurst studied the middle school</td>
<td>Proposed 10-14 year olds experienced specific age-level developmental tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>J. Kagan and R. Coles published <em>Twelve to Sixteen Early Adolescence</em></td>
<td>Scholarly volume with fourteen readings on 10-14 year olds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>H. Thornburg published <em>Preadolescent Development</em></td>
<td>Showed increasing acceptance of a specific developmental period for 10-14 year olds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>J. Lipsitz published <em>Growing Up Forgotten</em></td>
<td>Proposed the early adolescence developmental period was forgotten and needed attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>H. Thornburg founded the <em>Journal of Early Adolescence</em></td>
<td>The first scholarly research focusing on 10-14 year olds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>G. Dorman published <em>Middle Grades Assessment Program and Making Schools Work for Young Adolescents</em></td>
<td>Proposed schools needed to become more responsive to development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1980's</td>
<td>National, state and foundation reports appearing on reforming middle schools</td>
<td>Major attention on the needs of young adolescents and effective practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research indicates that there is a significant gap between theory and the use of developmentally appropriate practices (Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990). The
developmental appropriate philosophy defines the adolescent learner as having developing mental abilities. All individuals (with the exception of the retarded) are assumed to be able to attain these abilities, though not necessarily at the same age (Elkind, 1989). In essence, the developmental appropriate philosophy recognizes individual differences in ability and individual differences in rates of intellectual growth (Elkind, 1989).

From a developmental perspective, in order for students to experience success in light of ability and individual difference, the curriculum must be matched to the level of the adolescent's emerging mental abilities. In so doing, Elkind, (1989) emphasizes that merely knowing the stages of mental development does not provide special insight into how adolescents use the operations at any given stage to attain any particular concept. Equating ability or achievement levels with development can result in dire consequences for academic achievement and self-esteem (Manning, 1993).

In order to avoid this problem, teachers should be aware of the following: most middle level students function primarily at the concrete level, they should be provided with strategies for connecting new information to what is already known and learning strategies must be selected in order to accommodate their special and varied needs.

The developmental approach promotes the idea that there can be differences in knowledge without any reference to "right" or "wrong". The idea of difference rather than of correctness is important not only with respect to fundamental knowledge but also with respect to creative thinking (Elkind,
The aim of developmental appropriate instruction is twofold. First, if the learner is seen as a growing individual with developing abilities and the learning is regarded as a creative activity, then the aim of education must surely be to facilitate this development.

The second aim of developmental appropriate instruction is to produce thinkers who are creative and critical. This will not be achieved by teaching thinking skills to adolescents. Rather, the way to pursue this aim is by creating environments that challenge the adolescent’s emerging mental abilities. Creative thinking and critical thinking are not skills to be taught and learned. They reflect basic orientations toward the self and the world that can be acquired only when adolescents are actively engaged in constructing and reconstructing their physical, social and moral worlds (Elkind, 1989).

Developmental appropriate practice uses the concepts of age appropriateness (knowledge of the typical development of adolescents within an age span) and individual appropriateness (uniqueness of the individual). Appropriate practice includes providing experiences that meet the needs of individual adolescents and promoting self-esteem and positive feelings toward learning (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts & Hernandez, 1991). The environment provides for active exploration and concrete experiences. Positive guidance techniques are used and adolescents have opportunities to make choices. Their natural curiosity and desire to make sense out of the world motivates their learning (Liska, 1974). Researchers contend that developmentally appropriate practices for the middle school address this need (Elkind, 1970, Irvin, 1990;
Wood & Muth, 1991; Battista, 1993). Developmentally appropriate classrooms are defined as ones in which both teachers and students learn from one another. Teachers spend much of their time moving throughout the room, working with children individually and in small informal groups. Teachers initiate learning activities as well as respond to adolescents initiatives. As opportunities arise, teachers present students with challenges that help them move beyond their current understandings and strategies (Kostelnik, 1992).

Shapiro & White (1990) suggest that classroom practices are strongly influenced by practical realities of classroom life, teachers' beliefs, teachers' perceptions of administrative desires and beliefs, and the beliefs of parents. Research findings indicate that most people behave in ways which are different from the way they describe the things they actually do (Liska, 1974). In other words, Liska is alluding to the fact does incongruency exist regarding teachers' beliefs and their observed classroom practice?

Duffy (1982) proposes that the need to have a well managed classroom is the actual driving force behind most teachers' instructional practices. In order to ascertain what knowledge students bring to the learning environment, it is incumbent upon teachers to reflect upon and question why they are using specific instructional practices. Teachers have many beliefs about what is to be taught in the classroom. However, are successful beliefs and practices actually carried over to the classroom? If this is not the case, why is this so?
**Purpose Of The Study**

The purpose of this research is to ascertain 1) how language arts teachers define middle school language arts instruction, 2) how language arts teachers apply what they know about middle school instruction, 3) the appropriate/inappropriate teaching practices implemented in the classroom, and 4) what influences language arts teacher's beliefs and practices. It is hoped that this study contributes to veteran teachers and to those in teacher education programs as they reflect upon curriculum and pedagogical decisions.

Research findings suggest that educational beliefs of pre-service teachers play a pivotal role in the acquisition and interpretation of knowledge (Pajares, 1992). Subsequently, teaching behavior and unexplored entering beliefs may be responsible for the perpetuation of antiquated and ineffectual teaching practices (Pajares, 1992). Beliefs influence knowledge acquisition, interpretation, task definition and selection and interpretation of course content (Pearson, 1985). Research has shown that certain beliefs not only cause practitioners to implement an inappropriate curriculum, but also block their understanding and acceptance of current trends in language arts (Pajares, 1992; Jennings, 1992; Battista, 1993).

Teachers' beliefs play a major role in defining teachings tasks and organizing the knowledge and information relevant to those tasks. Pajares (1992) explains that the "earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure the more difficult it is to alter"(p.26). In addition, beliefs influence final judgment across one's career. Once teachers make a judgment and find it effective, they
are likely to incorporate the solution as part of a belief (Nespor, 1987). These beliefs influence teachers’ perceptions of the usefulness of alternative strategies or judgments and influence their willingness to consider and use new information (Pajares, 1992).

In order to have useful strategies or judgments, educators must realize that in order to educate middle school students effectively, they must base curricular and instructional decisions on a sound understanding of their developmental needs. To further one’s understanding of the developmental needs of the middle school student, the following factors must be taken into consideration:

1. Young adolescents experience dramatic and rapid biological, social, emotional and cognitive changes.

2. Instead of developmentally appropriate education, young adolescents often receive curricular and instructional experiences that are either a repeat of elementary school experiences or a “watered down version” of secondary school experiences.

3. Young adolescents are too often considered a homogeneous group without regard for the gender, culture, social class and individual differences.

4. Young adolescents often attend middle level schools that place major emphasis (or the only emphasis) on school organization (academics). These schools fail to develop a genuine middle level curriculum or an educational environment conducive to academic, personal and social growth.
5. Young adolescents often attend schools staffed by teachers and administrators who have been trained and certified to work in elementary or secondary schools and who know little about young adolescents and their development.

6. Young adolescents are taught language arts in some instances as an isolated discipline rather than being taught information that incorporates subject matter from all disciplines (Pajares, 1992).

This research considered the above mentioned factors paramount to further understanding and clarifying the beliefs and practices of middle schools language arts teachers.

**Historical Perspective - The Setting**

This research afforded me a rewarding, but challenging opportunity to view middle school learners. The middle grades are critical because adolescents undergo enormous cognitive, physical, social, emotional and moral changes that have direct implications for the classroom. As I visited the classrooms, the major emphasis was on providing a transition from the comfort and familiarity of the elementary grades to the competition and rigor prevalent at the high school level.

The schools are known as: A) River Middle School; B) Oak’s Middle School; C) Bayou Middle School. Within each of the three schools, interdisciplinary teams composed of a small group of teachers were formed. These individuals represented a content area (science, math, social studies and language arts) and planned together and taught the same group of
students. Exploratory programs were designed to help students pursue their interests and talents by choosing classes from special interest areas.

Advisory programs assigned all adults in the school to a small group of students. Teachers met with the students two or three times a week to discuss personal and academic concerns. Organizing middle schools around these three components—interdisciplinary teams, advisor programs and exploratory programs—is a first step toward alleviating the "volatile mismatch between the organization and curriculum of middle schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of adolescents" (Wood & Muth, 1991, p.35).

In order to determine how this concept was conceptualized, the focal point became the language arts teachers and how they instructed students in motivation, interest and developmentally appropriate practices. Furthermore, teachers' knowledge and beliefs became instrumental in the curriculum decision-making process. In addition, teachers' abilities to select and convey content appropriate to the learner within a particular contextual setting and situation drew closer attention to their beliefs. Through observations and interviews, beliefs influenced decisions associated with evaluation, judgment of content, teaching strategies and task selection in some classes. In others, teachers demonstrated practices that are considered developmentally appropriate and based on current trends and strategies for middle schools learners.

Middle school language arts teachers involved in this study following a non-traditional approach designed their language arts lessons in three ways to
ensure student success. First, more time was spent on instructional readiness. A sound instructional framework included a pre-reading (preparation phase), a guided reading phase, and post-reading (follow-up) activities. Teachers also followed with a demonstration, guided or independent practice. As part of the preparation phase, teachers established a background by eliciting students' prior knowledge of a topic. This was accomplished through brainstorming techniques, teacher-directed pre-reading strategies, or visualization techniques.

Second, vocabulary work was thorough and varied. Students were not involved in defining words and then tested on a list of words. To do otherwise is referred to as "depth of processing" and leaves students with only a surface familiarity with new concepts (Wood & Muth, 1991). As a result, students frequently fail to integrate the new words into their everyday working vocabularies. Instead, teachers employed vocabulary development strategies that combined definition and content along with semantic mapping.

Third, teachers were aware that the textbook is still the predominant instructional material for adolescents. Some teachers continued to lecture directly from textbooks, leaving students with little incentive to read on their own. To alleviate this problem, other teachers developed questions in the form of study guides, which students used as aids while reading. Teachers also reduced the amount of text that students must deal with on their own by encouraging peer reading and recall strategies.

Finally, non-traditional teachers assisted students in developing effective questioning, critical thinking and problem-solving strategies. As a means of
extending students beyond the literal recall of learning, teachers used predicted outcomes and shared-inquiry techniques. Small group problem-solving sessions were extremely beneficial as a means of encouraging adolescents to collaborate on demanding and challenging tasks.

As stated above, laudable organizational and instructional changes occurred in the middle schools involved in this study. However, belief systems significant to this research in three aspects: 1) Why do teachers hold certain beliefs however defined and labeled about their work, their students, their subject matter, roles and responsibilities? 2) Why do teachers state that they do one thing which in practice is totally different? 3) Why do individuals tend to hold on to beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge, even after scientifically correct explanations are presented to them? Therefore, I posed the following questions:

1. To what extent are developmentally appropriate practices being implemented in middle school language arts classes?

2. What relationships exist between teachers' beliefs and implementing developmentally appropriate instruction?

Significance

It is very important to examine middle school language arts teachers' instructional beliefs and practices. This is predicated on the fact that a large number of educators, despite current research and trends appropriate for middle school learners, continue to utilize traditional inappropriate instructional methods (Irvin, 1990).
Educators still erroneously assume that large numbers of middle school students possess the capacity to perform on a more abstract level than development permits (Irvin, 1990). Such perceptions reflect an inaccurate understanding of the differences between the intellectual and socio-emotional readiness of most middle level learners. Middle school learners should not be placed on the same level as the more intellectually mature high school student (Irvin, 1990). A lack of this clarification in state educational regulations, combined with parental expectations, has placed substantial numbers of middle school learners in situations that are extremely frustrating. This in itself can put students at risk of poor school achievement.

Significant as the status of teachers’ instructional beliefs and practices are, Epstein (1981) suggests that the problem is still misunderstood. Many teachers still do not implement the following:

1. Identification and diagnosis of student cognitive levels.
2. Organized learning activities that match student readiness to learn information.
3. Facilitation of student efforts to consolidate and mature previously initiated thinking skills.
4. Introduction of new and higher level thinking skills that demonstrate student readiness.

Previous research has cited the need to document the presence of developmentally appropriate and/or inappropriate instructional beliefs and practices, as reported by a sample of urban middle school language arts
teachers (Epstein, 1981; Irvin, 1990; Wood & Muth, 1991). The findings contributed to the current body of knowledge in this area. It is hoped that this study will provide information documenting the current beliefs and practices of middle school language arts teachers. As a result, the information may serve as the basis for designing curricular and instructional reform.

A review of the research as reported in this introduction suggests that teachers may be handicapped by the curriculum they believe that they must teach. Teachers may also be torn between their genuine care about students and the expectations that they submit, instruct, assign and carry forward to the mandated curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to determine what factors influence teachers to implement developmentally appropriate/inappropriate beliefs and practices in middle school language arts. According to Charlesworth et al (1991), in order to understand what determines teachers' decisions in planning, teaching and assessing, we need to understand what teachers believe to be important. Instructional practices have been instituted in classrooms because teachers may feel pressured by school districts to upgrade national test grades, which results in increased teacher accountability and may influence textbook selections (Clinchy, 1991). Research has suggested that the stronger the teachers' beliefs in developing appropriate practices, the more likely they are to implement these practices in classroom instruction (Charlesworth et al, 1991).

Finally, the information presented above from researchers has several indications for the significance and understanding of teachers' beliefs and
practices. First, if we are interested in why teachers organize and run classrooms as they do, we must pay more attention to the goals they pursue. These goals may be multiple, conflicting, inconsistent, or unrelated goals. Second, more attention should be given to the functions of teachers’ beliefs and their roles, their students, the subject matters they teach and the school system they work in. Third, beliefs are very important determinants of how individuals define tasks and problems and how they organize the world.

**Research Questions**

The present study investigated teacher beliefs and practices and the relationship to developmentally appropriate instruction. The research was limited to three urban middle schools in one parish of Louisiana. The research questions listed below were investigated:

1. To what degree do middle school language art teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices?
2. By what strategies/techniques do middle school language arts teachers communicate their beliefs and practices?
3. What is the relationship between years of teaching experience and the degree of developmentally appropriate/inappropriate beliefs and practices of middle school language arts teachers?
4. What are the constraining forces that contribute to a teacher’s understanding of developmentally appropriate practice.
Definition of Terms

Adolescence - A bridge between childhood and adulthood. It is a period through which individuals must pass before they are to take their place as mature, responsible, and creative adults. During this stage, developmental growth become more pronounced, cognitively, emotionally, physically, and in attitudes and values. Rapid change also occurs in relationships with parents, peers, freedom and responsibility. During this period individuals believe that adult privileges which are not accorded them are due. This ends when the full power and social status of the adult are accorded to the individual by society (Elkind, 1970).

Concrete Operations Level - Occurs from about seven to eleven or twelve years of age. Children show a greater capacity for logical reasoning. This level is entitled concrete because it involves concrete elements or hand-on experiences, (objects, relations) operations (such as addition or subtraction) and rules or properties that describe the way the operation may be performed. One of the reasons that students can think logically is that they are able to arrange objects in different levels of hierarchy at the same time. This gives students the ability to understand the relations of the parts to the whole, the whole to the parts, and the parts to parts. Students also learn serialization or serial ordering. Serialization occurs when students learn that different objects may be grouped by size, by alphabetical order, age, or that an object may simultaneously belong to more than one class. They learn that different combinations of numbers make the same total. In addition, substitutions may
be made with the same result. Finally, concrete students cannot take an idea from the possible to the abstract. They require many hands-on experiences, examples and demonstrations (Elkind, 1970).

**Formal Operational Level** - Begins about twelve years of age and becomes firmly established in some individuals by age fifteen. Formal operations adolescents are able through inductive reasoning to systematize their ideas. They are also able to deal critically with their thinking and develop theories about the process of thinking. These adolescents are able to orient themselves toward what is abstract and not immediately present (Elkind, 1970).

**Developmentally Appropriate Practices** - is defined as a principle that promotes a curriculum that should be both age and individually appropriate. It developed as a reaction to the school reform which meant to counter the trend toward test driven curriculum and instruction and rigid teacher-directed pedagogy. Developmentally appropriate practices include a curriculum for all domains of development; emphasis on learning as an interactive process; learning activities that are concrete, real and relevant; and learning activities that provide for a variety of activities in order to accommodate a wide range of abilities, interests, and skills outside the normal range of development.

Developmental appropriate practices implement teaching methods that are student-centered and integrated across subject matter; the focus is on active learning within meaningful contexts. Developmentally appropriate practice uses the concepts of age appropriateness and the uniqueness of the individual. In doing so, the concept emphasizes the fact that merely knowing...
the stages of mental development (concrete or formal) does not provide special insight into how adolescents use the operations at any given stage to attain any particular concept (Wood & Muth, 1991).

**Developmentally Inappropriate Practice** - Instructional practices not based on the individual learning styles of students. Educators do not match instruction with the learning styles of students. Current trends, practices and theories relevant to the middle school student are not taken into consideration. The traditional methods of lectures, utilization of textbooks, and administering of pencil and paper tests are dominant (Wood and Muth, 1991). In addition, the environment is highly teacher-oriented and abstract paper and pencil tasks must be completed within an inflexible time frame.

**Middle School** - is an educational response to the needs and characteristics of youngsters during adolescence that deals with the full range of intellectual and developmental needs. A true middle school has the following elements: educators knowledgeable about 10- to 14- year olds', a balanced curriculum based on developmental needs, a range of organizational strategies, varied instructional strategies, an exploratory program, comprehensive advisory and counseling programs, continuous academic progress, appropriate evaluation procedures, cooperative planning and a positive school climate (Manning, 1993).

**Middle School Program** - The term “program” refers to the organized learning experiences of the adolescent within the total curriculum of the middle school. It also includes the instructional procedures involved in developing those
experiences. This implies maximum attention in the school to social and emotional interaction between pupil and pupil, pupil and teacher, and pupil and the environment in its broadest sense. In other words, all types of development—social, physical, emotional, and intellectual—would have equal stress (Irvin, 1990).

Instruction for middle level students must be different from that of the elementary and high schools because adolescents have unique needs.

Students should be provided with:

1. The opportunity to work cooperatively in groups.
2. A vehicle for connecting new information to what is already known, thus helping students to feel more confident about learning new material, recognizing and validating their own experience.
3. Success-oriented experiences in abstract thinking that may help students move gradually from the concrete to the abstract levels.
4. Motivation to learn through the use of strategies that heighten students’ curiosity about learning.
5. Successful experiences that help students feel better about themselves as learners.

Traditional Instruction - utilizes curriculum guides and materials which identify the following: the scope of sequence of each of the subject compartments, specification of skills that are supposed to be acquired at each grade level, the precise content that teachers must cover and that students must know by the end of the school year. The skills to be acquired and the content to be learned
are broken down into small manageable and logical steps. Students are exposed to and are required to learn each piece before moving to the next one (Clinchy, 1991). Traditional instruction scarcely provides an opportunity for active participation. The teacher talks, often presenting material in abstract, symbolic form or relying on inanimate sources such as books to convey information. In addition, the traditional approach has little to do with what adolescents may want to learn or with what they would be interested in and capable of learning well (Clinchy, 1991).

**Conclusion**

Beliefs held and reinforced over a long time period increasingly act as a form of knowledge (Pajares, 1992). Teachers' beliefs form as they test their decisions in a variety of situations and settings on a daily basis. They learn how to select and present content to motivate difficult students to become engaged in instructional activities. However, over time, experiences shape and enhance the complexity of teachers' knowledge structures necessary to adapt to the settings and situations in order to motivate and teach young adolescents.

Conversely, teachers can make only minimal efforts in the educational process that will limit the teaching of the content when they do not believe the content is important. This can occur when teachers are required to implement a new curriculum that they had no part in designing or that is inconsistent with their own professional skills or beliefs. In these instances teachers may choose to ignore information even when others (researchers, curriculum directors, supervisors) insist that the curricular change will improve the learning
environment for their students (Pajares, 1992). Once these beliefs are formed, they appear to be resistant to change, creating formidable obstacles to the innovation process.

Individuals may continue to hold beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge, even after being confronted with knowledge or research findings to the contrary (Pajares, 1992). Individuals may choose to reject or disavow knowledge that conflicts with currently held beliefs. Knowledge disavowal is “the avoidance of knowledge in order to preserve or maintain the status quo or to avoid a difficult choice or threatening situation” (Pajares, 1992, p.48) When knowledge presented is inconsistent or incompatible with the individual’s belief system, it will not be positioned in the knowledge structure and will not affect future practice. Beliefs that are relatively new to the individual must fight for positioning with well-established beliefs in the beliefs network. When beliefs are challenged prior to becoming firmly established, they are easily squeezed out of the structure. Attempts to instill conceptions of effective teaching contrary to those that are used are often met with strong resistance.

Knowledge that is made meaningful and useful to teachers at their own stage of professional development is critical to the development of effective teaching skills. Teachers need opportunities to develop and test their own beliefs associated with the selection and utilization of knowledge for teaching. They also need assistance in connecting disciplinary knowledge to past and present experiences in their lives. In turn, they develop curricula that are meaningful and useful to their students.
Finally, to teach effectively in middle schools, language arts teachers should learn to work as members of a team and to design interdisciplinary programs of study suited to their students’ interests. Teachers must also learn about and become sensitive to cultural diversity because they will increasingly be teaching young adolescents of diverse backgrounds (Manning, 1993).

Manning (1993) suggest that middle school language arts teachers should provide academic diversity within the classroom. It is characterized by students achieving in the average, above average and below average range of academic performance as measured by the teacher, school district or state academic standards. These performance assessments are impacted by individual differences among teachers and students in learning needs, emotional needs, culture, goals, traditions, gender, life experiences and situations, age, abilities, skills, language, proficiency, beliefs and personal characteristics.

In order to provide for diversity in a classroom, teachers must 1) present concepts in a variety of ways; 2) use alternative methods to demonstrate competence; 3) make adjustments or practice opportunities; and 4) provide individual checks and feedback with regard to a student’s strengths and areas of growth. Instruction should be based on shared background knowledge and utilize various group approaches to individualization, such as peer-assisted and self-directed computer activities and choices in work and creative presentations. Effective teaching encompasses taking on the challenge to
account for the myriad of cultural, social, economic, ethnic and academic diversities in the classroom.
CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH ON TEACHING BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

There is an increasing interest in the study of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices which are developmentally appropriate and/or inappropriate for classroom instruction. Researchers are examining teacher judgments that are directly influenced by knowledge and beliefs. The literature on teacher behavior has shown that teachers make a difference in instructional practices. Curricular expertise is reflected in teachers' abilities to select and convey content appropriate to the learner within a particular contextual setting. Teachers' knowledge and beliefs are instrumental in the curriculum decision-making process. However, research contends that more attention should be given to teachers' thinking and beliefs as integral to practice (Erikson, 1986, Ennis, 1994). Moreover, teachers who are aware of recommended teaching behaviors do not consistently use them (Rowe, 1974).

While studying teaching beliefs and practices, one must consider three factors. First, a teacher's thinking may be guided by a personally held system of beliefs, values and principles. Secondly, a teacher's thinking may be guided by a broad knowledge base of language arts and teaching practices that perhaps go largely unarticulated. Third, if teachers are to move toward more thoughtful practice, they must acknowledge the complexity of teaching and assume an active role in the instructional process.

Wyatt and Pickle (1990) investigated the objectives and teaching practices of reading teachers. The results revealed that the teachers embraced
their own personal philosophies and taught according to these philosophies regardless of the circumstances or purposes. Teachers with traditional beliefs tended to teach with lectures and direct guidance, certain that there is only one correct answer to questions and desiring that their students reach that answer. Teachers with iconoclastic beliefs used social settings and indirect guidance to provide opportunities their students might choose to pursue. These teachers believed that what is correct for individual students in one circumstance may be incorrect in another.

**Defining Beliefs and Knowledge**

Confusion exists between the distinction of beliefs and knowledge. During a study aimed at clarifying the meaning of personal knowledge constructs used to understand teachers' beliefs, Clandinin and Connelly (1987) discovered an array of terms: teachers' teaching criteria, beliefs, perspectives, personal knowledge and practical knowledge. The significance of these terms revealed that it was difficult to determine where knowledge ended and that most of the terms were simply different words meaning the same thing.

Nespor (1987) suggested that beliefs have stronger affective and evaluative components than knowledge and that effect generally operates independently of the cognition associated with knowledge. Knowledge of a domain differs from feelings about a domain. Teachers often teach the content of a course according to the values held for the content itself. Nespor (1987) also stated that a knowledge system is semantically stored, whereas beliefs are stored in an episodic memory with material drawn from experience or folklore.
Nespor (1987) further argued that belief systems, unlike knowledge, do not require general or group consensus regarding the validity and appropriateness of their beliefs. Knowledge systems are open to evaluation and critical examination; beliefs are not. The relevance of beliefs to reality defies logic, whereas knowledge systems are better defined and receptive to reason. Nespor (1987) concluded that beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and problems. In addition, beliefs are stronger predictors of behavior.

Siegel (1985) defined beliefs in terms of "mental constructions of experience - often condensed and integrated into schemata or concepts" that are held to be true and that guide behavior. Harvey (1986) defined beliefs as an individual's representation of reality that has enough validity, truth or credibility to guide thought and behavior. When clusters of beliefs are organized around an object or situation and predisposed to action, this organization becomes an attitude. Beliefs, attitudes and values form an individual's belief system. Rokeach (1968) argued that many individuals are often unable or unwilling, for many reasons, to accurately represent their beliefs. Therefore, beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend and do.

Pajares (1992) argued that beliefs are static and represent eternal truths that remain unchanged in a teacher's mind regardless of the situation. Knowledge is fluid and evolves as new experiences are interpreted and integrated into existing knowledge structures. Beliefs are surrounded by an
emotional aura that dictates right or wrong, whereas knowledge is emotionally neutral (Pajares, 1992). Pajares concluded that beliefs influence what teachers say outside the classroom, and their behavior in the classroom is a result of beliefs being filtered by experience. In addition, beliefs are based on evaluation and judgment; knowledge is based on objective fact. Individuals will often manipulate knowledge for a particular purpose or under a necessary circumstance in order to define and understand the world and themselves.

Characteristics of Teachers’ Beliefs

Bauch (1982) conducted a study on teachers’ beliefs with two main purposes: 1) to describe some of the variety of beliefs teachers hold about teaching in the classroom, and 2) to explore possible relationships between teachers’ educational beliefs and their classroom teaching practices. Teachers who scored high on teacher control and low on student participation were classified as “autocrats.” Those who scored high or low on both dimensions were classified as “strategists” or “laissez-faire,” respectively. Those who scored low on teacher control and high on participation were classified as “democrats” (Bauch, 1982; Wyatt & Pickle, 1990; Ennis, 1994; Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990).

A brief discussion of each category as described by Bauch warrants further explanation. First, the autocratic-type beliefs can be characterized as being control-oriented. They place a high emphasis on teacher control of student behavior while de-emphasizing activities stimulating student participation and involvement. The autocratic-type teacher prefers that
students conform to grade level expectations, obey classroom rules and regulations, work independently and quietly, listen to and follow directions. They emphasize formal evaluation procedures such as tests and quizzes to grade students. In lesson planning, the reliance is primarily on textbooks and commercial materials.

The autocratic teacher also emphasizes total class lecturing, writing and test-taking in contrast to providing students with a diverse array of learning opportunities (Bauch, 1982). As predicted, the authoritarian teachers are very much in control of their classrooms, but the learning opportunities involving group processes and interaction are diminished.

Second, the strategist-type teacher is characterized as being management-oriented. Like the autocrats, strategists also seem to be very much in control of their classrooms. However, in contrast to the autocrats, they appear to provide more options for learning in terms of the teaching activities utilized (Bauch, 1982). They tend to be equally influenced by student background and student preferences in decision making and by curriculum guides and information about student past performances. Similarly, they make use of both formal and informal evaluation strategies in grading students.

In contrast to autocrats, strategists stand out as emphasizing infrequently used instructional practices, such as class discussions, dramatization, projects and experiments and use of media, while de-emphasizing lecturing. Strategists emphasize small group instruction to a greater degree than any other group while de-emphasizing total class
instruction. They also emphasize student-led and student-teacher cooperative activities, while providing more opportunities for student involvement (Bauch, 1982).

Third, the laissez-faire type teacher can be characterized as being neutrally-oriented regarding the value they place on teacher control and student participation (Bauch, 1982). Laissez-faire teachers de-emphasize activities that stimulate greater student participation, particularly in the provision for individualized pedagogical methods. They tend to emphasize lecturing without the use of media in teaching a lesson. Laissez-faire type teachers emphasize the use of non-interactive activities, such as students silently reading, writing or taking tests. Small group over total class instruction is moderately utilized. According to Bauch (1982), laissez-faire type teachers are willing to abdicate a portion of teacher control over the teaching-learning process. However, at the same time they appear unlikely to provide situations where student participation and responsibility could readily emerge.

Fourth, the democratic-type teacher is characterized as being participation-oriented. This type places a low emphasis on teacher control of student behavior and of the classroom curriculum and a high emphasis on providing activities that stimulate student participation (Bauch, 1982). More than any other group, democratic belief types prefer that students develop leadership qualities, become self-directed or self-motivated, think critically, creatively or independently. This is in contrast to conforming to grade level
expectations, obeying classroom rules and regulations, working independently or quietly and listening to and following directions.

The democratic belief-type emphasizes the utilization of student preferences and background as information and as a source of influence on planning. Informal rather than formal evaluation procedures are preferred to grade students, such as projects, reports, dramatizations and experiments. While democratic types rank high with strategist types in emphasizing small group instruction over total class instruction, democratic belief types were observed to place only a moderate emphasis on small group instruction. It may be that democrats view themselves perhaps as deviants and may feel more inhibited regarding some of their teaching practices in the presence of outside observers (Bauch, 1982).

Finally, since democrats place a high degree of emphasis on the provision of activities stimulating student participation, students of democratic teachers would have a greater opportunity to participate in the learning process than students of the other three belief types. Bauch utilized the Educational Beliefs Inventory which is based upon the work of Wehling and Charters (1969) and that of Bishop (1972). The teachers were assigned to respective educational belief types on the basis of their scores on teacher control and student participation. In the final analysis, Bauch concluded that the educational beliefs-based topology was predictably related to classroom teaching practices.
Other Factors That Influence Teaching Practices

Basically, beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate preserving even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience (Munby, 1982; Wilson, 1990). The earlier a belief is incorporated into a belief structure (beliefs, values, and attitudes), the more difficult it is to alter (Munby, 1982; Nespor, 1987). These beliefs in turn influence the teaching practices in the classroom. There are several factors that influence classroom practices. First, recent research has illustrated that teachers vary widely in how they distribute time to reading and comprehension skills, writing and vocabulary skills instruction. However, these studies do not indicate what may account for these variations.

Schmidt and Buchman (1983) conducted a study on teachers' beliefs and their curricular time and allocations and described two factors in this area. First, external factors are influences on teachers' content choices that stem from district or school policies, the principal, parents, students, or public opinion. As a result of their research on the influences of external factors on what is taught, Schmidt and Buchmann (1983) concluded that teachers "operate as political brokers, arbitrating between their own priorities and the implied priorities of external policies." An explanation for this is that institutional and social influences affect teachers, but teachers also act with considerable autonomy in making content decisions. For example, even though a district may mandate a textbook, teachers can skip whole sections of the book if they do not fit with teachers' notions of what should be taught.
The second factor described in the Schmidt and Buchmann (1983) study was that teachers' judgments, attitudes, and beliefs influence the opportunity to learn in the classroom. During the time of the study, there were no centralized policies regulating the curriculum, even with regard to time allocation to meet subject matter areas. Teachers essentially decided what to teach and how much time to allocate to subjects. Therefore, the question is not how much time is spent on a given subject but how this time is spent in terms of teacher and student effort, pacing and other characteristics of classroom instruction relating to standards of quality.

Another influential factor in regards to beliefs and practices is standardized testing. In reading and language mechanics, Shepard (1991) reported that because of external tests, teachers stopped allocating time to reading and writing. All available time was spent on word recognition, recognition of errors in spelling, language usage, and punctuation. Under pressure, classroom instruction is increasingly dominated by tasks that resemble tests. A test-driven curriculum encourages the teaching of skills in isolation. Different cognitive processes are elicited when a teacher concentrates on materials with a test-like format instead of addressing intended learning goals (Shepard, 1991). For example, students are asked to read short texts and to recognize one right answer rather than to invent their own questions or possible answers.

When middle school language arts teachers teach to traditional tests by providing daily skills instruction in formats that closely resemble tests, the
instructional practices are ineffective (Shepard, 1991). By following a theory that postpones the development of higher-order thinking until after the basics have been mastered, teachers deny learning opportunities in two ways. First, learning isolated facts and skills becomes more difficult. Without context there is no meaningful way to cluster or organize information and make it easy to remember. Second, learning skills means that the application of skills to real word problems becomes a difficult learning situation (Shepard, 1991).

Shepard (1991) also reported that teachers considered themselves victims of instructional decisions caused by accountability pressures. However, 67% reported considerable distress because of the discord between the instructional methods they were forced to adopt and their own training and beliefs about children's learning needs.

Teachers are not expected to be experts in pedagogy or child development. Instead, they are supposed to implement externally mandated curricula, textbooks, tests and promotional standards as specified (Shepard, 1991). Bureaucratic accountability begets exactly what it assumes - less unskilled professionals (Shepard, 1991).

Similarly, Smith (1989) found that teachers were both degraded and unskilled by a high-stakes testing environment. Teachers felt ashamed and embarrassed by low scores, even when they recognized the influence of socioeconomic factors on school rankings and the mismatch of the tests' content to instructional goals. The teachers were unskilled because their decisions to align instruction to the tests impoverished their teaching repertoires.
and ultimately limited their own conceptions of what should be taught (Smith, 1989).

Textbook selection also influences teaching practices. Ornstein (1990) points out that textbooks have had the longest influence on the curriculum to the extent of standardizing teaching and educational practices. Ornstein (1990) further reports that textbooks can dominate the nature and sequence of a course and profoundly affect the learning of middle school students. Textbook adoption committees have contributed to the problem with their demands for topic coverage and easy to read prose. Special interest groups with their passions and legal challenges have added to the problem causing publishers to become politically sensitive to the content at the expense of linguistic and cognitive processes (Ornstein, 1990).

Teachers have also contributed to the problem of textbook selections, since most emphasize answers to be found, not problems to be solved or thinking processes to be used. Ornstein (1990) suggests that in order to make this connection, it would benefit students if language arts teachers would take time out to help students organize ideas in terms of reading, writing, and note taking. Some educators now argue that comprehensibility, not readability, is the major criterion to consider when adopting a text (Ornstein, 1990).

Comprehension entails a number of elements: coherence, sequence, match and transition words. Coherence suggests that readers organize the text information according to either the text knowledge or their own background knowledge. Sequence determines how students move from original
understandings toward new understandings. One of the most important factors in comprehension of written material is the match between the text content and the readers' background. Good texts should be organized into coherent and explicit content that connects to the students' current knowledge and developmental level (Ornstein, 1990). Transition words such as “yet, also, next, for example, however,” etc. provide cohesion within the text and suggest direction in thought. In addition, the use of examples from the reader's own life experiences or environment are more effective than examples that contradict or are irrelevant to what the students know.

According to Woodward and Elliott (1992) textbooks can be used to exercise central or administrative control over teachers and to ensure uniformity of instruction. Shannon (1987) has also reported that administrators often mandate the use of textbooks. This demand often results with materials producing teachers' guides with detailed lesson plans and scripts from which teachers can read.

Personal philosophies held by teachers may also influence teaching practices. Wyatt and Pickle (1990) conducted a study to investigate the personal philosophies of teachers. The researchers were convinced that the circumstances of the classroom and the stated objectives of a program would drive the objectives of the classroom. Wyatt and Pickle (1990) found that teachers embrace their own personal philosophies and teach according to them no matter what the setting or purpose of their teaching. Teachers with traditional beliefs tend to teach with lectures and direct guidance. Teachers
with non-traditional beliefs used indirect guidance to provide opportunities their students may choose to pursue. They also believed that what is correct for individual students in one circumstance may be incorrect in another (Wyatt & Pickle, 1990).

Wyatt and Pickle (1990) have found that extrinsic factors such as the purpose, setting, and needs of distinctive students do not drive the objectives of teachers. The objectives are instead driven by the intrinsic personal philosophies of teachers. Once beliefs are formed, individuals have a tendency to build causal explanations surrounding the aspects of those beliefs, whether these explanations are accurate or mere invention.

Beliefs influence perceptions, behaviors and practices that are consistent with and that reinforce the original beliefs (Nespor, 1987). Rokeach (1968) reported that teachers, through years of teaching preparation, develop all types of beliefs. Consequently, teachers take these beliefs with them into their schools and classrooms. Nespor (1987) and Rokeach (1968) recommend further research in the area of teachers' belief systems.

**Teachers' Beliefs, Administrators' Beliefs, and Parental Beliefs**

Research on teacher thinking is abundant. Critics have questioned how its findings can be of use to teachers or teacher education. They suggest that other perspectives should be focused upon in order to better understand the classroom beliefs and practices of teachers (Pearson, 1985; Jennings, 1992; Bernd, 1992).
Few would argue that the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which in turn affects their practice of teaching in the classroom. Pajares (1992) argues that to understand the belief structures of teachers and teacher candidates, it is essential to improve their professional preparation and teaching practices. On the other hand, Clark and Peterson (1986) contend that people's beliefs are important influences on the ways they conceptualize tasks and learn from experience. Attention should be given to the structure and functions of teachers' beliefs, their roles, their students, the subject matter areas they teach, and the schools in which they work.

Teachers often teach the content of a course according to the values held of the content itself. This combination of affect and evaluation can determine the energy that teachers will expend on an activity and how they will expend it (Bandura, 1986). Calderhead and Robson (1991), reported that pre-service teachers held vivid images of teaching from their experiences as students. These images influenced interpretations of particular courses and classroom practices. Such images played a powerful role in determining how they translated and utilized the knowledge they possessed. These images also determined the practices they would later undertake as teachers.

Once these images or beliefs are formed, individuals have a tendency to build explanations surrounding the aspects of the beliefs, whether these explanations are accurate or mere invention (Pajares, 1992). The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter. These beliefs subsequently affect perception and strongly influence the
processing of new information (Pajares, 1992). It is for this reason that newly acquired beliefs are most vulnerable. With time and use they become robust. Individuals hold on to beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge even after scientifically correct explanations are presented to them. The power of beliefs can easily outweigh the clearest and most convincing evidence (Nespor, 1987). Therefore, beliefs can influence behaviors and instructional practices that reinforce the original beliefs (Nespor, 1987).

Researchers have expressed confidence in a number of findings; therefore, some inferences and generalizations can be made with reasonable confidence.

1. Beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience (Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992).

2. Individuals tend to hold on to beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge, even after scientifically correct explanations are presented to them (Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987).

3. Belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon. The most common cause is conversion from one authority to another or a gestalt shift (Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992).

4. Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan and make decisions regarding such tasks. Hence, they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information (Pearson, 1985; Jennings, 1992; Davies, 1989).

Through numerous studies, researchers pointed out that certain teachers' beliefs not only cause them to implement an inappropriate curriculum, but also block their understanding and acceptance of current trends in language arts (Liska, 1974; Battista, 1993). Although teachers may be willing
to understand and implement change, they must acquire knowledge and
competencies that their traditional beliefs have heretofore prevented them from acquiring (Battista, 1993).

It is difficult for teachers to know how to create an intellectual and social climate in the classroom which will allow students the freedom to discuss, reflect on and make sense of tasks rather than merely learning mechanical exercises (Battista, 1993). If teachers are provided with good instructional materials and scripts for exploring ideas with students, what will they do if students do not follow a script? It is likely that teachers will not be able to respond constructively to unexpected conjectures that emerge as students follow their own paths in approaching reading and writing skills (Battista, 1993).

According to Elkind (1989), the essential pedagogical task is not to instill "correct ways of doing", but rather to guide students' constructive activities until they eventually find viable techniques to improve comprehension and language skills. Such guidance must necessarily start from points that are accessible to students. In order to establish these starting points, we must first gain insight into the adolescents' conceptual structures and methods (Elkind, 1989). The language arts teacher will be far more successful in accommodating middle level learners' growth in conceptual understanding if he or she has some notion of what the students' present structures and ways of operating are.

Teachers who are accustomed to implementing the traditional strategies have not needed much knowledge of students learning in language arts (Battista, 1993). They have been required only to explain to students
sequences of skills or procedures prescribed by textbooks. Thus, teachers accustomed to teaching the traditional methods may lack knowledge about current research in language arts and student learning that is essential to their success.

The beliefs of administrators also play a significant role in teachers' beliefs and practices. If the principal believes that all students can learn, this establishes staff responsibility for student failure (Bernd, 1992). Principals are the chief stewards and advocates of their schools' belief systems. Principals must constantly press for values and beliefs that increase student achievement (Bernd, 1992).

It is important that an administrator has a sound belief system and a frequent and visible presence in the classroom. However, administrative ability also depends on instructing teachers on how to improve their instruction by understanding and applying specific behaviors. In order to assist teachers in utilizing appropriate strategies, principals may offer seminars to learn more about learning styles of adolescents, time management and new methods to approach the textbook (Duncan, 1992).

Duncan (1992) proposes that the enforcement of curriculum and instructional alignment on the principal's part does influence teaching practices. There should be a one-to-one relationship established among curriculum and instruction, state curriculum frameworks, district goals, school goals, course objectives, instructional materials, teacher practices and assessments of the middle level learner (Duncan, 1992). This relationship teaches teachers how to
improve their instruction in language arts on the middle school level and
enhances their understanding in applying specific practices (Duncan, 1992).

Bernd (1992) states that in order to enhance teachers, understanding of
utilizing appropriate practices, the principal must have a sound belief system.
However, the behavior and policies of the principal may significantly affect the
capacity of teachers to create, find strategies, or to experiment with new or
different approaches (Foriska, 1994). Principals should provide teachers with
the resources and incentives to pursue new ideals and create new options
(Duncan, 1994). The belief system should be accompanied by extensive
knowledge about instruction and effective, appropriate strategies for
adolescents.

A practical set of teacher skills should be monitored by the principal:
1. Selecting objectives at the appropriate level of difficulty.
2. Teaching to those objectives.
3. Monitoring students' progress and adjusting instruction accordingly.

Bernd (1992) also states that the principals in his study believe that the
practice of monitoring teachers is necessary for teacher reinforcement of
existing strengths, reduction of weaknesses and development and/or
improvement of the teacher's student analysis ability.

Another influential factor on teacher beliefs and practices are beliefs and
practices of parents. Ascher (1987) notes that parents "are powerful models
who may or may not reinforce messages" about good reading or study habits: When parents do reinforce these messages consistently with those given by teachers, children are far more likely to absorb them.

Parents have strong educational beliefs when they perceive that teachers have strong programs (Ascher, 1987). These beliefs are reinforced when teachers guide parents in how to assist their children at home. Parents have reported that teachers have often stated in progress reports that their child is failing and must improve. However, parents do not know how to help the child improve when teacher suggestions were often written in unfamiliar terms (Ascher, 1987). Research has also revealed that the only contacts with teachers are negative messages when a child is in trouble (Davies, 1989; Ascher, 1987).

Teachers must be the main carriers of promoting a positive attitude between themselves and parents. Davies (1989) has stated that despite the many benefits and prospects for a more democratic and equitable society, teachers have allowed social class barriers to grow, which inhibits good relationships between parents and teachers. Parents believe that some teachers tend to look upon low-income people as those who do not value education highly; in addition, parents have little to offer to the education of their own children. These beliefs tend to develop into self-fulfilling prophecies, and the students are victimized by the myth that they cannot learn.

Researchers believe that racial, ethnic and social class factors are of central importance in the dynamics of educational beliefs and practices. They
are essential in the relationships between the socio-economic status of adolescents, their families, the teachers and the school (Davies, 1989; Jennings, 1992). Teachers should establish a collaborative relationship between themselves and the parents and with their students (Davies, 1989). By focusing on shared rather than separate beliefs, the alliance between teachers and parents can strengthen and better instill those beliefs in students.

**Teaching Experience**

Teaching is a rewarding yet complex profession on the middle school level. With experience, the practitioner must continually weigh what he or she does in relation to knowledge about how adolescents learn and develop (Kostelnik, 1992). To translate that knowledge into actual teaching strategies, teachers must be willing to explore a variety of practices in the classroom. According to Kostelnik (1992), veteran teachers will continually examine their assumptions and learn from adolescents as they evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

The knowledge of students and teaching gained over the years serves as the foundation from which teachers can examine their pedagogical beliefs and practices (Kostelnik, 1992). Since the concept of developmentally appropriate practice has evolved from past educational experiences, most teachers are implementing numerous compatible strategies and activities in the classroom (Kostelnik, 1992; Walsh, 1991; Hoy, 1991). There are some teachers who need assistance in order to recognize their strengths. On the other hand, others need to know that they are using developmentally
appropriate practices. In either case, researchers agree that teachers are most successful with developmentally appropriate practices when they build on what they know (Kostelnik, 1992; Walsh, 1991; Hoy, 1991; Newman & Church, 1990).

With experience, teachers learn to interact more with adolescents. They observe, listen, instruct, guide, support and encourage them. While teachers carefully consider long-range objectives, their decision-making remains fluid in order to capitalize on input from students (Newman & Church, 1990). Adolescents will ask questions, suggest alternatives, express interests and develop plans that may lead the instruction in new directions. In this way, overall instructional goals are managed with more immediate ones, thereby creating a flexible, stimulating classroom structure (Walsh, 1991).

Finally, Hoy (1991) reports that a major concern of all teachers is discipline, but it is especially acute for beginning teachers. Teaching experience has an impact upon all teachers, but for new recruits, initial teaching experience may be a sudden confrontation with conflicting role demands of teaching and learning goals of the school. In other words, the internalized ideal images of the teacher's role may be in conflict with the norms and values of the school culture (Hoy, 1991).

Many studies have attempted to correlate classroom teaching practices to teachers' educational beliefs (Pajares, 1992, Harvey et al, 1968, Willower, 1975, Bauch, 1982). These researchers have shown that investigating the educational beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates should become a focus
of current educational research. These beliefs about teaching are well established by the time students get to college. Nespor (1987) developed what is called the apprenticeship of observation that takes place during the years students spend at school. They include ideas about what it takes to be an effective teacher and how students ought to behave. Although these ideas are usually unarticulated, they are brought into teacher preparation programs and the classrooms. Few researchers would disagree that teachers' beliefs influence their perceptions, judgments and classroom behaviors (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Wilson, 1990).

Nisbett and Ross (1980) concluded that there is substantial evidence to show that beliefs persist even when they are no longer accurate representations of reality. Nisbett and Ross (1980) further contend that their research does not imply that beliefs do not change under any circumstance but that they generally do not change even when it is logical or necessary for them to do so. Although Nisbett and Ross (1980) rendered useful insights of belief systems, Lewis (1990) argued that there are other implications for the understanding of educational beliefs. Lewis (1990) contends that there are six ways individuals can believe or know: believing an authority, deductive logic, the experiences of the senses, the emotion of feeling that something is true or right, rational intuition, and personal use of the scientific method. Lewis suggested that although individuals acquire beliefs through all six modes, one mode ultimately emerges as the primary one for the development of personal values.
Current research suggests the implementation of staff development programs for supervisors and teachers designed to facilitate teacher change (Hollingsworth, 1989). This approach represents an attempt to foster teachers' understanding of the complexities involved in classroom life, classroom management, current teaching methods, and information regarding particular schools and children. It is important to think in terms of connections among beliefs rather than the existence of beliefs as independent subsystems (Bunting, 1984). Viewing educational beliefs as detached from and unconnected to a broader belief system is ill-advised and probably unproductive (Pajares, 1992).

**Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Adolescent Development**

The transition from childhood to adolescence is difficult because the line is not clear and there are inherent risks involved (Manning, 1993). It is an emotional leap as well as a physical one, and maintaining a balanced sense of self becomes increasingly difficult. Manning (1993) suggested four variations of the self-concept that young adolescents must reconcile if a degree of emotional stability is to be achieved.

1. **General self-concept:** The adolescent's evaluation of himself and the perception of his or her abilities and roles.

2. **Temporary self-concept:** A temporary evaluation, perhaps influenced by a recent event or remark.

3. **Social self:** The way the adolescent believes others view him or her.
4. Ideal self: How the adolescent would like to be.

By the time a person reaches adolescence, self-concept stabilizes. The ages 11 to 14 are a period of growing, changing and general instability. Perceptions of self at this time often guide decisions about social situations, cognitive activities and a general feeling of self-worth (Irvin, 1990). Most middle level students have not developed a strong sense of emotional autonomy and are easily discouraged and lose self confidence. A teachers' emphasis on content and academic excellence at the expense of strong emotional support at this age does not contribute to the general well-being of the students (Manning, 1993; Irvin, 1990). The characteristics of middle level students into physical, social, cognitive and emotional development have no boundaries separating them; they are intertwined and interact with each other in a complex and not easily understood manner (Irvin, 1990).

Researchers have advocated the use of developmentally appropriate practices in order to enhance the development of the middle school learner (Irvin, 1990; Manning, 1993; Bell, 1986; Strubbe, 1990; Elkind, 1989). For many years, educators placed great emphasis on basic skills and relegated higher-order and critical thinking to secondary roles (Irvin, 1990). Reformers now advocate that developmentally appropriate instruction can be used to emphasize critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. For so many years, educators relied on standardized tests as the best measure of student learning. As a result, less emphasis has been placed on thinking skills (Irvin, 1990; Manning, 1993).
Educators must reconsider that developmentally appropriate instruction can provide adolescents with thinking opportunities (Manning, 1993). Classroom exercises must move beyond the common practice of worksheets and practice skills, which tend to focus on isolated skill deficiencies. By reconsidering such past practices, teachers can find alternatives to remedial and compensatory approaches to basic skills instruction by requiring students to develop higher-order cognitive skills (Manning, 1993).

In order to assist students in developing higher-order thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills, they should be engaged in active learning situations, such as debates, panel discussions, role playing and projects (Irvin, 1990). Adolescents should also learn how to analyze, interpret and apply information; define issues and problems; determine priorities; anticipate possible outcomes and make decisions (Wood & Muth, 1991). Developmentally appropriate instruction incorporates the activities mentioned above in order to meet the needs of middle school learners who represent a wide range of abilities, learning styles, interests and background.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the success of any developmentally appropriate strategy depends on the learner's current level of comprehension, what experiences the learner might have had and skills the learner brings to the situation (Newman & Church, 1990). Although it is generally believed that the formal operational stage of thinking begins at about the age of 11 or 12, considerable research exists that some adolescents do not
reach this stage and remain on a concrete level (Elkind, 1989; Irvin, 1990; Manning, 1993; Kostelnik, 1992; Piaget, 1963).

Finally, maturing adolescents and young adults in high school demonstrate increasing abilities to integrate information learned in separate settings. However, the vast majority of students cannot make those connections during their middle school years (Elkind, 1989).

The diversity among middle level school students is complex. This diversity creates different challenges to middle level educators who need a focus different from that required in either elementary or high schools. Effective middle level educational practice requires much more than a less rigorous version rendered on the high school level (Wood & Muth, 1991; Irvin, 1990). By the same token, neither is the extension of procedures appropriate for elementary students appropriate or effective in meeting the learning needs of middle school learners. Research has confirmed that facts, skills and information are best learned when students can recall and apply them to their experience and knowledge and can learn content skills in relation to one another (Elkind, 1989; Piaget, 1963, Duffy, 1982; Elkind, 1970).

Middle level learners can become better thinkers when they are allowed to work at the pace and rate that individual capacities and developmental readiness (cognitive, social, emotional) will allow (Piaget, 1963). Developmentally appropriate practices for middle level learners can be used to develop better attitudes toward learning and prepare them for long-term learning that extends far beyond the middle grades.
The two conditions essential to an appropriate learning environment are (1) the teacher must recognize that each learner constructs new learning when he or she is interested in "figuring it out," and (2) a plan of action (i.e., educational objectives) is needed which provides adolescents the opportunity to maximize their intellectual and socio-moral potential (Wakefield, 1993). In developmentally appropriate classrooms where talking in small groups is recognized as an opportunity for learners to explain and reexamine their own viewpoint, the time is used to compare and contrast one student's thinking against another student's thinking.

Integrated vs. Separate Curriculum

In the developmentally appropriate classroom, the teacher integrates subjects from all areas into an overall theme, rather than teaching them separately from one another in isolated time slots. Although the language arts teacher is responsible for only one discipline, other subjects may be incorporated as well. Almost any subject is best taught when it is needed to accomplish something else (Wakefield, 1993). This is known as an integrated curriculum.

Meaning-Driven vs. Skill-Driven Curriculum

Breaking down the whole into parts to be practiced separately would seem to be a useful strategy for teaching something new. However, there are some adolescents who do not have the capacity to consider both part and whole simultaneously (Piaget, 1963). Skill lessons often become rote lessons, artificial and contrived. They are apt to be performed unrelated to purpose,
learner interest, or intellectual focus (Epstein, 1981). Since the “whole” tends to be more meaningful and interesting, the student is able to learn about it more successfully. Teachers teach skills but not in isolation from the “whole” and only rarely in large group lessons. Skill lessons follow the need to know, such as a student asking for help in reading a word.

In developmentally appropriate classes, teachers model and emphasize the pleasure of reading and writing. Teachers teach writing in conjunction with the purpose of communicating. Due to their need and desire for meaningful communication, adolescents’ ability to talk, read and write emerges and improves (Wakefield, 1993).

Table 2-1 Developmentally Appropriate Practice Assessment Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE</th>
<th>VS</th>
<th>TRADITIONAL PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Separate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning-Driven</td>
<td>Skill-Driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous</td>
<td>Homogeneous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready Now</td>
<td>Getting Ready</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Centered</td>
<td>Teacher-Centered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Heteronomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Knowledge</td>
<td>Previous Skill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires Thinking</td>
<td>Requires Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human-As-Instrument</td>
<td>Test-As-Instrument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Incidental vs. Explicit Learning

In traditional practice, explicit learning is carefully described in teachers’ lesson plans. The teacher has established what will happen, and the students will follow the script. Incidental learning, however, occurs unexpectedly as a
more interesting sidetrack to the planned topic. Developmentally appropriate teachers appreciate the importance of student interest and recognize the potential of students who take the lesson in other meaningful ways. Problems are solved not by the teacher alone but by the whole class.

**Heterogeneous vs. Homogeneous Grouping**

Grouping is a distinctive characteristic in a developmentally appropriate classroom. In a developmentally appropriate classroom, grouping is arranged according to interest. The most effective method is through heterogeneous grouping. Heterogeneous grouping crosses ability levels and maximizes diversity. The role that a learner interest plays in intellectual growth dictates that we examine the reasons we group adolescents by our perception of their abilities (Wood & Muth, 1991). The more varied the group, the more likely the teacher is to recognize each child as a unique learner. This allows for more individualized instruction, implementing cooperative skills and the sharing of ideas and interests.

It is interesting to note that when students group themselves by interest, it is often across ability groups. A plethora of literature has been written against ability grouping (Wood & Muth, 1991; Evans & Carr, 1985; Epstein, 1981; and Lounsbury & Vars, 1978). These authors found that the more varied the group, the more likely the teacher is to recognize each student as a unique learner. This allows for much more individualizing of instruction, implementing cooperative skills and the sharing of ideas and interests.
Ready Now vs. Getting Ready

Students are always ready to learn something of interest to them. When they are stopped “to get ready,” as may occur in traditional practices, this may delay or even interfere with their interest and the mental engagement that is likely to lead them to new learning (Wakefield, 1993). The developmentally appropriate classroom teacher recognizes that all students are ready now for thinking challenges that are age-appropriate and appropriate for the individual (Wood & Muth, 1991). Instead of pronouncing a student’s work right or wrong, which closes down thinking, in developmentally appropriate classrooms, teachers ask their students to explain their thinking, which keeps them engaged. By asking students why and how questions, the students will not only “figure out” the right answer, they will know why it is right (Wakefield, 1993). When children are required to think, they will construct a knowledge base that can support more complex levels of thinking (Epstein, 1981).

Child-Centered vs. Teacher-Directed

A child-centered classroom provides more opportunity for the learner to investigate that which is of interest to them. In this setting, developmentally appropriate teachers become facilitators of student choice. In a teacher-directed classroom, the teacher plans the week’s events and carries out those plans with little input from the students. Some teachers are very skilled at long-range planning and pride themselves on having every day of their year planned in advance. The consequence of this teacher-directed classroom is that opportunities for following student interest are often missed. In addition, if the
teacher has used these same plans repeatedly, she or he knows what will happen. Adolescents learn through modeling and from repeated opportunities to try them in an environment that will value and allow it (Epstein, 1981). Teachers who direct instead of guide take opportunities away from their students to develop autonomy and to learn how to direct themselves confidently.

**Autonomy vs. Heteronomy**

In order to achieve autonomy, students need to have repeated opportunities to make decisions and think about the consequences of their moral and intellectual choices (Piaget, 1963). In the developmentally appropriate classroom, the teacher recognizes that moral and intellectual independence will be constructed by the students over time as they make more and more complex moral and intellectual decisions. When a teacher makes the decision that could have been made by the child, the opportunity is missed for the child to grow in his or her own ability to make a decision and to be held accountable for it (Piaget, 1963).

In contrast, in traditional practice adults often fear that the student will make a mistake in his or her choice. Consequently, the adult makes any necessary decisions in the best interest of the student. However, this does nothing to build the student’s competence and confidence in his or her own decision-making abilities (Herber & Herber, 1987).
Previous Knowledge vs. Previous Skill

Stewart and Tei (1983) found that there are three lines of access to constructing new knowledge. The perceptual line of access connects what is new to what we have seen before. The action line connects to what we have done before. The conceptual line connects to what we have thought about before. (p.101) What students have seen, done and thought before are so crucial to what they are able to learn now that teachers need to be alert to recognized evidence of students’ previous knowledge (Herber & Herber, 1987). Students may not know which line of access is appropriate; however, there should be ample classroom opportunities to see, manipulate, think and talk.

Thinking vs. Practice

Developmentally appropriate practice teachers favor classroom activities that encourage thinking over rote practice. The difference between practice in the developmentally appropriate classroom and practice in the traditional classroom is timing. Practice follows and supports the students’ interest and the need to know, but it is not a method for teaching students new relationships.

Human-as-instrument vs. Test-as-instrument

The traditional method of comparing students to one another by group testing is gradually being replaced with a method of comparing an individual’s present work with his or her previous work (Wakefield, 1993). The traditional emphasis has been to get students where we want them to be by the end of the school year. Whether they are is usually determined by an achievement test.
In a developmentally appropriate classroom, the rate and the amount of student learning is affected by many things for example, the student’s previous knowledge, his or her interests and the opportunity for thinking. The rate and amount of student learning will not be positively affected by directives outlining what the school district wants to be accomplished by the year’s end. In the developmentally appropriate classroom, the learning philosophy and educational plan call for centering on where each student is now (Wakefield, 1993). When teachers have ascertained the status of each of their students, they can provide individual and age appropriate activities which will maximize the students’ opportunities for thinking.

Traditional teachers agree that the above mentioned goals are worthy of implementation. However, their actual practices in the classroom show a persistent use of traditional teaching methods. A gap exists between what they say they want to do and what they actually do (Wakefield, 1993; Pajares, 1992; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Nespor, 1987; Ennis, 1994). Usually, the “missing link” for these teachers is their lack of understanding for the role adolescents play in constructing their own knowledge. Until traditional teachers experience the intellectual discomfort that comes when confronted with a viewpoint that challenges their present belief systems, there will be no change (Pajares, 1992).

As middle level schools implement organizational structures that are more conducive to meeting the needs of young adolescents, it is time that classroom instruction transforms to be more meaningful to students.
Developmentally appropriate instruction should accommodate young adolescents' needs to move, to explore, to debate, to interact and to relate new learning to what they know and what they will need to know to be productive citizens in the twenty-first century.

Education theorists have suggested that learners' developmental levels should provide the basis for school curricular, classroom instruction and practices as well as the overall teaching/learning environment. Developmental appropriateness is based on the principles that curriculum should be age and individually appropriate. Such practices should include a curriculum for all domains of development; emphasize learning as an interactive process; include learning activities that are concrete, real and relevant; and provide a variety of activities for a wide range of abilities, interests and skills outside the normal range of development (Manning, 1993).

Much progress has been made in just a few years toward implementing more appropriate teaching methods that are child-centered, integrated across subject matter and that focus on active learning within meaningful contexts. Practices that support a developmental approach include the use of cooperative learning groups and authentic or performance-based assessments. In spite of widespread acceptance and implementation of such strategies, barriers still exist that limit or prevent the developmental approach in the classroom. Misinterpretations and obstacles continue to cause conflict with the philosophy of what is suitable for the education of young adolescents.
One significant barrier has been the continued emphasis upon measurement of student learning using standardized achievement tests. Despite volumes of literature documenting the inappropriate nature of using standardized tests in middle schools, the practice continues (Manning, 1993; Stewart & Tei, 1983; Thornburg, 1982, Epstein, 1981). Test-driven instruction is a reality in states where accountability for learning is measured through mandated tests that are administered in all school districts. As a result, curriculum and instruction continue to be influenced by pressures for high test scores.

Another barrier to more widespread implementation of the developmental classroom approach is that some teachers are fearful of embracing developmental practices that may be in conflict with methodology widely advocated or mandated in recent years which they may still be expected to follow. In addition, some teachers perceive developmentally appropriate instruction as lacking in structure and believe that students in such an environment are learning less than they could in a more teacher-directed environment.

This problem may have resulted from the mindset which holds that elementary schools should address the educational needs of the childhood years while secondary schools should focus on the adolescent years. Except for serving as a transition between the two, the middle level school lacked a clear rationale.
Several factors have contributed to the increased emphasis on developmentally appropriate instruction. First, early adolescence has now been accepted as a legitimate developmental period (Thornburg, 1982) and secondly, as this research has shown, more teachers are implementing instruction that is age appropriate and individually appropriate.

Educators should remain aware of the fact that adolescents progress through physical, psycho-social and cognitive development. Physically, curricular and instructional design should address the need for movement and exercise. The awkwardness and discomfort associated with changing bodies, including lack of coordination, should be considered in planning classroom organization. Young adolescents need sufficient opportunities to stretch and walk. Desks and seating arrangements should accommodate growing bodies and sufficient room between rows.

Psycho-social development can have a profound impact on both young adolescents and their teachers. Such developments include friendships, self-esteem, peer pressure, school, climate and academic achievement. Developmental tasks should prove opportunities for young adolescents to:

1. win recognition for skills abilities and accomplishments
2. identify positively with peers and achieve feelings of adequacy
3. understand how behavior affects others
4. learn social skills and listen to and consider differing viewpoints
5. understand the significance of increased independence and responsibility

Cognitive development involves the increased ability to think hypothetically, abstractly, reflectively and critically. Language arts teachers should provide experiences that allow learners to engage in higher levels of cognitive thought and activity. Rather than assuming that all young adolescents learn alike, instruction should consider the learning styles of individual learners and varying intelligence (Manning, 1993; Bell, 1986).

Once educators commit to developmentally appropriate instruction, actual experiences, methods and materials can be planned. Cognitive needs may be met by integrating subject matter across disciplines and providing communities of learning. Strategies include cooperative and experiential learning, proper academic counseling, exploratory programs for studying areas of interest and working in small groups. As middle level teachers in language arts plan group instruction, large or small, grouping students by ability should be avoided at all costs. Equating ability or achievement levels with development can result in dire consequences for academic achievement, self-concept, and teacher behaviors (Manning, 1993).

A positive learning environment where there is acceptance on the part of the teacher is essential. Emotionally, students need to feel competent and desire achievement. They need to participate in school and classroom decisions, but they also require structure and clear limits (Wood & Muth, 1991). Classrooms should be emotionally safe places where taking risks is not only
acceptable but encouraged. Teachers hold the key to adolescents taking academic risks and creating a learning environment that is emotionally safe (Wood & Muth, 1991).

Intellectually, most middle level students function primarily at the concrete level of thinking. Given some time and prompting, middle level students can perform such operations as problem solving, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation (Manning, 1993). Adolescents think concretely, even literally, most the time; however, the middle grades is the appropriate time for students to experiment with and become more comfortable with abstract thinking. Abstract thinking for middle level students should be encouraged but not expected. The intellectual capabilities should always be considered in a developmentally appropriate classroom. The introduction should be non-threatening and success-oriented (Epstein, 1981).

Manning (1983) suggests that in order to bring about the above mentioned atmosphere, certain factors must be present:

1. The teacher can ensure optimum learning conditions by giving top priority to the social, emotional needs of adolescents.

2. The individuality of pupils is sustained when teachers make allowances in their grade reports for the varying interests which adolescents have.

3. Adolescents gain a sense of belonging when the teacher encourages friendships among pupils in the room.
4. Teachers increase their chances of directing the work into productive channels by having students participate in the planning.

5. Students master the essentials of a subject only when extensive plans are made for accommodating individual differences in pupils.

6. Developmentally appropriate instruction is enhanced when the teacher has the ability to see the world as adolescents see it.

7. The teacher's ability to see the world as adolescents see it is an absolute must if there is to be any success at all in teaching.

8. Pupils never really understand a subject until they can relate what they have learned to the broader problems of the world.

9. Teachers must always be prepared to explain to pupils the interrelationships among various elements of the overall curriculum.

10. Teachers must set definite items aside to show adolescents the relationships between their subject and the overall goal of education.

11. If curriculum plans are to be developed, they must be detailed as to how course content can be integrated across subjects.

12. In planning developmentally appropriate instruction, teachers should rely heavily on the knowledge and skills pupils have acquired outside the classroom.

13. The adolescent's knowledge is best developed when teachers interrelate facts and figures from many different subject fields.

14. An essential component of a good lesson is an illustration of its relevance to other areas of knowledge.
Teachers should focus on significant instructional goals that are evident and important to students, taking care to maintain consistency between these goals and classroom instruction. Students can and should be involved in the process (Manning, 1993, Thornburg, 1982). For example, teachers can share with the students the goals for the course and provide opportunities for students to question, critique, and help modify those goals. This feedback has the added advantage of enabling the students to perceive the purpose of what occurs in class and why.

In order to assist middle school educators in meeting the instructional goals of young adolescents Dorman (1984) and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) have developed recommendations and appropriate practices to meet the needs of young adolescents shown in Table 2-2 and Table 2-3.

**Conclusion**

While it seems helpful for educational practice to be able to show a relationship between teacher’s educational beliefs and their teaching practices, there may be other traits which contribute to these associations. It may be that needs (Maslow, 1943), levels of achievement, motivation and other personality characteristics are also highly associated with teaching beliefs and practices. In addition, other variables such as principal leadership, student characteristics and school climate may be related factors.
### Table 2-2 Dorman's Seven Needs Of Young Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Appropriate Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The need for diversity</td>
<td>Different opportunities for learning and different relationships with a variety of people, different opportunities to refine thinking skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The need for self-exploration and self-definition</td>
<td>Opportunities to establish positive self-concept and a sense of identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The need for meaningful participation in school and community.</td>
<td>Opportunities to become independent and to have a role in making the rules affecting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The need for positive social interaction with both peers and adults.</td>
<td>Opportunities for association, companionship, and criticism regarding new social roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The need for physical activity.</td>
<td>Opportunities for physical exercise and proper rest to avoid high energy levels and fatigue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The need for competence and achievement</td>
<td>Opportunities to try out new physical, psycho-social and cognitive abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The need for structure and clear limits.</td>
<td>Opportunities for increased independence and self-direction yet with clear limits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All teachers hold beliefs, however defined and labeled, about their work, their students, their subject matter and their roles and responsibilities. Researchers have concluded that the earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter (Nespor, 1986; Rokeach, 1968; Munby, 1982). In addition, beliefs affect perception and strongly influence the processing of new information. It is for this reason that newly acquired beliefs are most vulnerable. With time and use, the individual holds on to the beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge even after scientifically correct explanations.
are presented to them. Therefore, responsibility in content decision making requires that language arts teachers examine their own conduct, its bases and its potential effects on student's opportunities.

Table 2-3 Turning Point's Recommendations And Appropriate Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Appropriate Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Create small communities for learning.</td>
<td>Opportunities for intellectual and personal growth where stable, close and mutually respectful relationships exist: schools-within-schools, teams and small group advisories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teach an academic core.</td>
<td>Opportunities to develop literacy, develop thinking skills, lead a health life, behave ethically and assume responsibility in a pluralistic society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensure success for all students.</td>
<td>Opportunities for all students to experience success—elimination of tracking by achievement level, promotional or cooperative learning, flexibility in instructional time and adequate resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions regarding educational experiences.</td>
<td>Opportunities for students to have teachers with greater control over decisions affecting the education process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staff middle schools with teachers who are expert at teaching 10-14-year-olds.</td>
<td>Opportunities for students to have teachers who are properly prepared and assigned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Improve academic performance through fostering health and fitness.</td>
<td>Opportunities for students to have access to health coordinators and to health care and counseling services, and a health-promoting school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Re-engage families in the education of learners.</td>
<td>Opportunities for parents to act in meaningful roles in school governance, opportunities for support the learning process at both home and school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Connect schools with communities.</td>
<td>Opportunities for student participation in the community through service and partnerships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Nespor, (1987) beliefs color not only what individuals recall but how they recall. If it is necessary to completely distort an event, this will be done in order to sustain the beliefs. In addition, explanations will be formulated to surround the aspects of those beliefs, whether these explanations are accurate or inaccurate.

Beliefs within attitudes have connections to one another and to other beliefs in other attitudes. Therefore, a teacher’s attitude about a particular educational issue may include beliefs connected to attitudes about the nature of society, the community, race and even family (Pajares, 1992). These connections create the values that guide one’s life, develop and maintain other attitudes, interpret information and determine behavior (Pajares, 1992). Little will have been accomplished if research into the educational beliefs of teachers fails to provide insight into the relationship between beliefs on the one hand and teacher practices, teacher knowledge and student outcomes on the other.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was conducted among thirty-two middle language arts teachers from three schools in Orleans parish. It is based upon descriptive research which is aimed at describing the beliefs and practices of the respondents. In addition, the research was conducted in a natural setting in order to develop hypotheses that would enable the research to explain or understand why language arts teachers implement developmentally appropriate/inappropriate practices. The research utilized the biographical data sheet, observations, and interviews from language arts teachers in order to assess the opinions, attitudes, preferences and perceptions of the research subjects. It was determined that a biographical data sheet would be a more useful instrument than a teacher questionnaire and would provide more meaningful data.

Qualitative methods were employed for the following reasons: 1) A qualitative approach focuses on social processes and the meanings that participants attribute to social situations. 2) Qualitative research usually attempts to reconstruct reality from the frame of reference of the subjects. The respondents are in some cases better able to understand the complex interactions that have been observed and account for the influence of values on these interactions. 3) A qualitative approach utilizes data analysis, whereby the research gathers the data and then tries to develop an understanding and draw generalizations. 4) Qualitative assessment allows non-judgmental orientation -
-the emphasis is on recording the total situation without superimposing one’s own value system.

**Selection of Participants**

The three middle schools chosen were identified by clearly stated philosophical statements. Twelve schools were contacted, but only four responded. The philosophy of the schools are closely aligned with the purpose of the study. These statements were based on the checklist developed by Dorman (1984) and Manning (1993). (See Appendix H) These researchers stated that educators have the professional responsibility to assess whether their middle level school is basing educational experiences on young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial and cognitive development. The school should adopt clear values that provide a blueprint for their practices.

These values should be limited in number and clearly articulated by all educators working in the school. Dorman (1984) and Manning (1993) state that the following must be implemented: educators should be knowledgeable about young adolescents, a balanced curriculum is based on developmental needs, a range of varied organizational and instructional strategies exist, appropriate evaluation procedures, cooperative planning and a positive school climate.

A meeting was requested with the principal of each school to discuss the purpose of the study and to secure their consent. The language arts teachers participating in the study were given a brief explanation of the purpose of the research. Those who were willing to participate were asked to read and sign a volunteer consent form (See Appendix D). A total of thirty-two teachers out of
fifty agreed to participate in the study and were informed that they may
discontinue participation from the study at any time without penalty. The
names of the individuals were not used in any publications that may result from
the research. To ensure confidentiality, teachers were asked to use an alias
during the interview and observation. A number code was assigned for the
biographical data sheet to ensure confidentiality.

Each teacher was asked to fill out and return by mail the biographical
data sheet, dates and time at which interviews and observations would be held
in accordance to their schedule. Meetings with the language arts teachers
were held in the absence of administrators in order to minimize feelings of
apprehension concerning volunteering or declining to participate. The teachers
were further assured that the data obtained would not be placed in their
personnel files or utilized as a means of evaluation.

In order to prevent any repercussions against the participants, the
strategies and practices were not discussed with anyone, including
administrators, teachers in other disciplines, and all other support personnel.
The investigator informed the participants of all aspects of the research that
might reasonably be expected to influence willingness to participate and all
other aspects of the research about which the participants inquired.

All signed consent forms and field notes were kept on file as proof that
consent was obtained. Upon completion of the study, the administrators were
provided with the results of the research.
Background Information of Language Arts Teachers

Although this may initially seem to be a homogeneous group, it can be divided further into four subgroups as shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Division of Subgroups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CERTIFICATION STATUS</th>
<th>Teachers with a Degree</th>
<th>32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certified</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-certified</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>Masters +30</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.S. or B.A.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE LEVEL</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selecting Classrooms for Observation

In order to select classrooms for observation, a letter was forwarded to school principals to request an interview in order to discuss the purpose of the study and its implications. All three principals gave their consent. The purpose of the study was also discussed with all of the language arts teachers in all three schools. A total of 32 teachers were available. Table 3-2 shows the distribution of teachers by school grade level.

The schools involved vary in demographics, infrastructure and philosophy. School A services predominantly black students who reside
Table 3-2 Distribution of Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL A</th>
<th>SCHOOL B</th>
<th>SCHOOL C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEACHERS</td>
<td>TEACHERS</td>
<td>TEACHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADE 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>GRADE 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADE 7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>GRADE 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADE 8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>GRADE 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

primarily in a public housing project. Most of the students commute to school by walking, school bus, or public transit. The majority of the students are recipients of the free breakfast and lunch program and are on the low socioeconomic level. The school has grade levels six through eight and operates on a seven period day. The curriculum includes language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, reading and exploratory (e.g. home economics, art, music) subjects.

The team teaching approach is utilized, and the three grade levels are maintained on separate floors. This allows the teachers to be able to identify their students by grade level, discuss weaknesses, strengths and problems that students may have. The separation of grade levels also minimizes discipline problems. The students are scheduled twice a week to improve on their language arts and mathematics skills in the computer lab.

School A has various support systems: school disciplinarian, counselor, social workers, a school building level committee, psychologist, college tutors for students, a Chapter I program to improve language arts and mathematics...
skills, school nurse and a speech therapist. The extra curricular activities include a school band and a choir, student council, intramural sports, flag twirlers, majorettes, drill team, 4-H club and a newspaper staff.

The philosophy of school A is that all students which it serves can learn and develop to their maximum potential. This will be achieved through clearly articulated goals supported by the entire staff, a balanced curriculum responsive to the needs of adolescents, varied modes of teaching emphasizing concept development and achievement motivation, a diversified activities program, a strong student-centered guidance program, supportive community relationships, a continuous and relevant staff development program and the ongoing evaluation of all programs.

The students of school B, also predominantly black, reside in public housing and middle class residential neighborhoods. Most of the students commute to school by public transit, school busing, or walking. The school provides a breakfast and lunch program through which 90% of the students receive free lunch. The grade levels for school B are seventh, eighth and ninth, operating on a seven period day. The curriculum includes language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, reading, physical education and exploratory.

The team teaching approach is utilized whereby the three grade levels are maintained in separate buildings. This separation serves the same function as in school A: 1) to minimize discipline problems; 2) to identify students according to grade levels; 3) to discuss with team teachers the strengths,
weaknesses and concerns of students. The teachers advocate that success in school is intricately tied to the reading process. Poor readers can improve if reading is a major thrust of the total curriculum. If materials and strategies are meaningful and well organized, hopefully, reluctant students may become involved in the learning activities.

School B has various support personnel which consists of a school nurse, counselor, social worker, student assistance team, speech therapist, school based-clinic, support and appraisal personnel and itinerant teachers for the arts. The extra-curricular activities consist of an art club, drama club, foreign language club, honor society, library club, peer assistance club, speech club, math club, science club, video club and student council.

The philosophy of School B is based on the recognition that the school is established for the development of the student as an individual with unique needs, desires and expectations. Thus, the basis of its educational program should provide opportunities that will help each individual to grow physically, emotionally, aesthetically, socially, mentally and morally in order to attain optimum achievement in a direction beneficial to society regardless of status, qualifications or religious creeds. Because of the continuous changes in education, the instructional program should employ varied and effective methods to meet specific course requirements for slow learners and the accelerated student. It should encompass an open, friendly but firm and sincere relationship between teacher and student and allow for the development of creativeness as a major endeavor in all phases of school work.
Thus, the central focus of school B is on the individual student. The curriculum shall be flexible, practical, vocation-oriented, exploratory and diversified for student needs, levels and interests. Innovative and traditional methods, strategies and materials used for implementing the instructional program shall be selected if they are effective and reflect consideration for different learning organizational patterns, modes, and characteristics. The administrative staff, faculty, school personnel, parents, students and community will all work together cooperatively as a unified team dedicated solely to helping each individual student develop into a responsible, functional, supportive citizen in our rapidly changing democratic society. (Mission statement, 1996 of School B)

School C is located in an affluent area ranging from middle class to upper class. The school is a more modern structure than the other schools and is fully air-conditioned. The structure of school A is over 125 years old and recently received central air and heat. The structure of school B is more modern than school A; however, school B is only partially air-conditioned.

At school C, the ethnic background is far more diversified than school A or B. It consists of: blacks, whites, Vietnamese, Hispanics and Mexicans. Most of the students commute by public transit or are transported by parents. The school does provide a breakfast and lunch program; however, 90% pay full price for meals.

The grade levels for school C are seventh, eighth and ninth which operate on a seven period day. The curriculum encompasses the same
courses as school A and B. The team teaching approach is also utilized at school C and functions for the reasons already stated by schools A and B.

School C has various support personnel similar to schools A and B. However, language arts is taught as a second language. The extracurricular activities include the newspaper staff, the yearbook staff, photography, intramural sports, student council, Red Cross, math club, drama club, library club, drill team, instrumental music and choir.

The philosophy of school C is that a maximum learning experience will enable all students to become competent, self-reliant and contributing citizens in a democratic society. Therefore, the students would be capable of shaping the future and providing leadership in a highly technological world. The school is established for the development of adolescents as individuals with unique needs, characteristics and desires. The educational program should provide opportunities to grow in all areas of development in order to obtain optimum achievement.

**Administration of Biographical Data, Observations and Interviews**

The biographical data sheet was hand-delivered to the principals with a self-addressed envelope. Principals were informed during the interview that an advance notice and schedule clearance would be developed concerning the teachers' interviews and observations.

The principals submitted a list of the language arts teachers available for participation and their non-teaching period to facilitate the conducting of
interviews. After each interview, the teachers informed the researcher in writing of the dates and times at which classroom observations may be undertaken.

After the above-mentioned information was collected, the interviews were conducted with school A language arts teachers. When the interviews were completed, classroom observations were conducted at the dates and times given by the teachers. The interviews and classroom observations were conducted in the same manner as stated above for school B and C.

Data Collection

As the principal investigator, I visited the thirty-two classrooms two to four times per week from May 1995 through May 1996. Initially, a biographical data sheet was hand-delivered to all participants with a stamped envelope. The respondents used code numbers to protect their anonymity. After receiving all responses, they were coded according to categories. As the principal investigator, I observed the teaching practices of middle school language arts teachers and attempted to uncover the beliefs that influenced their instructional practices.

In order to understand these beliefs and practices, I participated in the classroom activities for the above mentioned reason and to gain rapport with the teachers. Throughout the observation period, detailed notes were taken, and my reflections of these experiences were incorporated as well.

The interviews were held according to the schedule provided by the participants. Two interviews were held for each teacher at the beginning and at the end of the study totaling sixty-four interviews. This was to determine if any
opinions had changed or remained the same and to determine any discrepancies. The interviews were scheduled with the teachers approval during their non-teaching period. The researcher notified the teachers in advance of the upcoming interview date. The teachers were free to cancel and/or reschedule the interview session.

The following rules were applied during the interview sessions (Borg and Gall, 1989).

1. Pose questions in language that is clear and meaningful to the subject.
2. Ask questions that contain only a single idea.
3. Use open-ended questions.
4. The interviewer should talk less than the respondent. As a rule the less the interviewer talks, the more information is produced.
5. Use a conversational mode in the interview that is similar to everyday conversation. This mode communicated empathy and elicits trust in a relaxed atmosphere.
6. Save complex or controversial questions for the latter part of the interview after rapport has been established.
7. Use examples before any items that might be confusing or difficult to understand.

The teachers were receptive to the open-ended questions and freely gave additional comments. The participants were very reluctant to have these proceedings tape recorded or video recorded. Therefore, only field notes were

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
used. Upon completion of collecting the data, all information was organized and coded in order to determine any discrepancies or emerging themes.

**Data Procedure**

Field notes were taken two to four times a week from November 1995 through May 1996. Sources of information included the following: field notes, participant observer notes, and key informants. The participants for the study were middle school language arts teachers who were divided into four categories: graduate veteran, graduate novice, bachelor veteran and bachelor novice. (Categories will be defined in Analysis of Interview Chapter 4.) These categories were further divided according to gender, experience and education.

These participants were informed of the purpose for the research and that their participation would be voluntary and confidential. In addition, all information obtained would be used solely for the purpose of the research and would not be used as an evaluation measure. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the principals (Appendix D). The teachers who were willing to participate signed a volunteer consent form (Appendix D).

The teachers were first issued a biographical data sheet with a stamped envelope. These were to be returned with code numbers only to protect their anonymity. Next, the teachers were observed according to a schedule they submitted. Interviews with open-ended questions were also used. The key informants were the principals and assistant principals. Key informants are members of a group who have special knowledge or perceptions that are not otherwise available to the researcher. They may also provide insights that no
amount of observation would reveal. The key informants perception of the language arts teachers is that this discipline stands at the core of all disciplines. The teachers believe in team teaching and keeping abreast of the latest strategies and techniques in order to accommodate various learning styles and abilities. After the field notes were completed, the three methods of research were reviewed to reveal emerging themes, patterns, or contradictions that would provide an explanation for the beliefs and practices implemented in middle school language arts classes.

Data Collection Analysis

The data was analyzed based upon information received from the biographical data, observations and interviews. These methods were reviewed and organized in order to determine any recurring patterns or themes.

According to Borg and Gall (1989), analysis of the triangulation method involves: 1) collection of the data from the instruments; 2) search for recurring patterns, themes, or events; 3) establish method of codes; and 4) writing clearly concerning recurring patterns, themes, or events. After the analysis was completed, the data was reviewed again to report any discrepancies. Every attempt was made to gather all pertinent information in order to complete this study.

Once the above steps were taken the following factors were considered:

1. What conclusions can be supported?

2. What generalizations to the population are justified?
3. The researcher must consider unanticipated results.

4. What behaviors are repetitive?

5. How are classroom activities organized labeled, explained and justified?

6. What language do they use for communication, both verbal and nonverbal?

7. How do participants view their past and future teaching experiences?

8. What meanings do participants attribute to what they do?
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Instrumentation

Three types of instrumentation were utilized: biographical data, observation and interview. To incorporate several different kinds of data-collection instruments is referred to as triangulation of methodology (Borg & Gall, 1985). Triangulation is achieved by collecting essentially the same data from different sources, at different times, and in different places.

The researcher engages in a variety of activities when acting as a participant observer. In order to implement the above mentioned instruments, the researcher watched the actions of the subjects, listened to what they said and interacted with subjects in order to be socialized into the group under investigation. The observation instrument in particular allowed the researcher to study behaviors without alerting the subjects that certain behaviors were being studied, such as facial expressions, tone of voice and nonverbal language.

Analysis of Biographical Data

Ornstein (1990) stated that language arts teachers should use several instructional sources in the classroom in order to accommodate the variety of learning styles and learning abilities. This study indicated that other than the textbooks, language arts teachers disseminated information in the manner shown in Table 4-1. From these sources, the most frequently used are dictionaries, computers, journals, audiovisuals and kits/workbooks.
Table 4-1 Instructional Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dictionary</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visuals</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kits/Workbooks</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Speakers</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers' primary purposes for teaching language arts are: 1) to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the students and not vice-versa; 2) to establish effective communication through reading, writing and word pronunciation skills; 3) to prepare students for the secondary level and increase all aspects of communication skills; 4) to provide students with a storehouse of knowledge that will lend itself to cultural literacy; 5) to apply and adapt existing and new knowledge in familiar or new situations; 6) to communicate ideas in writing with language and style organization, coupled with the appropriate emphasis on form, grammar, spelling and punctuation; 7) to ensure that basic skills are taught in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Finally, teachers were asked if their beliefs regarding middle school language arts instruction had changed or remained the same since their early years of teaching. The data revealed that seventy-two percent (72%) had
changed their beliefs, twenty-five percent (25%) had not changed, and three percent (3%) decided that it was too early in their career to make a sound judgment. Reasons cited for the changes in beliefs included: 1) teachers need to focus more on the learning ability and styles of adolescents and less on forcing adolescents to adapt to the curriculum; 2) classrooms need to be more student-centered than teacher-centered; 3) the school system is more concerned about test scores than methods to improve student achievement; 4) one method of teaching did not work for the various learning styles; 5) adolescents should be active learners and not passive learners; 6) small group instructions allow students on any level to work with and assist each other; and 7) the adolescent requires far more guidance and hands-on experience than a student at the secondary level.

At the other end of the spectrum, those who had not changed their beliefs maintained their beliefs because: 1) despite the current trends and strategies, there is no need to change; the methods used in the early years are still appropriate; 2) to change will not produce significant student progress; 3) with adolescents, one must be an authoritarian-type teacher emphasizing lectures, the textbook and whole instruction; 4) to allow students independence and creativity invites chaos; 5) they feel totally frustrated with the students and the school system; 6) they feel inundated with discipline and new strategies; and 7) the attempts made were a waste of time.
Analysis of Observation

The researcher functioned primarily as a participant observer in order to gain rapport with the teachers. It was necessary to do so in order to develop a better understanding of how the teaching beliefs and practices function within the classroom.

The observation focused on and answered the following questions:

1. What resources are used in the classroom?
2. Who makes the decisions in the classroom, i.e., are decisions solely those of the teacher, or are they shared between teacher and students?
3. How are activities organized, explained and justified?
4. What teaching strategies are implemented during instruction?

In response to the first question, there were a variety of learning resources in the classroom. Some teachers (50%) provided learning centers or an in-house library. The resources used beyond the textbook were dictionaries, computers, writing, journals, kits/workbooks, newspaper, novels, magazines and guest speakers. One teacher incorporated photography and architectural designs of historical city sites. This not only allowed the students to leave the classroom but it also used the city as the textbook and provided hands-on activities. In addition, the students were made more aware of the cultural richness that the city offers.
Second, decisions were initially made by the teacher in order to provide structure and a model to follow. However, 91% of the teachers allowed flexibility and student input. In instances where student input was allowed, students participated in peer learning, mutual assistance and information seeking. The students participated in small-group problem sessions which encouraged collaboration on demanding tasks rather than leaving students to work independently and become frustrated.

Third, teachers devoted as much time as necessary to instruction when presenting new ideas. In order to provide a sound instructional framework they allowed for a pre-reading (preparation) phase, a guided reading phase, post-reading (follow-up) activities and a discussion on how the new information or concepts relate to students’ everyday experiences. The teachers usually followed with guided and independent practice or built background knowledge by eliciting students’ prior knowledge of the topic.

In order to provide a clear explanation of the material, teachers issued outlines, they used the overhead projector for reviewing pertinent information in the outline and students engaged in brainstorming to assist other students in comprehension. Teachers demonstrated that there is no single type of strategy used. Teachers used brain-storming, encouraged peer learning and information seeking through group retellings or tutorial grouping, SQ3R method, cooperative learning, text previews, small group instruction and the incorporation of technology with the textbook.
Finally, upon the conclusion of the observations I spoke briefly with a veteran teacher of twenty years. She reported that the middle school is the most difficult yet the most rewarding and challenging level to work on. While others frown upon the adolescent, this teacher thought it was necessary to give them guidance and appropriate instruction not only academically, but socially, emotionally and physically. "After all", she replied, "without the children we have no schools." Therefore, middle schools should match the curriculum to fit the abilities and learning levels of the students. (Personal communication, Feb. 7, 1996).

Observations are well suited to discover the relationship between a given educational setting and its immediate social context. The teacher's behavior in the classroom is affected by what happens in the broader social systems, such as the school, the district and the community (Erickson, Florio, and Buschman, 1980). These systems must be taken into account when studying the local scenes. The investigator can compare the way different activities and problems are handled in other places and other times. The perspective developed by such comparisons can help the researcher identify the genuine possibilities for change as well as the genuine constraints.

Observations can be classified as low-inference behavior or high-inference behavior. According to the former, the observer records clearly defined practices. The observer is not called upon to interpret or draw inferences from what is observed.
On the other hand, observations can be high-inference behavior because the observer must translate his general impression into a single judgment. The observation method used for this study was developed by Sikorski, Niemiec and Walberg (1994). The intent was to develop a checklist for the implementation of developmentally appropriate instruction and determine to what extent instruction was implemented.

In the development and organization of the checklist, the researchers composed statements describing observable teaching behaviors that have an association with student learning. The instrument is divided into five sections:

1. Introducing the lesson, dealing with those behaviors that set the stage for learning. The teacher identifies the key concepts that are to be learned in the lesson.
2. Presenting the lesson. Teachers present concepts in understandable chunks but proceed at a rapid rate to avoid problems.
3. Student participation identifies those behaviors that promote group cohesion.
4. Evaluative feedback identifies, reviews and re-teaches elements of developmentally appropriate instruction.
5. Written comments provide space for pertinent observations about teaching that are not captured by the previous statements (p.28).

The researchers developed a scale in order to determine the degree of developmentally appropriate instruction implemented in the classroom. The scale is as follows: Excellent (39-36), Superior (35-32), Very Good (31-28),
Good (27-24) and Fair (23-20). In order to determine the various scores, only the “yes” responses are tabulated. Table 4-2 summarizes the findings from this instrument.

Table 4-2 Developmentally Appropriate Instruction Implementation Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SUPERIOR</th>
<th>VERY GOOD</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>FAIR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRADUATE VETERAN</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADUATE NOVICE</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACHELOR VETERAN</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACHELOR NOVICE</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes scores less than 3%.

As shown above, the data shows a relationship between experience and developmentally appropriate instruction. Based upon the interviews and observation, this research supports previous studies that show teachers who are experienced and receptive to educational innovations have the ability to make appropriate decisions about students and the knowledge base when planning and teaching. It promotes a holistic perspective that gives appropriate weight to the role of knowledge and the needs of the learner within particular settings and situations.

In addition to the observation checklist, additional notes were taken for each respondent observed. The majority of classes observed contained learning centers exhibiting the following emphasis on the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing), computers and
reading materials (novels, magazines, puzzles, encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses and atlases). In one classroom, a center was provided for review work on assignments previously given with answers once the material has been initialed by the teacher. Reading centers with the use of computers for on level and below level readers were provided for students. Portfolios of students’ work were kept in binders.

Several classes were involved in developing writing skills. The teachers fully explained each step and all students were attentive. Initially, the lesson was taught to the entire class. Thereafter, students were placed in groups. The teachers circulated among the groups to determine the students’ progress and comprehension. Students were encouraged to share ideas and offer suggestions within the groups. After students shared and offered ideas, a rough draft was started. Students within each group proofread the work of group members.

The use of small group instruction was more frequently observed than whole group instruction. Each group selected their members as opposed to selections by the teacher. Peer teachers or group leaders were selected by group members to perform the following tasks: 1) to ensure that all members completed their assignments; 2) answer all questions posed by group members; 3) maintain order; 4) issue and collect all materials necessary for assignments; 5) hold study sessions for tests and oral presentations. The teacher’s task was that of a facilitator, questioning students for comprehension and providing feedback to questions too difficult for peer leaders. In some
instances, the teacher guided groups to information in order to obtain the correct answers and to explore the steps taken in doing so. Throughout the observation period, teachers consistently used examples and illustrations to introduce, teach and reteach information. Heterogeneous grouping rather than homogeneous grouping was used to enhance lower level ability.

In contrast, only a few classes demonstrated primarily whole instruction. There was little interaction between the teacher and students. Those students who completed assignments early sat idle. The teacher did not circulate to ask questions, offer suggestions, or issue another assignment. In cases where assignments were issued, they were not reviewed to determine what students did or did not comprehend. Writing journals was considered to be unimportant and placed an unnecessary burden on teachers. The major source of information was disseminated through the textbook, lectures and ditto sheets.

As class observations demonstrate, teaching is a complex profession whereby there is no solution that fits every circumstance. On the contrary, teaching episodes can and should be qualified by "It depends" (Newman and Church, 1990). It depends on such variables as current level of comprehension, the experience of the child, and the kind of previous knowledge and skills the child brings to the situation. Contextual elements including time, human resources, the physical environment, material resources, and the values and expectations of the school and community must also be considered. Practitioners must continually weigh what they do with their knowledge about how children develop and learn. To translate that knowledge
into actual teaching strategies, they must be willing to explore a variety of practices in the classroom.

Teachers will have to continually examine their assumptions and learn from the children as they evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching. What meets the needs of several children in a group may not be appropriate for others. What was optimal for last year's students may not be so the following year. One's search is not simply for "right" answers, but for the best answers to meet the needs of students representing a wide range of abilities, learning styles, interests and backgrounds.

Learning can be characterized as occurring in two directions: vertically and horizontally. The former is hierarchical. A person starts at the base and gradually moves upward. This kind of learning piles facts or skills one on top of the other. As the learner proceeds higher and higher, the result is an increase in the number and complexity of the facts and skills he or she has attained. Horizontal learning is conceptually based. Within this framework, experiences occur more or less simultaneously, and the role of the learner becomes that of making connections among these experiences (Newman and Church, 1990).

Hierarchical and horizontal learning are essential to human understanding. The former expands one's quantity of knowledge and skills; the latter contributes to their quality. Neither should be emphasized to the detriment of the other. There should be more of a balance in the curriculum with both kinds of learning being addressed and valued (Newman and Church, 1990). This is a fundamental tenet of developmentally appropriate instruction.
This would result not in students learning less, but in students learning better. Language arts instruction that focuses on isolated skill development, whole group instruction, and paper-and-pencil activities does not meet the needs of adolescents. However, instruction that emphasizes concepts and processes, small group instruction, active manipulation of relevant, concrete materials, and interactive learning provide a solid foundation for language arts within a context of meaningful activity.

**Analysis of Interview**

The interview consisted of seventeen (17) open-ended questions based on the research questions. As previously stated, several categories were developed: curriculum, students, most influential in implementing instruction, primary purpose for teaching language arts, and beliefs system. Teachers were asked if a variety of teaching methods were employed and what processes were used (whole, small, and individualized instruction). Respondents overwhelmingly replied that a variety of methods were used, and sixty-two percent (62%) preferred small group over whole group instruction. Twenty-two percent (22%) used a combination of both small and whole group instruction, emphasizing individualized instruction, particularly with small groups. Sixteen percent (16%) of the respondents implemented whole group instruction and felt comfortable using this single process.

The second category entitled “students” revealed that ninety-four percent (94%) of the respondents encouraged the students to be self-directed and independent. The following reasons were given: 1) to provide organizational
skills, structure, and acceptance of constructive criticism; 2) to prepare students for greater independence required on the secondary level; 3) to encourage adolescents to make decisions for themselves and to be able to state the reasoning behind the decision; 4) to enable students to rely less on the teachers. In order to enhance writing skills, the computer was used. The reasons cited were: 1) the writing process provides an opportunity to maximize intellectual potential; 2) to introduce students to professional writing on the computer; 3) to provide organizational skills, structure, and acceptance of constructive criticism; 4) to prepare and improve writing skills for the secondary level and for life as an adult; 5) to improve clarity of ideas; 6) to improve oral communication skills; 7) to guide students beyond prewriting and writing and advance them to the stages of revision, proofreading, and completion of the final version.

A third category that several choices were the most influential factor for the implementation of instruction. The results revealed the following from greatest to least significant: students-63%, school district-25%, teachers-9%, State Department of Education-3%. Several factors were reported to support these finding: 1) the instruction should be tailored to meet the individual needs of each student; 2) it is the teacher's responsibility to help each student learn according to their ability level; 3) teachers should determine what the best way is to enable students to learn and guide them to their fullest potential. The individuals which selected the teacher as most influential responded that they perform better with materials with which they are more knowledgeable.
Teachers also considered the manner in which the lessons are presented; careful planning and presentation on the teacher’s part will hopefully lead to better comprehension for the students.

Subjects who considered the school district as most influential cited the following: 1) teacher evaluation; 2) standardized test scores; 3) review of grades at the end of the quarter; and 4) curriculum guides. The most frequent responses concerned raising test scores and the strategies used to improve them. The State Department of Education was considered influential only when the individual is placed in the evaluation cycle.

The years of experience were divided into the following categories:

**Graduate Veteran** - one who holds a Master's Degree or higher, tenured, and five (5) or more years of experience.

**Graduate Novice** - one who holds a Master's Degree, non-tenured, and less than five (5) of experience.

**Bachelor Veteran** - one who holds an undergraduate degree only, tenured, five (5) or more years of experience.

**Bachelor Novice** - one who holds an undergraduate degree only, non-tenured, and less than five (5) years of experience.

The third instrument, the interview, allowed respondents to reply more extensively to questions and to determine any relationships between the biographical data, observation and interview concerning teaching beliefs and practices. The questions listed below hopefully result in information that will be
reasonably objective while still permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondents' opinions and the reasons behind them.

1. How much do you know about the beliefs of your administrator concerning middle school language arts instruction?

2. How much does your administrator tell you about his/her beliefs concerning middle school language arts instruction?

3. How often does your principal observe your class during instruction?

4. If observations are held, do you receive prior notification and feedback from the principal?

5. Of the following, which one has the most influence on the way you plan and implement instruction in your class: teacher (yourself), principal, students, school district, parents. Briefly state your reason(s).

6. In your opinion, what should the primary objective of a language arts course be for the middle school learner?

7. What influenced you to pursue a degree in language arts?

8. Have your beliefs changed or remained the same from your earlier years as a teacher as to what is appropriate or inappropriate for middle school language arts instruction?

9. Do you employ one or a variety of methods to disseminate instruction (lecture, textbooks, computer, media, etc.)?

10. Is it important to teach students to become self-directed, independent learners? Why?

11. Is it important for students to keep journals? Why?

12. Is it important for students to engage in the writing process, i.e., prewriting, drafting, writing, revising, editing, publishing.

13. Do you provide guided, independent practice and feedback on students' attempts with materials and activities?

14. What role do you believe parents play in their child's education?
15. How would you describe the attitude of parents concerning their child's progress in language arts?

16. Do you communicate on a regular basis with parents concerning their child's progress in language arts?

17. In general, how similar or dissimilar are the attitudes of parents and their children towards education in language arts?

This method of triangulation between the above mentioned instruments helped to establish trust worthiness and supported previous findings that the beliefs of language arts teachers, which are influenced by many sources, do indeed determine the implementation of developmentally appropriate/inappropriate practices in the classroom. It is hoped that the data obtained has given insight that relates to the impact of different teaching behavior patterns and beliefs.

Analysis of Teacher Beliefs

The data analysis suggested that beliefs about teaching can interact and influence instructional content and classroom opportunities lead to varying levels of teaching knowledge. It also supports current trends and theory that the middle school language arts teachers believe that adolescents learn developmentally and self-constructively through manipulations of their world. Instruction should also be age appropriate, individually appropriate, interactive, with a variety of activities and interests. In addition, those who entered teaching believing in a teacher-directed structure saw the need to modify or change entirely their instruction so that it would be closer aligned to developmentally appropriate instruction.
There appeared to be a definite pattern among the respondents in realizing that traditional practices are not conducive to learning for middle school learners. The respondents also reported that many adolescents need to be challenged with complex and abstract reasoning tasks and the possibility for the hypothetical. On the other hand, many students of the same age and in the same class find it difficult to move beyond the concrete, the real, and the immediate. The respondents also reported that working in groups was a powerful strategy for discussions, cooperative learning, and shared inquiry. Experienced teachers stated that they must have the following in order to implement developmentally appropriate instruction: knowledge of the latest research and its classroom application, excellent human relations skills and leadership qualities, the ability to function as a catalyst for change, and the ability to provide support to adolescents. On the other hand, there were teachers who incorporate learning strategies into their instruction and continue to evaluate student outcomes in a way that is not consistent with their teaching. Their teaching is for process and the main idea and their testing is still objective and detail oriented. Therefore, the students fail but for a good reason: the evaluation was not consistent with their instruction. This was observed in developmentally inappropriate language arts classrooms, where evaluation and instruction are not tailored to the needs of the students and the two are not consistent with each other.

These results are significant for several reasons: 1) developmentally appropriate instruction is derived from a philosophy of education that is in total
opposition to the educational philosophy that now dictates educational practice in the majority of our public middle schools; 2) the basic material of education on the middle level is not the curriculum, assessment, or methods, but the adolescent learner; 3) teachers should develop through educational training a strong foundation in adolescent development and integrate what they learn about curriculum, assessment and management with what they know about how adolescents of various ages think and learn; 4) all of the respondents teach in urban middle schools where they reported that some students (despite all efforts) lack motivation to learn, perceived little reason for attending school, and demonstrate atrocious attendance habits; 5) many pedagogical methods employed by some teachers in urban schools do not work. There are teachers whose overuse of direction and insistence on student compliance only provoke student resentment and teacher burnout as emotional and physical energy are to maintain the experience teacher authority. Teachers who are implementing developmentally appropriate instruction reported that it is impossible to separate the learning process from the material to be learned, as it is impossible to separate learning from instruction. The teacher in this environment is also a learner and the students are also teachers. The teacher who experiments with the curriculum is learning about the curriculum and the students he or she teaches. The students also learn to work cooperatively and are teaching as well.

Respondents reported that it was only logical to focus their attention and instruction on teaching adolescents how to learn rather than focusing on
content only. This technique is called metacognition. Metacognition refers to a person's awareness and understanding of knowledge and control over skills (Stewart & Tei, 1983). Metacognition is involved when a student assesses what he or she knows and does not know about a topic. Metacognitive skills do not fully develop in students until late adolescence, but much can be done to enhance the ability during the middle level years (Stewart & Tei, 1983).

Before adolescents can use metacognitive skills, they must become aware of the learning context, their own ability, how to interpret the demands of a learning task, and the best ways to react in order to maximize learning. The respondents have assisted adolescents in this manner by 1) clarifying the purposes of learning, understanding both explicit and implicit task demands; 2) identifying the important aspects of a message; 3) focusing attention on major content rather than trivia; 4) monitoring ongoing activities to determine whether comprehension is occurring; 5) engaging in self-questioning to determine whether goals are being achieved; and 6) taking corrective action when failures in comprehension are detected.

Metacognition develops as a student matures, usually during adolescence. However, it can be taught and strengthened by explicit instruction and practice (Thelen, 1986). Young adolescents are just beginning to be able to consider their own thinking in relation to the thoughts of others. The middle level years are an ideal time to develop metacognitive abilities in students and to teach them a repertoire of learning strategies to become independent learners.
During the middle and near the closing of school, the biographical data, observations, and interviews were compared for each respondent to determine any degree of change (Sikorski, Niemiec, and Walberg, 1994). Care was taken to look at negative evidence such as, reasons given for beliefs remaining unchanged throughout the teaching career, lack of variety of teaching techniques and strategies, refusal to respond to any interview question or the biographical data sheet. The data instruments were checked for consistency and/or inconsistency. No significant discrepancies emerged.

**Conclusion**

This research concluded that there is a relationship between teachers’ educational beliefs, planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices. This research offers the following:

1. The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter.

2. The belief system has an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves (Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Abelson, 1979).

3. Beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate and persevere even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience (Wilson, 1990; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Munby, 1982).

4. Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks.
Therefore, they play a role in defining behavior, organizing knowledge, and information (Bandura, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Lewis, 1990).

5. Individuals tend to hold on to beliefs based on incorrect knowledge even after scientifically correct explanations are presented to them (Lewis, 1990; Rokeach, 1968; Abelson, 1979).

6. Beliefs must be inferred, and this inference must take into account the congruence among individuals' belief statements, the intention to behave in a predisposed manner, and the behavior related to the belief in question (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Abelson, 1979; Wilson, 1990).
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion of Research Questions

"To what degree do middle school language arts teachers reflect developmentally appropriate practices?" Although knowledge and beliefs are essential components within curricular expertise, beliefs held and reinforced over a long period of time increasingly take the form of knowledge and influence appropriate or inappropriate instruction. Curricular expertise is reflected in teachers' abilities to select and convey content appropriate to the learner within a particular contextual setting and situation (Ennis, 1994). Teachers' beliefs form as they test their decisions in a variety of situations and settings on a daily basis. They learn to modify their teaching plans to maximize opportunities to work with particular facilities and instructional programs.

Value orientations describe the relative priority the teacher places on several key factors in teaching (Ennis, 1994). These include teaching the disciplinary body of knowledge, accommodating student interests and needs in curriculum selection and responding to or shaping the teaching environment in which the teacher works. During this study, it was revealed that middle school language arts teachers expended great effort to find ways to teach what they believed to be important to their students' learning and enjoyment. Conversely, teachers make only minimal efforts to improve situations that limit the teaching of content when they do not believe the content is important. This can occur when teachers are required to implement a new curriculum that they had no
part in designing or that is inconsistent with their own professional skills or beliefs.

The observations and interviews revealed that in these instances, teachers may choose to ignore information, even when others (researchers, curriculum directors, supervisors) insist that the curricular change will improve the learning environment for middle school learners. Those language arts teachers who implemented developmental instruction focused on skills and attitudes such as, communication, computing, and researching, reflective thinking, identifying and judging the morality of problem situations, problem-solving, valuing, developing, social action skills (e.g., action up on problem situation both individually and collectively) and forming self-concepts and self-esteem. The language arts curriculum challenges learners at their respective ability levels, providing a clear articulation between elementary and secondary levels, and responds to the immediate concerns of the young adolescent learner.

In contrast, some teachers believed that current strategies and techniques were incompatible with their current conceptualization of language arts. These individuals believe that current strategies and techniques are incompatible with their current methods of instruction (Ennis, 1994). The teachers expressed concerns that innovative techniques are inconsistent with their beliefs or knowledge structures. They also expressed the idea that workshop leaders were unaware of the problems associated with teaching in their school. Individuals may continue to hold beliefs based on incorrect or
incomplete knowledge, even after being confronted with knowledge or research findings to the contrary (Pajares, 1992). According to Ennis (1994), when knowledge presented is inconsistent or incompatible with the individual’s belief system, it will not be positioned in the knowledge structure and will not affect future practice. Although it is true that change for the sake of change is unwise, some educators view current language arts instruction as a formidable barrier to curricular innovation and development.

“By what strategies or techniques do middle school language arts teachers communicate beliefs and practices?” The use of developmentally appropriate strategies and techniques in language arts instruction is widely used. In order to determine what was developmentally appropriate, five areas of instruction were investigated that were established by researchers: mode of presentation, instructional format, use of textbooks and material, nature of classroom activities and the use of questioning, critical thinking and problem-solving (Wood & Muth, 1991).

For the mode of presentation, teachers utilized a variety of techniques, such as modeling strategies, demonstrations, examples, and illustrations as opposed to lecturing. Teachers encouraged peer learning and information seeking through group retellings, research projects and cooperative learning. These methods were more widely used than the lecture method as a means of conveying information.

The instructional format incorporated vocabulary strategies that involved a higher level of processing, such as semantic mapping and preview in context.
rather than writing vocabulary words on the board and locating definitions. Teachers also utilized brainstorming, predicting outcomes, determining assumptions and eliciting students' prior knowledge as oppose to having students read orally or silently on their own. The instructional format included teaching within a framework that involved prereading, reading and post reading rather than issuing assignments with little or no preparation, directions, follow-up, or discussion.

The use of textbooks and materials incorporated developing questions in the forms of study guides, allowing students to compose their point of view on a particular subject, peer reading and retelling, and the use of recall strategies. The teachers found this to be beneficial for students rather than completing end-of-chapter questions or working independently. The use of the media and other technology devices were employed as aids in reading.

The nature of classroom activities involved students in hands-on learning activities. Teachers were interested in activities that promoted higher-order thinking, thus resulting in substantial learning. Teachers reviewed the level of difficulty for textbooks, thus avoiding the assumption that their students possessed the ability for successful study skills.

In order to assist students in developing effective questioning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teachers implemented two important strategies. First, small group problem-solving sessions were held in order to encourage adolescents to collaborate on demanding and challenging tasks. Second, in order to assist adolescents with integrating new information with
their existing knowledge, teachers employed questions which prompted
students to identify relationships among ideas so that meaningful learning could
take place. Third, the use of analogies and drawing conclusions were far more
effective than literal recall.

A plethora of information has been written concerning developmentally
appropriate/inappropriate instruction and implementation of strategies and
techniques (Bauch, 1982; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Wood
& Muth, 1991; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Elkind, 1989). This research
reveal that developmentally appropriate strategies and techniques on the
middle school level utilize the uniqueness of the individual, providing
experiences that meet the needs of individual students, promoting self-esteem
and positive feelings toward learning. Moreover, these middle schools were
making great strides in providing an environment for active exploration and
concrete experiences. Instruction should establish for the adolescent the
relevance between prior knowledge and what is taught in the classroom (Wood
& Muth, 1991). Adolescents are constantly attempting to make sense of the
world and to learn more about it. Throughout the observation period, language
arts teachers worked in this direction to provide learners with opportunities to
integrate learning, apply skills to authentic problems and to develop conceptual
skills to enable the students to express themselves orally and in written form.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Preferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mode of Presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) More telling, mentioning, or assisting than actual teaching.</td>
<td>Modeling strategies, assignment, or techniques by using demonstrations, examples and explanations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The lecture approach as the predominant means of conveying information.</td>
<td>Encouraging peer learning and information seeking through group retellings, research, interest or tutorial grouping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Instructional format</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Writing vocabulary words on the board and having students look them up in the dictionary</td>
<td>Vocabulary strategies that use deeper processing such as semantic mapping and preview in context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Telling the class to open textbooks and begin reading.</td>
<td>Building background, eliciting students' prior knowledge, brainstorming, guided imagery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Providing no guidance for learning from written/oral material</td>
<td>Teaching students how to be strategic readers by engaging in mental modeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Assigning reading with little or no preparation, direction, follow-up or discussion.</td>
<td>Teaching within a framework that includes prereading, reading and post reading phases following a model of direct instructional where appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use of textbooks and materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Having students answer end-of-chapter questions.</td>
<td>Developing questions in the form of study guides and reading road maps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Expecting students to work independently when textbooks are too difficult</td>
<td>Reducing the amount of print students must deal with, encouraging peer reading and retelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nature of classroom activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Assuming that students have the study skills necessary to complete assignments.</td>
<td>Teaching students how to use their textbooks by conducting a text preview, demonstrated study strategies and note taking strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Questioning, critical thinking and problem solving.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Asking mostly literal level questions.</td>
<td>Developing questions that involve thinking beyond the text, setting group problem-solving sessions, using statements instead of questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The third research question states, “what is the relationship between years of teaching experience and degree with developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices in middle school/language arts classrooms?” Pajares (1992) explains that the “earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter.” Nisbett & Ross (1980) suggest that earlier experiences become woven within belief systems. They appear to influence final judgments across one’s career. Once teachers make a judgment and find it effective, they are likely to incorporate the solution as part of a belief or informal theory (Pajares, 1992). Over time, informal theories become highly resistant to change. These rigid beliefs influence teachers’ perception of the usefulness of alternative strategies or judgments, influencing their willingness to consider and use new information.

Within experience, efforts to maintain one’s beliefs in the presence of conflicting information often result in what Pajares (1992) describes as “very agile, mental somersaults.” Some researchers (Nespor, 1987, Nisbett & Ross, 1980) describe efforts by teachers to interpret conflicting evidence to support their beliefs. They may use selective attention to focus only on the information that supports their informal theories or beliefs. These strategies result in biases that limit their ability to question beliefs in light of new information. Biases can influence “not only what individuals recall but how they recall it, if necessary completely distorting the event recalled in order to sustain the belief ” (Pajares, 1992).
Beliefs that are relatively new to the individual must fight for positioning with well-established beliefs in the belief network. When beliefs are challenged prior to becoming firmly established, they are easily squeezed out of the structure (Pajares, 1992). Sustaining neophyte beliefs recently developed in professional preparation is difficult when confronted with the persuasive views of veteran teachers and traditional school policies. These views may encourage first year teachers to revert to earlier beliefs and expectations.

In order to determine the relationship between teaching experience and developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices among middle school language arts teachers, this study involved the analysis of the interviews and biographical data that were given. The teachers were divided into the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-2 Teacher Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Veteran</strong> - Graduate Veteran - one who holds a Master's Degree or higher, tenured and five (5) years or more experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Novice</strong> - one who holds a Master's Degree or higher; non-tenured and less that five (5) years of experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bachelor Veteran</strong> - one who holds an undergraduate degree only, tenured, five (5) years or more of experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bachelor Novice</strong> - one who holds an undergraduate degree only, non-tenured, and less that 5 years of experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview consisted of seventeen (17) open-ended questions, and the biographical data requested the following: highest degree earned, years of
teaching experience, years of teaching on the middle school level, area of certification, strategies and techniques used, attendance to national or international conventions within two (2) years, attendance to regional or state conventions within two (2) years, presentations to a national or international convention, presentations on the state or regional level, presentations given within the department, topics beyond the textbook, have beliefs changed or remained the same regarding language arts in the middle school level.

According to biographical data obtained from respondents, fifty-six percent (56%) have earned a Master's Degree or higher (i.e. Master's + 30 or Specialist in Reading). With regard to experience, eighty-four percent (84%) are veteran teachers. The years of experience ranged from 17-30 years. For forty-seven percent (47%) of teachers their only experience has been on the middle school level, while others have experience on the elementary, middle and secondary level. All respondents are certified in language arts, including other areas as well (science, math, social studies).

The respondents stated that it was imperative to remain abreast of current trends for middle school language arts students in order to be effective. Attendance to national or international conventions revealed that forty-six percent (46%) have done so within the past two (2) years; attendance to conventions on regional or state level was sixty-two percent (62%); presentations on the national or international level were thirty-one percent (31%); presentations on the regional or state level were forty-one percent
(41%) and presentations within the department were fifty-nine percent (59%).

This data is outlined in Table 5-3.

Table 5-3 Attendance And Presentations To Conventions Within The Past Two Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduate Veteran</th>
<th>Graduate Novice</th>
<th>Bachelor Veterans</th>
<th>Bachelor Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International or National</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional or State</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International or National</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional or State</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Department</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- - represents those with less than three percent (3%).

The respondents reported several strategies or techniques used for middle school learners in language arts:

1. diagnostic testing - - to assess what the student does or does not know before a lesson is introduced;

2. SQ3R (survey, questions, read, recite, review) - - the students' look at the title and subtitles and transforms them into questions. Next, the students read to answer the questions and reads the material again to have it firmly implanted.

3. shared inquiry - - refers to interpretive reading selections and attempting to determine why the author presented the material in a certain fashion

4. vocabulary words - - relating their importance to the story.
The textbook was not used as the only source of information in language arts. The following were used in conjunction and considered to be just as important or more than the textbook: magazines, computers, newspapers, guest speakers, journals, audio-visual equipment, dictionaries, novels and kits or workbooks.

Finally, respondents were asked “have their beliefs changed or remained the same since the early years of their career?” In response to this question, seventy-two percent (72%) changed their beliefs, twenty-five percent (25%) did not change their beliefs, and three percent (3%) decided it was too early in their career to decide. Some teachers reported that their beliefs and practices had to change because learning abilities and levels are so vast. The use of only one instructional strategy can no longer accommodate a successful learning environment. The respondents also reported that the lesson plans must change every year. Each year students move faster or slower than the previous year. Therefore, the pace of the students cannot be determined before hand. Novice teachers stated that they relied heavily upon teacher education. However, through actual experience they discovered that some techniques did not work and sought advice from veteran teachers and workshops.

Veteran teachers claimed that their classrooms have become more student-centered than teacher directed. The developmentally appropriate teachers share power with the students to the extent that each child can handle it. A student-centered classroom provided more opportunity for students to
investigate that which is of interest to them. Through experience, veteran
teachers discovered that to direct instead of guide takes away opportunities
from the students and prevents the development of autonomy and the ability to
direct themselves confidently.

At the other end of the spectrum, some teachers expressed that their
beliefs have not changed. These individuals were adamant about changing
their beliefs and practices despite the success of current trends and strategies.
These individuals reported that, as far as they were concerned the traditional
methods have worked, and there is no need to change. Others pointed out that
new techniques were a waste of time and nothing beneficial would result. A
few were contemplating retirement and concentrating on working less not,
more. Still, some reported that students reflected the attitudes of their
environment. Students are in school because it is law. In this instance,
teachers saw no need to assist students in developing to their maximum
potential.

As stated earlier, beliefs influence teachers’ willingness to consider and
use new information. The more experience one acquires, the more one will
select certain information to support his or her beliefs. However, this research
demonstrated that the experienced teacher was willing to try and did accept
new instructional techniques/strategies. These individuals stated that
eagerness to learn is a condition that must be nurtured. When adolescents are
eager and ready to learn, their attempts and efforts must be valued and
encouraged.
“What are the constraining factors that contribute to teachers' understanding of developmentally appropriate practice?” Most people behave in ways which are different from the way they describe the things they actually do. Individuals may continue to defend these practices, even after being confronted with knowledge or research findings that are contrary to such practices (Wakefield, 1993). Some practices are used to preserve one's sense of self-worth. By attributing failures or difficulties in applying knowledge to constraints in the teaching setting, teachers place the responsibility of control for decisions affecting learning to some other source beyond their control. They can legitimately dismiss knowledge and their understanding of it as non-utilitarian because it is not effective in their situation. In other words, when new knowledge or a current practice in education is considered not useful despite proven success, the innovation will fail. This becomes part of the teacher's set of presumptions that eventually becomes impervious to old and new knowledge alike. Knowledge of curricular and instructional innovations, such as developmentally appropriate practices becomes inert. It is available but is perceived to be irrelevant (Ennis, 1994).

As stated, earlier beliefs influence many of the decisions that teachers make in classroom instruction (Pajares, 1992). For example, if teachers believe it is important to teach cooperative learning, they are likely to devote time to teaching cooperative skills separate from independent practice. They design tasks that require progressively more complicated cooperative skills and
evaluate their own and their students' success by the extent to which students can work together to accomplish such skills.

In this study, several constraining factors were revealed that prevented teachers understanding of developmentally appropriate practice. First, there are those who believe that developmentally appropriate instruction is too demanding and are inundated by other teaching responsibilities. Second, some teachers continue to make students conform to the curriculum despite the various learning abilities and levels that exists in the classroom. Third, despite the success of current trends and strategies, some educators are adamantly opposed to change. For these individuals, traditional methods were successful in their early years of teaching and will continue regardless of any research findings. Fourth, teachers are consumed by raising standardized test scores and compliance with curriculum guides. Fifth, some respondents claimed that students emulate parents or the environment. If little emphasis is placed on education, which in turn is not a top priority, the child demonstrates this attitude in class. In addition, there are students who do not come to school ready to learn. Further, limited equipment, limited budgets, time constraints and large class sizes may prevent teachers from structuring and implementing developmentally appropriate instruction.

Over time, experiences shape and enhance the complexity of teachers' knowledge structures necessary to adapt to the unique settings and situations in which they teach (Wakefield, 1993). Knowledge that is made meaningful and useful to teachers is critical to the development of effective teaching skills.
There are those who need assistance to connect disciplinary knowledge to past and present experiences. On the other hand, some teachers need opportunities to develop and test their own beliefs associated with the selection and utilization of developmentally appropriate knowledge for teaching. The study also revealed that developmentally appropriate teachers helped students build knowledge and performance networks. This was done by taking skills and concepts learned in one subject area and applying them in language arts. Teachers summarized, reviewed and linked main concepts at critical points.

The observations, interviews and biographical data revealed that beliefs are more difficult to measure directly than is factual knowledge. An individual's beliefs often must be inferred from statements or actions. They reflect a tacit understanding of personal, social, or professional truths that have been constructed over time through education, schooling and their environment (Pajares, 1992).

In other words, teachers have formed beliefs over their professional careers through observations, intense experiences (either positive or negative), or a series of events that gradually convince them of the "truth" of some rationale or relationship. These beliefs about teaching and learning can and do influence how teachers select and present content to students.

**Summary of Research Problem and Method**

It is very important to examine middle school language arts teachers’ instructional practices and beliefs. This is predicated on the fact that a large number of educators, despite current research and trends appropriate for
middle school learners, continue to utilize traditional inappropriate instructional methods (Irvin, 1990). Educators still erroneously assume that large numbers of middle school students possess the capacity to perform on a more abstract level than development permits (Irvin, 1990). Such perceptions reflect an inaccurate understanding of the differences between the intellectual and socio-emotional readiness of most middle level learners. The middle school learners should not be placed on the same level as the more intellectually mature high school student (Irvin, 1990). A lack of this clarification in state educational regulations, combined with parental expectations, has placed substantial numbers of middle school learners in situations that are extremely frustrating. This, in itself, can put students at-risk of poor school achievement.

As significant as the status of teachers’ instructional practices and beliefs are, Epstein (1981) suggests that the problem is still misunderstood. Many teachers still do not implement the following:

1. Identification and diagnosis of student cognitive levels.
2. Organization of learning activities that match student readiness to learn information.
3. Helping students to consolidate and mature previously initiated thinking skills.
4. Introduction of new and higher level thinking skills as students demonstrate their readiness.

This research utilized the descriptive method, which is aimed at describing and reporting the findings of the beliefs and practices of the
respondents. Previous research has cited the need to document the presence of developmentally appropriate and/or inappropriate instructional beliefs and practices. It is hoped that the findings of this research contributed to the current body of knowledge in this area.

Summary of Teacher Beliefs and Practices

In work where the primary mode of carrying information is ordinary language, attention must be given to context, for that determines how the language becomes meaningful. A potentially confounding factor in interpreting the language of teachers in interviews and like settings comes from imposing contextual frameworks which are essentially those of the researcher. The closer one can get to a teacher's own verbalization of beliefs and principles, the closer one gets to their integrity.

Opportunities must be available so that teachers can provide pieces of context within lengthy conversations, thus allowing for some corroboration. Therefore, an interview was held with each teacher to learn about a teacher's beliefs and practices because it provides a sort of distance for immediate and particular classroom incidents. It was also extensive in coverage so that opportunities for all relevant information could emerge. It is not unreasonable to suppose that many, if not most, teachers have an uncluttered and accurate perception of the beliefs and practices which drive them to act as they do. Accordingly, having someone speak directly to the question, "What are your beliefs about X or practices concerning X?" is not only sensible at first sight, but attractive. Yet, there are hazards in this style of questioning. First, there
always exists the danger that responses to innocent questions may come from a perspective which is influenced by such thoughts as, “What is it that the interviewer wants to hear?” or, “How do I wish to appear to the interviewer?” Secondly, it is not necessarily the case that an interviewee might deliberately avoid genuine disclosure, but that he or she might not be fully alert to the power of such influences.

Kelly (1955) contends that people construct their own realities in ways that consist of a finite number of constructs which are employed to order, process, and give meaning to events. Kelly’s stance toward understanding people is that significant knowledge of individuals comes from comprehending the unique ways in which they see and construct their worlds. Beliefs evolve as individuals are exposed to the ideas and morals of their parents, peers, teachers, neighbors and various significant others (Pajares, 1992). They are acquired and fostered through schooling, through the informal observation of others and through the folklore of a culture. They usually persist, unmodified, unless intentionally or explicitly challenged (Pajares, 1992). Teachers who teach the way they were taught, usually go about with beliefs unchanged throughout their educational career. Furthermore, their beliefs, if unchallenged, have the potential for creating frustration and disenchantment.

Implications for Middle School Language Arts Teachers

The only kind of learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered or self-appropriated learning-truth that has been personally appropriate and assimilated in experience (Hilgard, 1958). While this idea is
certainly neither new nor unique, it continues to be a crucial concept, particularly for developmentally appropriate instruction. Every learner is an individual and learns as an individual, not as a member of a group.

Several key points are important regarding what teachers should consider when exercising their beliefs and practices in middle school language arts:

1. The learner's abilities and perceptions are important, as are provisions which must be made for differential learning.
2. Prior influences that have shaped the development of the adolescent are extremely important.
3. The major culture and the subculture to which the individual belongs will probably affect his or her learning.
4. The encouragement to learn may be seen differently by different individual learners according to their anxiety level. Therefore, motivation is an individual process, not a group process.
5. The same situation probably will tap entirely different motives from each of the learners.
6. The values held by an individual make the relevance of the subject matter less or more immediate.
7. The group atmosphere of learning (for example, competition vs. cooperation) will affect not only the product of the learning, but the satisfaction of the youngster in his or her learning (Manning, 1993).
Learning is enhanced when the purposes and methods are suited to the capacities of the individual student rather than externally imposed criteria (Manning, 1993). The individual learner in the middle school experiences a number of conflicting influences because of pubertal development, social demands of peers and home and other crucial factors arising in his or her life. Even homogeneous grouping alone, as opposed to heterogeneous grouping, makes for tremendous variations within the experiences of the adolescent. If inappropriate teaching beliefs and practices are implemented, it will force the student to learn under severely handicapped conditions. The reason is obvious—every student in the class will not learn equally well at a particular time and under a particular circumstance. Even the teacher who attempts to individualize learning but who adheres to the basic standards and objectives of the course cannot most effectively aid in the learning process. The only objective the teacher will accomplish is to make learning more difficult, force the adolescent to become a passive learner rather than an active learner, foster frustration, and hinder motivation.

Teachers should also consider the following needs from a middle school and middle school learner's perspective:

1. Moving beyond drills, worksheets and other basic skills/tasks toward intellectual challenges, such as higher order and critical thinking activities.
2. Examining the effective teaching literature from a middle school perspective to determine teaching strategies that address the developmental characteristics of adolescents.

3. Maintaining high expectations for young adolescents' academic achievement and behavior after careful consideration of individual abilities and development.

4. Providing adolescents with clear and attainable goals in order to facilitate success.

5. Making deliberate efforts to understand the psychology of young urban adolescents, their value systems, their developmental characteristics and their outlook toward school and life.

**Implications for Future Research**

A plethora of literature has been written on developmental appropriateness on the elementary level. However, more research is needed on the middle school level and what is developmentally appropriate for adolescents. More research should be conducted on the entering beliefs of preservice teachers which may help to determine the direction of a curricula program. Researchers have demonstrated that beliefs influence knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content and comprehension monitoring (Pajares, 1992; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Nespor, 1987; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Ennis, 1994). Such research may reveal how teachers interpret and define the goals and curricula for preservice teachers education programs. Research on the entering beliefs of
novice teachers would help teacher educators with important information on how to determine the directions for curricula programs.

Attention should be given to understanding how beliefs interact with other beliefs in order to present a coherent pattern of thought and action rather than looking at beliefs only as isolated cognitive phenomena. Thus, understanding the belief systems of teachers, including how beliefs interact with one another (whether favorably or unfavorably) may enhance the working of technical innovations when they are implemented. Also, in-service programs that are in conjunction with teacher training and staff development may be another area of interest. This may encourage the practice of understanding and developing belief systems in educators before implementing school improvement plans.

It may also be useful for teachers to write out the beliefs that seem important to them, including the meanings attached to these beliefs. Teachers could also write positive reasons for teaching the beliefs and negative reasons for not teaching the beliefs. The questions involved here are, “if teachers want to teach particular beliefs, are their strategies for carrying them out effective?” Also, “how can the teacher effectively teach those beliefs that are highly relevant?”

Another area of importance is developmentally appropriate instruction for middle school learners. It is not surprising that many practitioners believe that developmental appropriateness is simply a reoccurrence of previous ideas and will soon pass. Developmental appropriateness builds on what went on before;
it does not duplicate the past. Consequently, the concept represents an evolution in professional thinking that will continue to emerge over the coming decades. Educators are not simply revisiting old ideas; they are integrating the truths of previous years of research that have resulted in the creation of an enhanced concept that is uniquely suited to modern times.

One reason why trends come and go is that old technologies are constantly being replaced by newer ones. If developmental appropriateness is treated merely as a technology encompassing specific materials, it could suffer the same fate. Certain basic assumptions and beliefs will prevail regardless of how we choose to operate them. However, the essence of such research is not simply what teachers do, but how they think and how they think about adolescents while encompassing their beliefs and practices.

Finally, middle schools should provide supportive classroom environments. To create a supportive learning environment, teachers must believe in both students’ and their own competence. Teachers work with learners individually and in small groups, explain concepts, conduct participatory and practice assignments, and maintain a strong academic focus by providing students with extra direction and support (Brophy, 1982).

Effective teachers stress cognitive objectives and maintain high standards in a friendly and supportive manner, making special efforts with students who might be inhibited, frustrated and alienated. The approach is to turn adolescents into confident and independent learners. The concept of supportive environments also pertains to teachers whose schools provide
quality work environments. Teachers who maintain high expectations for their students and who are satisfied with their environment and working conditions appear to be more productive. In fact, a positive correlation exists between teachers’ satisfaction with their workplace and their beliefs and practices in students’ performance (Andrews & Morefield, 1991). Most veterans responded that there are great rewards from teaching in the middle grades. They enjoy the developmental diversity of the age group and their role in helping young adolescents cope with their cognitive, physical, and social development. They observed that many young adolescents are still enthusiastic about learning. Teachers should remain cognizant that they should serve as facilitators for preservice teachers and reflect about the implications that adolescent development, cultural diversity, learning abilities and learning levels have for curriculum and instruction.

**Conclusion**

The use of developmentally appropriate practices in middle school language arts classrooms depends on several variables: the student’s current level of comprehension, student experiences, the kinds of previous knowledge and skills students bring to the situation and the cognitive level of development. Practitioners must continually reflect on what they do in relation to their knowledge about how young adolescents develop and learn. To translate that knowledge into actual teaching strategies, teachers must be willing to explore a variety of practices in order to tighten the gap between theory and actual
practices in the classroom. It is also incumbent upon teachers to reflect upon
and question why they use specific instructional practices.

As language arts teachers reflect and question instructional practices,
instructional goals should be related to the cognitive development of middle
level learners. These goals should include:

- application of basic skills mastered in the elementary grades.
- understanding of the inter-relatedness of subject areas.
- development of higher order thinking skills
- developmental of cognitive skills necessary for life long learning.
- exploratory opportunities to provide broad exposure to cognitive
  activities, in addition to the continuing emphasis on academic subject
  areas (Manning, 1993).

With the onset of formal operations, some young adolescents see for the
first time connections between present achievements and future roles (Dorman,
1984). It is important to emphasize that some middle level school learners
continue to function at the concrete operational stage. Their maturity does not
allow them to work effectively with highly conceptual content or with abstract
thought processes, such as analogy, hypothesis and deduction (Manning,
1993). Instruction for these students should be rich in experience,
demonstration, practice and personal relevance.

The curriculum should challenge, not over challenge, the students.
Otherwise, learners run the risk of continued failure and lowered self-esteem.
A carefully articulated curriculum minimizes gaps as students move from unit to
unit or grade to grade. Such a curriculum provides a clear articulation between elementary and secondary curricula (Pajares, 1993). The middle level learning activities should reflect student variance in levels of reading, thinking, attention span and interest. Educators should recognize and plan for differences in students’ ability to generalize and to understand abstract concepts, as well as differences in interests and goals, cognitive responsiveness and personal adjustment.

As educators are engaged in instruction, they need to devise ways to get inside the thoughts of their students in order to know if students actually understand the content. Some of the assessment techniques that can be used are: questioning strategies, summarizing main ideas, outlining the content or providing reasons for correct answers (Wood and Muth, 1991). To simply assume that young adolescents recognize the main points of a lesson because a teacher perceives that they have been adequately covered is a dangerous assumption. However, by actively listening to young adolescents, we promote not only their growth as individuals but the development of positive relationships with adult and educational improvements that can greatly enhance the potential of students.
REFERENCES


Ennis, Catherine. (1994). Knowledge and beliefs underlying curricular expertise. *Quest, 46*, 164-175.


APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please respond to the following questions. Mark your answers on these sheets:

1. Have you earned a(n)
   - Bachelors Degree: Yes No Major __________________________
   - Masters Degree: Yes No Major __________________________
   - Ed.S Degree: Yes No Major __________________________
   - Ed.D /Ph.D.: Yes No Major __________________________

   Area of concentration in Major __________________________

   Topic of dissertation __________________________

2. Number of graduate level language arts/reading courses:
   __________

3. Are you Louisiana State Certified? Yes No
   If yes, in what subject(s) __________________________

4. Teaching experience:
   - Elementary Level (1-5) _____ Years
   - Middle Level (6-8) _____ Years
   - High School Level (9-12) _____ Years

5. Number of years teaching in Orleans Parish School System
   __________

6. Since September 1, 1988, approximately how many of the following have you attended?
   - National or International Conventions ________
   - Regional or State Conventions ________
   - Departmental In-Service Workshops ________

7. Since September 1, 1988, approximately how many presentations have you made at the following?
   - National or International Conventions ________
   - Regional or State Conventions ________
   - Departmental In-Service Workshops ________
8. List the topics of any inservice workshops you have attended within the past two years
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

9. Is there a coordinator for your middle level reading and language arts program?
   Yes          No          N/A

10. Does the coordinator set the curriculum?
    Yes          No          N/A

11. Are you required to follow the curriculum as set forth by the department?
    Yes          No          I have flexibility          N/A

12. Do you use a text for your language arts/reading courses?
    Yes          No          N/A

13. If there is no text for the course, or if additional materials are used, what instructional material do you use?
_________________________________________________________________

14. Are you: Male          Female

15. Circle the category that best describes your age:
    20-29          50-59
    30-39          60-69
    40-49          70 and above

16. What is your primary goal of the language arts/reading program in which you teach?
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

17. In your opinion, what should the primary purpose of a language arts course be for the middle school learner?
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your cooperation in this research study. Would you be willing to participate further by having personal interview and observations?
   Yes          No
Are you interested in a summary of the result? Yes  No

If yes to either, please include your name, address and phone number on space provided.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

BEST TEACHING PRACTICES: A CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVATIONS

Teacher ______________________  Date ______________________

Beginning Time _______    Ending Time _______

(Scale: Y = Yes, observed; N= No, not observed; NA = Not applicable)

Lesson Introduction

Presents brief overview of new concepts    Y  N  NA
Relates new concepts to previous learning  Y  N  NA
Alerts students to key questions that need to be answered Y  N  NA
Identifies specific objectives             Y  N  NA
Conveys benefit of lesson                 Y  N  NA
Presents schedule of activities           Y  N  NA
Clarifies expectations                    Y  N  NA
Establishes behavioral norms              Y  N  NA
Pretest, if necessary                     Y  N  NA

Lesson Presentations

Proceeds in small steps at rapid pace     Y  N  NA
Demonstrates or models appropriate behavior Y  N  NA
Signals transition between main points or key ideas Y  N  NA
Maintains eye contact                     Y  N  NA
Uses correct grammar-avoids jargon        Y  N  NA
Speaks with expression and uses a variety of vocal tones Y  N  NA
Uses concrete and everyday examples       Y  N  NA
Shows non-examples                        Y  N  NA
Uses a variety of learning modulates      Y  N  NA
Encourages students to paraphrase, summarize, or relate new information to existing knowledge Y  N  NA
Asks higher-order questions               Y  N  NA
Suggests how new information could be applied to problem solving Y  N  NA
Models organizational learning strategies of outlining or creating a hierarchy Y  N  NA
Demonstrates and encourages a variety learning strategies Y  N  NA
Demonstrates and encourages students to check their own comprehension  
Encourages students to self-praise  
Summarizes key concepts  
Student Participation  
Sets high standards  
Sets schedule of activities and identifies needed resources  
Uses a variety of activities  
Redirects students questions  
Uses a variety of comprehension checks  
Deals with challenging behaviors  
Engages all students, e.g., reminds silent student to participate  
Encourages peer interaction  
Uses praise frequently  
Evaluation Feedback  
Reviews frequently  
Reteaches when necessary  
Provides appropriate homework and explains assignments fully  
Test frequently using a variety of evaluation strategies  
Written Comments:
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How much do you know about the beliefs of your administrator concerning middle school language arts instruction?

2. How much does your administrator tell you about his/her beliefs concerning middle school language arts instruction?

3. How often does the principal observe your class during instruction?

4. If observations are held, do you receive prior notification and feedback from the principal?

5. Of the following, which one has the most influence on the way you plan and implement instruction in your class: Teacher (yourself), Principal, Students, School District, Parents? Briefly state your reason(s).

6. In your opinion, what should the primary purpose of a language arts course be for the middle school learner?

7. What influenced you to pursue a degree in language arts?

8. Have your beliefs changed or remained the same from your earlier years as a teacher, as to what is appropriate or inappropriate for middle school language arts instruction?

9. Do you employ one or a variety of methods to disseminate instruction i.e. textbooks, lecture, computer, media, etc.?

10. Is it important to teach students to become self-directed, independent learners? Why?

11. Is it important for students to keep journals? Why?

12. Is it important for students to engage in the writing process of: prewriting, drafting, writing, revising, editing, publishing?

13. Do you provide guided, independent practice, and feedback on students attempts with material and activities?

14. What role do you believe parents play in their child’s education?
15. How would you describe the attitude of their parents concerning education in general?

16. Do you communicate on a regular basis with parents concerning their child's progress in language arts?

17. In general, how similar or dissimilar are the attitudes of parents and their children towards education in language arts?
3128 Constance Street  
New Orleans, LA 70118

Dear Principal:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Louisiana State University. My dissertation will examine the ways in which teaching beliefs and practices influence middle school language arts instruction. I would welcome the opportunity to conduct my research in your school. Through this work, we can learn more about middle school language arts teachers' beliefs and instructional activities. It will also be of interest to learn how teaching practices influence what is learned by the students.

The teachers will be asked to fill out a biographical data sheet. The information provided by the teachers will be strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone. In addition, observations and an interview will be conducted with each teacher.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 891-4072. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to working in your school.

Respectfully

Suzán Anderson
Dear Teacher:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Louisiana State University. My dissertation will examine the ways in which teaching beliefs and practices influence middle school language arts instruction.

I would appreciate your assistance in my research. I believe that through this work we can learn more about middle school language arts teachers' beliefs and practices and how this influences what is learned by the students. Please fill out the attached biographical data sheet and return it to your principal as soon as possible. In order to assure the integrity of the data, please complete the biographical data sheet before discussing it with anyone. All individual information that you provide will be strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 8914072. Once again, I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to working with you in the near future.

Respectfully,

Suzán Anderson
LETTER OF AGREEMENT

VOLUNTEER TO PARTICIPATE FORM

I, _______________________________ volunteer to participate in the study of middle school language arts teachers' beliefs and practices conducted by Suzán Anderson of Louisiana State University. I understand that I can withdraw from the study and I will remain anonymous. I understand that my performance in this study may be used for additional approved projects, and I will be given an opportunity to ask questions prior to the start of the study and after my participation is complete.

______________________________
Signature

______________________________
Date
Dear Teacher:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study of middle school language arts teachers. Your assistance is valuable to this research. Your participation will provide useful information concerning ways that teachers turn beliefs about middle school teaching into practice and how students respond to those practices.

When I visit your classroom, I will make every effort to be as unobtrusive as possible. Please remember all individual information that you provide will be strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 891-4072. Once again, I appreciate you cooperation and look forward to working with you in the near future.

Respectfully,

Suzán Anderson
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Classwork:</th>
<th>Evaluation Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Classwork:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Written/Oral Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homework:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Classwork:</th>
<th>Student Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Classwork:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guided Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td>Independent Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homework:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Classwork:</th>
<th>Instructional Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Classwork:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td>Modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homework:**

146

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>Classwork:</th>
<th>Instruction Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>___ Textbook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>___ Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>___ Workbook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>___ Audio Visual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>___ Manipulatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>___ Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Y</th>
<th>Homework:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>Process Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>___ Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>___ Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>___ Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>___ Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>___ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homework:

Additional Information:
SESSION PURPOSE

To learn how to make healthy and positive decisions.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The student will ...........
1. Describe the basic steps of decision making.
2. Explain possible uses of the decision-making steps in the typical experiences of young teenagers.
3. Practice using decision-making steps.

MATERIALS

1. “My Decision Tree” worksheets (two per student)
2. “Decision Situations” worksheets

SESSION AT A GLANCE

1. Introduce the basic steps of decision making.
2. Have the students refer to the two “My Decision Tree” worksheets in their workbooks. Introduce the students to the decision-making process.
3. Read over the “Decision Situations” worksheet and have each student choose two situations to work through, using the “My Decision Tree” steps.
4. Share the results in a conversation circle or in small groups.
SESSION PURPOSE
To apply critical-thinking skills to information about cocaine and crack.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES
The student will ....

1. Respond to questions about cocaine and crack with factual information.
2. Identify reasons for the use and non-use of cocaine and crack.
3. Apply critical-thinking skills to analyzing the use of cocaine and crack and its consequences.

MATERIAL
1. Newsprint
2. Markers
3. Tape
4. Four paper lunch bags and clue sheets (see description, below)
5. “Mystery” message cut into quarters (see description, below)
7. Cocaine and Crack Information Sheet
8. Cocaine and Crack Questionnaire

SESSION AT A GLANCE
1. Before class, prepare the clue sheets and hide the four lunch bags.
2. Generate questions about cocaine and crack and post them on a newsprint sheet.
3. Give the students, working in small groups, ten minutes to complete part of the Cocaine and Crack Questionnaire. When each group completes its questionnaire, it receives a clue sheet.
4. When all the groups have decoded their clues and found their lunch bags, share the answers to the worksheets as a class.
5. After the discussion, the four clue decoders put their four pieces together to discover the answer to the “mystery.”
6. Check off answered questions on the posted sheet.
LESSON PLAN

DO YOUR OWN THINKING:
CRITICAL-THINKING SKILLS

SESSION PURPOSE

To learn and practice critical-thinking skills.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The student will ..... 

1. Understand the role of "probe questions," information gathering, and information assessment in the critical-thinking process.
2. Apply critical-thinking skills to typical experiences of young teenagers.
3. Express confidence in using critical-thinking skills.

MATERIALS

1. Critical-thinking Skills Information Sheet
2. "Critical-thinking Skills" worksheet
3. "Do Your Own Thinking" worksheet

SESSION AT A GLANCE

1. Introduce the topic of critical-thinking skills, focusing on "probe questions," information gathering, and information assessment.
2. Have the students pair up and practice using critical-thinking skills by focusing on the "Critical-thinking Skills" worksheets.
3. Discuss the results in a conversation circle or in small groups.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
LESSON PLAN

HOW OUR NEEDS AFFECT OUR DECISIONS

SESSION PURPOSE

To recognize the role of "needs" and "wants" in the choices and decisions we make.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The student will ....

1. List one example for each of the five levels of needs.
2. Discuss the importance of needs in making choices and decisions.
3. Understand the relationship between needs, choices, and decisions.

MATERIALS

1. Newsprint
2. Markers
3. Tape
4. Understanding the Need Pyramid Information Sheet
5. "Meeting Needs in Myself and Others" worksheet

SESSION AT A GLANCE

1. Have the students identify all of the things they would need, if they were to live on a new planet.
2. Go over the Understanding the Need Pyramid Information Sheet in the workbook and discuss the five levels of human needs.
3. In a class categorize the needs from the “My Planet” newsprint sheet to fit the five levels of need.
4. Discuss the relationship between the decisions we make and our needs.
Cooperative Learning is a teaching and learning strategy in which students work together in small groups to accomplish various learning tasks. Cooperative Learning groups emphasize mastering cooperative group skills such as discussing and agreeing, staying on task, encouraging others, reaching a consensus, disagreeing in a nice way, resolving conflicts, and compromising are all directly taught and practiced. Cooperative Learning groups are typically heterogeneous with respect to ability level, sex, race, and social characteristic. The group-functioning abilities of the individual members are emphasized, as well as completing the academic task. Students and teachers spend time evaluating the group’s functioning skills as well as the completion of the academic task. Social and academic goals are set and success toward those goals is carefully measured.

Four basic elements form the backbone of Cooperative Learning:

1. Positive interdependence
   The success of each group member is dependent on the success of all group member.

2. Face to face interaction
   Discussing, collaborating, summarizing, planning, and agreeing are all important in interaction.

3. Individual accountability
   All group members are responsible for learning the material or doing a part of the project or task. Each member is also responsible for helping other group members do their parts.

4. Mastery of group skills
   Group skills are directly taught by the teacher and practiced by the students. The group's level of functioning is analyzed and discussed regularly and goals for improvement of the group's functioning are always in place.

The teacher still teaches! He or she presents material, ask questions, leads discussions, and performs all of the traditional functions of a teacher. But when the time for practice and application of skills comes and students are in their cooperative groups, the role of the teacher changes. The teacher becomes the
group advisor, a facilitator of learning as groups grapple with their academic and social tasks.

The beauty of Cooperative Learning is that the teacher as facilitator can be where he or she is needed. Groups experiencing problems can receive help from the teacher quickly. Groups that are working without problems can work independently, thus freeing the teacher to work with others. The teacher is not pulled in too many directions at once. Because the groups are taught to use their own group as a resource wherever possible, the teacher can concentrate on those places where help is needed.

CREATING POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE

Truly cooperative groups succeed on a sense of positive interdependence. Members must feel a responsibility for one another. Members must feel that their job isn't complete until all have mastered or finished the task. Group members must work under the assumption that success is ensured only when all have been successful.

The teacher is the key in structuring this sense of positive interdependence. The following ideas can set the stage for groups to develop positive interdependence.

Assign Roles to Group Members.

Each group member has a role that is interconnected with the roles of others. Each member fulfills the duties of her/her role, and all members and their assigned roles are interdependent. There are a number of suggested roles for students:

- Starter: gets things rolling
- Materials engineer: gets materials
- Reader: reads the materials to others
- Recorder: writes down proceedings.
- Encourager: encourages and praises
- Timekeeper: keeps time
- Summarizer: summarizes information
- Checker: checks proceedings/product
- Observer: observes group functioning
- Cleanup engineer: organizes and replaced materials
- Cutter: uses scissors
- Paster: uses paste
- Artist: prepares artwork
- Investigator: investigates problem

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The names of the roles may change as students grow older. It is important for each member of a group to have a role if any member is assigned a role. The role of "Leader" is discouraged. If there must be someone designated for such a role, the title of "Guide" is preferred. "Leader" connotes that the person is in charge of the others and that he/she is in an elevated position. "Guide" connotes that this person is charged with helping the group while remaining a peer.

GROUP REWARDS

With older students, there are reward structures involving grades and scores that are quite successful;

- If all group members in a study group score 80% or better on an individual quiz/test, each member of the group receives two (or more) bonus points on his/her individual score.

- If the average of individual grades is 80% or better, bonus points are given to each individual.

- Points earned for working effectively can be used to gain privileges such as homework passes, computer gave time, invitations to popcorn parties, and other reward.

Teacher praise for a job well done is the most effective reward of all. Groups that work effectively because the teacher expects them to gain the intrinsic satisfaction that is more desirable educationally than extrinsic rewards. If extrinsic rewards are used to form behaviors, the goal is to move to intrinsic satisfaction as group members master effective group skills. Any reward system must be closely aligned with the teacher’s own philosophy about the role rewards play in a classroom.
### APPENDIX F

**THE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOL CHECKLIST**

#### The Overall Middle Level School Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school’s written philosophy states that curricular, instructional and environmental practices are based upon young adolescents’ physical, psychosocial and cognitive development characteristics.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school’s curricular and instructional practices reflect the unique nature and needs of young adolescents, rather than perceiving 10 to 14 year olds as children or adolescents.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school’s administration, faculty and staff have received professional preparation in young adolescent development and are experts at teaching 10- to 14- year-olds.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school provides “communities for learning” where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for personal growth and cognitive development.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school’s policies and practices recognize and address young adolescents’ cultural and gender differences, as well as their tremendous diversity in physical, psychosocial and cognitive development.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school ensures success for all young adolescents in at least one area.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school has functional strategies for re-engaging families in the education of learners.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school provides an organization that includes cross-age grouping, alternatives to ability grouping and tracking, school-within-a-school and other organizational strategies that address the young adolescent’s physical, psychosocial and cognitive development.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school actively seeks to connect schools with communities and tries to provide young adolescents with opportunities for community service.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The school empowers administrators and teachers to make decisions based on young adolescent development and effective middle level school practices.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young adolescents are provided sufficient opportunities for physical exercise, both planned activities and opportunities to move around the classroom.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young adolescents are provided desks, chairs and tables of appropriate sizes.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young adolescents are provided opportunities for noncompetitive...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
intramural sports activities that do not result in a comparison of early-and late-maturers.

Yes  No  Young adolescents have opportunities to become healthy individuals through the school’s efforts to provide appropriate health services and fitness education.

Yes  No  Young adolescents have at least one caring adult who is willing to listen to concerns and to answer questions about the various developmental areas.

Yes  No  Young adolescents have their gender differences understood and addressed by the administration and faculty (e.g., the implications of the growth spurt that is usually about two years later for boys than girls).

Yes  No  Young adolescents who are early-and late maturers are assured that variations in development are expected and normal.

Yes  No  Young adolescents—not just the athletically inclined or the early developer—are involved in some type of developmentally appropriate physical activity based on their unique developmental needs.

The Middle Level School’s Response to Young Adolescents’ Psychosocial Development

Yes  No  Young adolescents are provided opportunities to interact socially with same-sex peers and, if desired, opposite-sex peers.

Yes  No  Young adolescents’ friendships are understood as being crucial to development and are encouraged through developmentally appropriate school activities.

Yes  No  Young adolescents’ shifting allegiances and quests for freedom and independence are accepted as significant aspects of the developmental period; appropriate activities (e.g., learning cooperatively and congregating with friends) are integrated into the overall middle level school program.

Yes  No  Developing a positive self-concept is viewed as crucial to young adolescents’ overall development and deliberate efforts are directed toward improving self-concepts.

Yes  No  Young adolescents’ gender differences are recognized as appropriately addressed (e.g., boys have larger social networks than girls and girls have more personal conversations than boys).

Yes  No  Young adolescents’ peer pressure is understood and accepted as a significant aspect of the developmental period and, whenever possible, used as a means of establishing appropriate behaviors.

Yes  No  Young adolescents are provided significant opportunities to form identities as worthwhile individuals who are developing from childhood into adolescence.

Yes  No  Young adolescents are provided comprehensive counsel that includes advisor-advisee programs and small and large group guidance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Young adolescents are provided cognitive activities appropriate for the late concrete and early formal operations stages, reflecting their ability to think abstractly in one area and still be restricted to concrete thought in another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Young adolescents are called upon to develop the capacities for critical thought and problem-solving skills using “real-life” situations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Young adolescents are provided opportunities to analyze problems and issues, examine the component parts, and reintegrate them into a solution or into new ways of stating the problem or issue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Young adolescents’ individual differences—multiple intelligences, right brain/left brain, learning styles—are recognized and addressed through appropriate cognitive activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Young adolescents are provided exploratory programs that provide opportunities to learn more about areas of interest or develop various types of expertise.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Young adolescents have access to a core academic program that provides opportunities to develop literacy and thinking skills, lead healthy lives, behave ethically and assume responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Young adolescents have opportunities to develop a repertoire of learning strategies and study skills that emphasize reflective thought and systematic progression toward independent learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Young adolescents’ gender differences are understood and addressed (e.g., the relationship between self-image and academic achievement).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

TEACHERS AS WRITERS

AS I SEE MYSELF

The person that is about to be described is not what many people would call average. The first thing that is noticed about her is her height, or lack of it. Her physical appearance is that of an Afro-American female, who has not yet reached middle age. She appears to have seasoned well, with few lines to the face, glasses, and salt and pepper hair. She basically keeps a smile, if life allows it. She has light brown eyes and a ready reply to almost any statement or comment. She is slightly heavier in weight than would be considered an ideal weight for her height.

The person who is being described here is very content with herself. She is comfortable being who she is and feels it comes across to others that way. If it doesn't, then so be it. Her outlook on life is that all things have a purpose; things are allowed for a specific reason. When life serves a person something that he/she feels is not what life should grant, then, the person has a choice. The choice is whether to accept it or do what can be done to make corrections. When the decision is made and she feels that it is the best for her, then comes the contentment of knowing that the best that could be done was done.
SHIRLEY

S - Sharing is the one thing that makes me feel close to people and I do that quite well.

H - I love helping others.

I - I am an independent thinker and doer.

R - I am reliable. You can always count on me to do what I am asked to do.

L - My job requires leadership, and I am considered to be a good leader.

E - I am easy-going. If this means compromise, then this is what I am. I do not like to make waves unless they are good ones.

Y - I like dressing young, and thinking young, and in some instances acting young. To keep up with today's society, the flexibility of the mind is crucial.

LISA

L - Loyal to any task

I - Interesting to know

S - Serious about life

A - Abstract. Dare to figure her out.
AWAKENING

Having always felt an overwhelming sense of urgency when embarking upon a new adventure, feeling of urgency were now being replaced by a complete sense of calm. As I approached the final stages of my latest venture, my emotional circuitry seemed to have short circuited.

In my very ordered world, personal successes had always been measured in terms of the amount of stress related to achieving the outcomes. I was totally unprepared for this new sensation. How could I rank this experience among my lists of Greats when I could not factor in the stress variable to evaluate its relative importance? As I mentally prepared myself for the voyage, I allowed myself to ride this current of serenity and drift into unconsciousness. Upon awakening from sleep interrupted by occasional memories of days gone by, I began to confront the task that lay ahead of me.

The day that I entered the world of motherhood completely altered my perception of life and its inherent complexities. I discovered that responsibility, accountability, and just plain ability were no longer feared not dreaded monsters, but qualities that would assist me as I entered this new and adventurous facet of my life.
RITA

Funny, serious, eager, determined
Daughter of John and Cynthia Rice
Lover of Carl, traveling, seafood

Who feels blessed,
  happy and anxious

Who finds happiness in family,
  sports and
  walking with kids

Who needs more hours in a day
  more days in the weekend and
  time with the family
Who gives her time,
  her energy and
  her love

Who fears ignorant people
  kids who refuse to learn and
  parents who are not involved with their child's
  education

Who would like to see a change in the educational system,
  NBA playoff games and
  more teachers willing to help kids

Who enjoys my kids
  my husband and
  traveling

Who like to wear black,
  red or
  orange
Resident of New Orleans; Laurel Street
BALANCING LIFE

She was usually early for class, choosing a seat toward one side and near the back of the room, where she looked over her homework and watched the others coming in. They saw a small woman, wearing comfortable, practical jeans, a t-shirt, feet tucked up tailor style. She was forty-five, but looked younger until you noticed the deep lines between her nose and mouth, and one vertical line between her eyes, years of smiles, frowns, concentration, and puzzlement etched into place. After a few minutes, she stretched, massaged her neck, uncrossed and recrossed her legs, then left to get water before the call started. It was nearing the end of a long day spent being both teacher and student, and she needed a break - mentally and physically.

“The next parade is Sunday night, nine p.m. at Harry’s, and Bastille Day colors are red, white, and blue!” That information from the lead trumpet player was on her answer phone, checked during the all-too-brief stop at home between work and night school. As she began to mentally search her costume collection, a quiet smile appeared. Coming up with a costume to wear in the French Quarter, socializing with 30 to 75 friends (without having to clean house!), it was just what she needed. Her shoulders relaxed as she began to jot down ideas, planning something that was purely for pleasure, with no serious consequences if it turned out less than well done! She needed more of that and less seriousness in her life, or she would soon burn out.

165

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
I met Janice at a workshop at SUNO in August 1992. She walked in late and looking a little flustered. She sat down, and after a few minutes I introduced myself. We had a brief conversation about the workshop during the break. She was a rather soft-spoken woman who seemed genuinely interested in education. Later, I discovered that she had a keen interest in children with special needs.

Since that first meeting, I have interacted with Janice in a variety of settings. While she is still a little shy in large group settings, she is very open and talkative in smaller groups and one on one. Standing at about 5’7”, and medium sized bone structure and large hips, Janice does not have a very commanding presence. She has large eyes, partially hidden behind round purple-red glasses. When she walks, she is usually in a hurry and she gives the impression that she knows exactly where she is going.

Janice is a good listener. She can listen without being judgmental but she can offer advice if needed. A strong individualist, Janice can usually be objective in a non-threatening way. Because she is not a “group” person, I know she likes her space; I respect that right. But I know, if I need her, she’s there.
DOLORES

Intelligent, kind, giving, compassionate

Daughter of Louis and Pearl

Lover of people, singing, fun

Who feels anxious
    happy and
    sometimes lonely

Who finds happiness in church
    children and
    giving

Who needs love,
    understanding and
    true friends

Who fears God
    prejudice and
    hatred

Who would like to see world peace,
    better schools and
    happy children

Who enjoys church,
    games and
    family

Who likes to wear green,
    red and
    black

Resident of New Orleans; Tennessee Street
THE SHY LADY

Jillian is a lady of very few words. She knows how to sit and observe the world around her. Sometimes, she would sit in on a conversation for minutes at a time without uttering a word. Then, she would graciously enter the conversation. It was as if she had taken the time to appraise each person’s thoughts before formulating her own ideas on the subject.

Friends see her as being shy and easy going, but she describes herself as being quiet, but war like. This means that she will go into battle if all other means fail.

Jillian feels that some of her characteristics come from her upbringing. As a child growing up, Jillian stated that her father would always say, "Think about what you’re going to say" and "Know the company you’re in!" You can tell from many of her actions that she lives by her father’s teachings.
UNTITLED ME

She is a contradiction in terms.
A hothouse mistake between a rose and a cactus.
Long legs that belong to a dancer or an athlete
Short body that belongs only to her.
Feet determined to get there and somewhere.
Heart really hesitant and unsure
More balls than most
Smile frozen, stiff, hung-up, too serious.

The mask must remain in place.
You can’t know her now.

She is a contradiction in terms
She is still a little girl
Lonely and afraid
Neck aching
Hand waiting on His direction.
She is a woman
Moving in determined circles
Head and heart above the dizziness.

The mask must remain in place.
You can’t know me now.

She is fire
Feel her warmth and wrath
Smell her fears.
She is water
Taste her blood and tears
Watch her sweat.
She is dirt
See how solid
Touch the strength if you dare.
She is nothing you expected or planned on.

The mask must remain in place.
You can’t know her now.
THE ABC'S OF SUCCESS

A - Accept responsibility for your actions and education.
B - Believe that you can achieve.

C - Continue to do your best.
D - Discover and develop your natural abilities.

E - Enjoy life. You only pass this way once.
F - Finish a task once you begin it. A completed job is a job well done.

G - Give of yourself for it is far better to give than to receive or to have to receive.
H - Heed the advice of parents, teachers, and trust-worthy friends.

I - Initiate reconciliation when you offend or have been offended by a loved one.
J - Judge not, lest you be judged. Do not condemn a person by your words or deeds.

K - Know your heritage.
L - Learn from your mistakes.

M - Maintain a positive attitude.
N - Never stop learning.

O - Overcome your fears.
P - Persevere in spite of seeming obstacles.

Q - Quiet time is needed. Sometimes you need to meditate.
R - Recognize that you are a unique creature.

S - Set your goals high, yet realistic.
T - Trust in God and ask for His guidance.

U - Use your time wisely.
V - Venture out; break the paradigms.

W - Weigh your choices. Think about the consequences.
X - Xerox your successes. Copy the good things that you do.

Y - Yearn for the best in life and prepare yourself to attain them.
Z - Zip your lips when you have to. Know when to speak.
APPENDIX H

STUDENTS AS WRITERS

WHAT IS LOVE?

Love is a word. It means I love You.
Sometimes you don't hear that word very often.
Like me, I love my family and friends.
Because I care about them a lot.
Not because I say it. I really must mean it.
Trust me. Believe in love. Count on me.

By Pauline L.

I think love is when people care
About each other very much.
And would do anything
For that person or persons
If they can.

By Joy Tillis

Love is something that is shared by two people
Who really care about each other.
Love is for families who are there
When you get down and out
And have no one to lean on
Or to tell your problems to.
Love is a four-letter word that can be tricky.
Sometimes love doesn't mean the word love.
Love turns into disappointment.

By April Stewart
Love is God
Or two or more people
Who has this deep emotional feeling
About each other.

By Kenneth Osby

SUMMERTIME
Summer time is coming soon
but unlike spring it won’t be cool.

You might even want to go jump
into a big swimming pool

When you go to the beach
you can walk on the soft brown sand
or even try to get a beautiful suntan.

By Danika Zeno
Spring is in the air
you can see it everywhere

Don’t worry about the showers
because it will bring us flowers

The trees begin to grow
and the rivers begin to flow

We have spring every year
I wish, I wish, it comes here
but wait. I think it’s here.

By Anona Rowan

The sun comes out with its mighty power
And chases away the April showers.
I enjoy its mighty light;
I love to sit in the bright sunlight.
And watch the flowers swinging in the breeze
They sway back and forth with such graceful ease

By Katrice Wagner

173
THE GIRAFFE

The giraffe is very tall
but it's sad he has no voice at all

A male giraffe is sometimes 18 feet
but they can't eat meat

Being so tall they can see so good
So a lion won't attack like they know it would

Giraffes can run fast
It is like a link in the past.

By Ronald Christy

The giraffe is very tall
when he runs, it's a wonder that he does not fall

The giraffe rests in the middle
of the day and lays down
in a funny way

The giraffe's neck is like a tower
and its helps him to reach
high flowers.

By Reena Smith

Giraffes sleep in a strange way.
I don't know why they sleep that way.

A giraffe reminds me of a tower.
It can reach up high to eat pretty flowers.

A giraffe is the size of a tree.
I know one thing; he's bigger than me.

By Kent Huntley
HALLOWEEN
by LaShawn Badon

It was a dark and scary night in New Orleans.

Ghosts were booing and owls were hooing.

Children were running from here and there
With costumes of all kinds everywhere.

I could hear the trampling of everyone’s feet,
Going from door-to-door saying “trick or treat.”

A ghost appeared at the door when we were getting candy;

He saw that we were all so fine and dandy.

It said little girl I like your suit,

So give me all your candy or I will boo you.

Suddenly the little girl said, “I am the spirit of David Crockett,
And I am going to keep all of my candy in my pocket.”

They were lots of oohs and ahs.

And a whole lot of ha! ha! ha’s!

Halloween is the night when kids have fun
As they begin counting treats one by one.

Time was running out on that fun-filled night.

Everyone was running home to watch the midnight fright.

Parents and children were betwixt and between

And I hope that everyone has a “Happy Halloween”.

The End
THEY SCARED ME

by Lucy Briley

It was Halloween Night.

Lights were clicking off and on.

I went to school to get some candy.

And all of my teachers had turned into mummies.

Then they started chasing me.

I ran into a spider web and I got stuck.

Then the spider was coming for me.

It was very ugly.

The mummies were coming for me, too.

They were getting closer and closer.

They tore my shirt and Freddie Kruger appeared.

I screamed, "Let me go!"

And he said, "Your wish is my command."

And he let me go.

Down, down I went into the fire.

Freddie looked down and started laughing.

And do you know what?

I found that was one of my bad dreams.

The Ghostly End.
VITA

Suzán Anderson was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She attended schools in Haiti, Morocco, India and public schools in New Orleans, Louisiana. She received a bachelor of arts degree in Political Science and History Education from the University of Haiti and Southern University in New Orleans in 1975. She received the master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Xavier University in 1985. Her master's of arts degree (+30) was awarded in 1990 from Louisiana State University in Curriculum and Instruction.

Ms. Anderson has been an educator for seventeen years. She has served as a middle school classroom teacher for nine years. Ms. Anderson has also taught modern dance and gymnastics for twenty years. She has worked as an intern in Curriculum and Instruction and Counseling Psychology. During the 1994-95 school session, Suzan served as a ranking teacher and is the assistant principal for the 1996-97 school session.

Ms. Anderson is currently completing the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, which will be awarded at the Summer Commencement, 1998.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Suzan Anderson

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Dissertation: Beliefs and Practices of Middle School Language Arts Teachers

Approved:

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

April 6, 1998