Synthesizing Middle Grades Research on Cultural Responsiveness: The Importance of a Shared Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

In conducting a literature review of 133 articles on cultural responsiveness in middle level education, we identified a lack of shared definitions, theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and foci, which made it difficult to synthesize across articles. Using a conceptual framework that required: a) clear definitions of terms; b) a critically conscious stance; and c) inclusion of the middle school concept, we identified 14 articles that met these criteria. Then we mapped differences and convergences across these studies, which allowed us to identify the conceptual gaps that the field must address to have common definitions and understandings that enable synthesis across studies.

Well-documented and persistent opportunity, achievement, and discipline gaps exist between White, middle-class students and students of color, those from low-income backgrounds, speakers of languages other than English, LGBTQ youth, students identified as disabled, and immigrants. Students from marginalized backgrounds consistently fare more poorly (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Losen & Skiba, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2014). According to Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015), teachers' perceptions and biases play key roles in perpetuating the opportunity, achievement, and discipline gaps. However, when teachers become aware of their implicit and explicit biases and employ culturally responsive teaching practices, marginalized populations experience increased success (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Understanding teachers' successful implementation of cultural responsiveness allows for the sharing of effective dispositions and practices among teachers, teacher educators, scholars, and policymakers. Research suggests that such successful implementation may vary according to the developmental stages of the students (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Although gaps in success between student groups persist across developmental stages, these gaps begin to become profound when students transition into middle schools (Arcia, 2007; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). This project developed from an initial attempt to synthesize existing knowledge about the successful use of culturally responsive practices in middle grades classrooms. In conducting the literature review, we found that the ways authors conceptualized and operationalized culture and cultural responsiveness varied so widely that theoretical frameworks and research findings were not able to be synthesized. Consequently, we shifted our approach to mapping conceptual differences and convergences using these guiding questions: How does current middle grades research define culture and the roles of culture, power, and difference in teaching and learning? What similarities and differences exist in the definitions of terms and references used? We began our investigation with a shared framework that emerged from our initial attempts at synthesis. Next, we describe that framework and how we applied it to a review of the literature. Then we share findings from the review, and conclude the article with recommendations for future research on cultural responsiveness in the middle grades.

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework consisted of three shared tenets which emerged as we discussed our initial difficulties in synthesizing studies due to vast differences between them. Specifically, we noted the importance of: a) definitions of

terms, since many important terms seemed to be used in different ways, often with little specificity, justification, or references; b) a critical stance toward oppressive power structures that impact minoritized students; c) specific links to middle grades concepts. Here, we describe each of these three tenets of our conceptual framework.

Definitions of Terms

The first tenet of our conceptual framework regarded the definitions of terms used and cited by authors within the articles examined. In our initial review, we found as many terms needing definitions as there were possible definitions themselves. Having a consistent mechanism for deciding whether or not an article actually had definition or defined terms central to the article's focus became a litmus test for quality as we worked to understand the theoretical and contextual backdrops of the articles. How authors understood and employed historical and current paradigms informed how they situated subjects, individuals, and societies (Apple, 1990; Marsh & Willis, 2003). When authors explicitly defined terms that reflected their stances, we could more easily compare and contrast across articles.

A Critical Stance

During our initial review, we noted distinctions between articles that advocated culturally responsive practices to prepare students to reproduce the current social order versus those that advocated the use of these practices in order to challenge oppressive social structures. As a research team, we identified our commonly held belief that scholarship in cultural responsiveness should empower marginalized groups, and we drew upon Ladson-Billings' (1995) definition of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to help us articulate our own framework for categorizing and synthesizing articles. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated:

> I have defined culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition (1992c) not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop

and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

We used this final tenet of Ladson-Billings' definition to differentiate articles that focus on cultural responsiveness as a tool for training students to unquestioningly accomplish success as it is defined by dominant, White, middle class society from those that focus on cultural responsiveness as a vehicle for empowering students to make social change for equity.

Links to Middle Grades Concepts

In addition to sharing a perspective regarding CRP, we also shared a common understanding of middle school structures and practices that support early adolescents. This part of our framework allowed us to categorize articles according to how they addressed the unique needs of young adolescents and how they identified actual practices that could be implemented to support these students. The collection of structures and practices specifically tailored to young adolescents is commonly referred to as the "middle school concept" in middle grades literature (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

We used two foundational texts to guide our definition of the middle school concept. These texts included *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). These publications were chosen because they have been instrumental in explaining and supporting the middle school concept for numerous policymakers, researchers, organizations, and schools. *Turning Points 2000* built on the original Carnegie Corporation's 1989 *Turning Points* report, which Hough (1997) described as being the blueprint for planning and implementing middle schools in the United States. *This We Believe* is the position paper of the AMLE, formerly NMSA, that outlines the four essential attributes and 16 vital characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents.

Both *Turning Points* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) have been used to shape and support the middle school concept due to their prominence within the field of middle level education. The most common elements of the middle school concept that we drew upon included advisory programs, common planning time, exploratory programs, family-community involvement, heterogeneous/multi-age grouping, integrated curriculum, interdisciplinary teaming, and transition programs. Each of the definitions below was drawn from these two foundational publications.

Advisory programs. Advisory programs are designed to ensure that each student has an adult advocate within their school. These programs typically include a special period regularly built into the school schedule where a small group of students meets with an adult who facilitates the building of community, supports the development of interpersonal bonds, and provides guidance to students.

Common planning time. Common planning time is time built into teachers' schedules that allows them to meet, co-plan, assess data, and critically reflect with teachers on their interdisciplinary teams. This time is necessary to sustain effective interdisciplinary teams.

Exploratory programs. Exploratory programs allow students to engage in activities, try out ideas, and play roles that help them form their identities without requiring their continued commitment to these programs.

Family-community involvement. Family-community involvement is a meaningful and mutually beneficial collaboration between schools, families, and communities to support student learning.

Heterogeneous/Multi-age grouping. Heterogeneous grouping consists of the flexible grouping of students at different ages and stages, with different academic and social skills, and with different demographic backgrounds to maximize learning for all students. Multi-age grouping entails the stable grouping of heterogeneous students with similar interests but at different ages and grade levels,

keeping them with the same students and teachers throughout middle school to provide stability and encourage supportive relationships.

Integrated curriculum. Integrated curriculum involves the use of a big idea or essential question to drive instruction, and encourages students to make connections across academic content areas. An integrated curriculum is driven by students' questions about their lives and therefore allows students to examine and make sense of the world around them.

Interdisciplinary teaming. Interdisciplinary teaming consists of a small group of teachers across multiple content areas who work together to support the academic and social development of a shared group of students within a school.

Transition programs. Transition programs are designed to support young adolescents' move from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. Young adolescents often experience anxiety as they matriculate into and out of middle school. Transition programs allow for a smoother adjustment.

In our review, we identified articles that made reference to young adolescent identity formation as well as identified at least one of these structures from the middle school concept and cited the source supporting the use of the term. These specific elements of the middle school concept address the developmental needs of early adolescents but do not include a description of culturally responsive practices appropriate for early adolescents, and that gap justifies the need for our work. We did not know the degree to which the articles we reviewed would mention the middle school concept or how the middle school concept would overlap with cultural responsiveness, and so we examined this as part of the review as well.

In summary, our conceptual framework led us to examine articles with regard to whether and how authors: a) identified key terms related to culture, power, and difference; b) employed a CRP lens critical of hegemonic power structures; and c) incorporated middle school concepts into the work. We used this conceptual framework to group articles into eight categories according to

whether authors had incorporated each of these dimensions in their work (see Figure 1). Articles placed into our first category met each of these three criteria.

Methods

As a team of four researchers, we began our qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) using as a foundation Brinegar's (2015) review of all articles published in the *Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education* series, *Middle Grades Research Journal*, *Middle School Journal*, and *Research in Middle Level Education Online* between 2000 and 2013. In that study, Brinegar conducted a qualitative content analysis of all 691 articles published during this time and identified categories that characterized the content of those articles. Qualitative content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Specifically, Brinegar's study relied on conventional content analysis methods to inductively cluster data into thematic groups (Story & Resnick, 1986). Two of those categories, special populations and diversity, contained articles relevant to our work so we based our review on the articles in those categories. As our work was part of a broader endeavor in which other scholars were examining special education literature, we removed articles that addressed special education, leaving 133 articles to review.

In a shared Google sheet, we created a codebook articulating how we would identify evidence of each of our three categories (see Table 1). This codebook aligned our conceptual framework with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria that the team used throughout the analysis. An article could be categorized into one of eight aggregate categories depending on how it rated on each of these three components of the framework (see Figure 1). Each team member independently coded each article using the codebook and categorization scheme. We met weekly to discuss our categorizations of 10 articles at a time, coming to consensus regarding each difference of opinion and continuing to clarify the criteria in our codebook. Then we compared and contrasted how the articles that met the criteria for all three categories of our conceptual framework addressed each category.

Findings

Fourteen of the 133 articles met all three criteria of our framework (see Table 2). Of these 14 articles, 10 were empirical research studies, three were literature reviews, and one was a conceptual piece. The special populations addressed in the articles varied widely and included: students of color or those in high poverty schools (7), immigrants (2), Hawaiians (1), Latinos (1), and no group (3). Of the empirical articles identifying a geographical context of the research, the majority identified an "urban" setting. Two studies took place in the northeastern US, four in the Midwest, one in the southeast, and one in Hawaii, with no studies occurring in the western half of the contiguous 48 states and none in international contexts. In further analyzing this collection of articles, we concluded that middle school literature on culturally responsive practices that reflected our conceptual framework did not share any fully developed terms, theories, or foci.

How Articles That Met All Three Criteria Defined Terms

The articles that met all three of our criteria defined terms that focused on teaching and learning, student development, and/or social justice and equity. Of the 44 terms that authors clearly defined across articles, thirteen terms, used by seven scholars, made connections across these three foci. Twelve of these terms were used in only one article, while one term was used in two articles (Figure 2). What distinguished these terms from the others was the authors' comprehensive approach to connecting classroom practices, student development, and social justice. We describe Brown and Leaman's (2007) definitions of exploratory studies, advisory programs, and curriculum integration, and Vagle's (2007) definitions of high pedagogy, dignity, and democracy as examples of how authors connected these three areas, successfully defining terms in ways that can guide future research in cultural responsiveness.

In their conceptual piece, Brown and Leaman (2007) discussed the ways that educators can support middle grades students from minoritized backgrounds in developing a healthy and emancipatory ethnic identity. They described theories of ethnic identity development and defined the terms "ethnic

identity development," "assimilation," "blended biculturalism," "integration," "oppositional identity," and "separation" in ways that connected student development with social justice. We are particularly interested in how they defined terms related to the middle school concept since these definitions pulled together student development, social justice, and teaching and learning. For example, after stating specifically that exploratory studies are projects that allow students to explore topics of interest, they went on to explain:

> Two intended purposes of exploratories are to provide students with opportunities to develop socially and to pursue a variety of personal cognitive interests...exploratories can be specifically designed to give students a chance to examine issues of ethnicity and diversity personally, among the student body, and throughout the community. (pp. 228-229)

This definition, similar to their definitions of advisory programs and curriculum integration, addresses how educators can work for social justice specifically by empowering students in their identity development while employing developmentally appropriate curricular and instructional strategies. Rather than positioning terms and concepts as discretely reflective, only of one aspect of culturally responsive teaching, they connected teaching and learning, and students' cultural identity development with equity, thereby creating an exemplar for how scholars can define terms in ways that reflect the conceptual framework we advocate for use in middle grades research in this area.

Accomplishing a similar goal while defining qualitatively different terms, Vagle (2007) drew upon his phenomenological research to discuss how teachers can create liberatory classrooms. He used the terms "high pedagogy," "dignity," and "democracy" to describe these classrooms. For example, in defining high pedagogy, he stated:

> In these places of high pedagogy teachers respect the dignity of young people, embrace democracy, feel that democratic values and rights should be extended to young people in schools, believe diversity in a classroom is a

source of strength, involve young people in significant learning, are interested in excellence and equity, and aim to integrate life inside and outside of school. (p. 325)

He went on to explain that Beane's definition of this term also included curriculum integration, and further explained its importance in accomplishing the emancipatory goals of high pedagogy. Again, this definition connects curriculum and instruction, student development, and social justice, providing another model for how scholars can sufficiently conceptualize culturally responsive practices in their definitions of terms.

How Articles That Met All Three Criteria Reflected a Critical Stance

Each of the 14 articles we placed into our first category shared the principle that democratic change comes through changing the system to better serve all students, rather than through changing the students to better fit the existing system. Collectively, these articles assert that educators should modify their practices and beliefs to enact democratic education and promote social justice. Strategies to bring about systemic changes discussed in these articles fell into one of five categories: a) institutional structures; b) school leadership; c) educators' supportive practices; d) teacher beliefs and learning; and e) curriculum and instruction. We offer brief examples of each category.

Using institutional structures to change the system. Four articles described five institutional structures that were viewed as democratic: detracking, racial integration, an extended school day, homework help, and summer school. Arambula-Greenfield and Gohn (2004) described tracked systems as, "...highly discriminatory by race and class [as they] exert harmful effects on the achievement of lower-track students by limiting their access" (p. 13). Thus, detracking, or placing students into flexible, heterogeneous groups and classes, supports diverse and equitable opportunities for all students to learn, regardless of demographic group membership or previous academic achievement.

Using school leadership to change the system. Democratic school leadership, as

identified by four articles, included the beliefs and actions of effective principals as well as collaboration among teachers, parents, and students in school-based decision-making. For example, Davis and Thompson (2004) explored ways that middle level principals can help both adults and students develop positive self-identities and resiliency toward realized dreams. Designated town meetings with parents, grandparents, guardians, and community members were utilized by the principal in their case study of *Central Middle* to address current issues; and school-wide student meetings at the start of each day occurred so that educators could learn "about their roles as leaders" (p. 8). The principal also used weekly newsletters to communicate with teachers and students; played music in the hallways to encourage a sense of safety and belonging; created programs for sixth and eighth grade boys through authentic mentorship with community men for helping them with academic, social, and career success; and included students in decision-making for curriculum and instruction. Ultimately, principals serve as important catalytic agents for connecting the school to the community and the community to the school. In Davis and Thompson's (2004) example, we see how a leader can implement developmentally appropriate middle grades programs that promote social justice.

Using educators' supportive practices to change the system. Seven of the articles describe how four different supportive practices resulted in a positive environment for youth from marginalized backgrounds. These practices were: personal support for students; development of students' cultural identities; culturally appropriate behaviors; and a focus on multicultural education. For example, in their description of successful Hawaiian middle schools, Deering et al. (2005) described how educators collaborated with families to implement culturally appropriate caring practices for their diverse student population. They described:

> Teacher Treena Guerrera and her colleagues at Washington Middle School have taken a proactive approach to nurturing and guiding their new immigrant students and connecting with families. Washington holds a two-week summer school for ELL students that

familiarizes them with all the survival skills they will need for the coming year: room locations, school procedures, how to tell time using a clock, and how to use the student planner book. They also take field trips, learn to use public buses, apply for library cards at the public library, and visit the Honolulu Zoo. (p. 17)

The educators in this study also used multicultural education, such as a Polynesian exploratory curriculum wheel and family cultural heritage project.

Using teacher beliefs and learning to change the system. Six of the articles stated how important teachers' beliefs and learning were in supporting marginalized youth. Asset-based thinking, the challenging of cultural stereotypes, and teachers' ongoing professional learning were all cited as important. For example, in their study of interdisciplinary teacher teams at one urban middle school, Tonso, Jung, and Colombo (2006) described the importance of common planning time to teachers' professional learning, making connections between the middle school concept and culturally responsive practices that led to the success of marginalized students.

Using curriculum and instruction to change the system. Finally, the Paideia Model (Arambula-Greenfield & Gohn, 2004) and Family and Community Sciences (Clauss, 2006) were described as curricula that align with social justice principles. Arambula-Greenfield and Gohn (2004), Clauss (2006), and Vagle (2007) also noted how instruction based in critical thinking did the same. For instance, Clauss described the curriculum of Family and Community Sciences as a vehicle for introducing students to thought processes that reflect different cultural perspectives, thereby teaching them to think critically—particularly about social injustices—which also tapped into middle grades students' natural inquisitiveness.

These five categories of strategies mentioned in the articles we identified as reflecting our conceptual framework provide examples of how educators can challenge the status quo and teach and lead for social justice. Significantly, many of the articles we identified linked educators'

effective uses of these strategies to their implementation of the middle school concept.

How Articles That Met All Three Criteria Incorporated the Middle School Concept

During our analysis we found that there were two main ways that the authors utilized the middle school concept. The first was connecting the middle school concept to young adolescent development solely. The second was connecting the middle school concept to young adolescent development and cultural identity development. Of the 14 articles identified, five of them discussed the middle school concept as a way of meeting the developmental needs of young adolescents. Seven articles utilized the middle school concept as a way of supporting young adolescents' developmental needs and cultural identity development. The remaining two articles used both approaches. Because the application of the middle school concept to students' cultural identity development best supports our conceptual framework, we draw upon the seven articles that had evidence of this application as exemplars.

For a detailed example, we return to Davis and Thompson's (2004)[1] case study of a racially segregated urban middle school. In this case study, Davis and Thompson show how educators can indeed create high performing middle schools in monoracial and impoverished school settings. The authors demonstrate how educators' uses of interdisciplinary teaming and integrated curriculum can move schools like Central Middle School from the middle school concept toward cultural responsiveness in action. Even though their work occurred 50 years after the groundbreaking victory of *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), de facto segregation continues to plague public education and makes their work even more important for all educational constituents these 62 years later, as educators seek to meet all the needs of young adolescents.

Teachers at Central Middle worked on rotating interdisciplinary teams, meeting each week for each grade level to discuss students, instruction, and curriculum. Interdisciplinary teaming at the school had a particular structure and focus that

supported teachers' cultural responsiveness. Specifically, team meetings provided a context for dialogue and skillful discussion with students through ongoing conversations about their needs and interests. Likewise, ongoing professional learning and development were at the core of this process, allowing teachers and teams to constantly challenging cultural stereotypes in order to build a culture of possibilities and develop students' cultural identities. This type of culturally responsive structure at the middle level is vital, as "school educators must acknowledge the complexities of this development along with all of the other forms of social development occurring in adolescence" (p. 10). Interdisciplinary teaming directly supported students' cultural identity development, demonstrating that the middle school concept can support teaching for equity.

Central Middle also used an integrated curriculum. If educators acknowledge that school curriculum has long been under fire from external and internal sociopolitical pressures, and that some places of learning operate as apartheid schools, then they can begin to see just how vital integrated and democratic curriculum is. Educators at the school used student focus groups where students and teachers discussed connections across core content areas; engaged in active learning, such as role play and the use of manipulatives; and shared hopes and dreams through curricular content, instructional practices, and one-on-one relationships.

In addition, Davis and Thompson (2004) discussed how integrated curriculum also meant infusing career exploration, technology, and cooperative learning into students' experiences; it meant democratic education was at the core of valued and difficult discussions about what to teach and to whom the school belonged. Students were involved with problem solving and in actively deciding what and how they learned. As Davis and Thompson (2004) stated, "In segregated middle schools, there is an urgent need for collective responsibility for the well-being of young adolescents" (p. 11). This urgent need for collective responsibility was fully realized in the notion of democratic education where teachers and students worked alongside

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[1] Although this study is 12 years old, we chose to use it as an example due to the scarcity of more recent

published accounts of culturally responsive practices in the middle grades.

each other in implementing an integrated curriculum.

Discussion

Although we identified exemplars among these 14 articles that effectively integrated the middle school concept with culturally responsive practices while also clearly defining terms, we found more differences than similarities among them. While some authors defined and cited terms in ways that connected teaching and learning with student development and social justice, others explained and applied terms in more isolated or discrete ways. Similarly, authors varied with regard to whether they applied the middle school concept to issues of culture, power, and difference in middle schools. This wide variation reflects a lack of shared conceptual understanding among scholars who research culture and social justice in the middle grades. Thus, the following conceptual questions need to be addressed by middle level scholars in order to create a foundation for the development of a collection of research studies on cultural responsiveness that can be synthesized and shared.

What is Cultural Responsiveness in Middle Level Education?

Although all articles included definitions of terms as well as incorporations of middle level concepts, there remain two conceptual gaps: a) how the unique needs of early adolescents might demand specific culturally responsive practices from educators; b) how well foundational middle school structures apply to marginalized groups. Brown and Leaman (2007) and Virtue (2007) addressed this first gap. Both of these articles discussed the identity development needs of students of color, who must negotiate the development of a cultural identity from a socially minoritized position. Virtue specifically discussed the needs of immigrant English Language Learners (ELL), who have unique needs. The needs of ELLs are especially relevant considering the increase of that population in the US (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction, 2012; Zong & Batalova, 2015).

Brinegar (2010) and Deering et al. (2005) discussed this second gap, again with very different specific foci, with Brinegar focusing on

refugees and Deering et al. focusing on native Hawaiians and immigrants living in Hawaii. Davis and Thompson (2004), Fenzel (2009), and Tonso et al. (2006) explored whether middle school structures could work in urban settings, which is distinct from the first two gaps because it focuses on the implementation of structures in settings with majority minoritized populations. This focus also reflects an undertheorization of the use of the term "urban" in a way that conflates race, ethnicity, poverty, and deficiency. As a field, middle level research has not yet teased apart these conceptual gaps.

What Does It Mean to be an Effective, Culturally Responsive Middle School?

We noted that these articles reflected a range of priorities in identifying effective middle schools, with some focused on standardized achievement measures (see Lys, 2009), others prioritizing student experiences (see Storz & Nestor, 2003), and still others utilizing the middle school concept as a framework for evaluation (see Brinegar, 2010). We note that Ladson-Billings' (1995) components of CRP lend themselves to a rubric for the evaluation of effectiveness that would include additional factors not included in these other measures, such as whether or not students developed critical consciousness. Middle level research on cultural responsiveness would benefit from a clear, shared conceptualization of effectiveness that reflects cultural responsiveness in middle level education.

What Research Methodologies and Methods Best Capture Middle Level Educators' Successes with Marginalized Students?

Because researchers have used various definitions of effectiveness, both explicit and implicit, they have also used various research methodologies and methods to address and capture whatever they define as effective. Nine out of the 10 empirical studies were qualitative, with seven of those using case study methodology or methods. These case studies varied widely in the level of rigor used in both design and implementation, and perhaps most significantly in the roles that interviews with students and teachers played in the case study designs (i.e., the majority of these studies did not incorporate student voice in the methods or

findings). Similarly, the quantitative study used survey design with predetermined responses as a method to capture student perceptions. The use of this design to answer a research question regarding perceptions of marginalized students, who may have a contribution not anticipated by the researchers or included in the predetermined survey options, elucidates the need for middle level researchers to consider how we capture, incorporate, and evaluate the experiences of students and teachers, particularly when addressing topics related to cultural responsiveness.

According to *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010), an education for early adolescents should be empowering, "providing all students with the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives, to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge," and equitable, "advocating for and ensuring every student's right to learn and providing appropriately challenging and relevant learning opportunities for every student" (p. 13). To produce research focused on effectively achieving this call for all early adolescents, middle grades researchers should examine the roles of culture, power, and difference in teaching and learning within middle schools. Defining cultural responsiveness in middle level education and establishing shared notions of effective practices and appropriate research approaches grounded in critical consciousness would provide the essential foundation for this important work.

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Table 1

Codebook

	Categorize as "Yes"	Categorize as "No" If Any Instances of These
Defines Terms?	Defines or provides examples of multiple terms related to systemic power (i.e., wielded within institutions/systems, not just by individuals), culture, and difference *and* cites reference(s) to support the majority of the definitions; *Or* Defines one key term (i.e. the central focus of the article) in detail *and* cites reference(s) to support the definition. These terms might not traditionally be associated with power, culture, and difference.	Terms are used without specific definitions and/or supporting citations.
Change the Context?	Focuses on changes in curriculum, instruction, and/or structures to better support students and/or change unjust systems; *And* Uses an assets-based approach to students. A critical stance can mean changing an oppressive distribution of power at any level (i.e. classroom, school, etc.).	Has a deficit based approach; *Or* Considers change without a critical focus.
Middle School Concept?	In addition to: 1) references early adolescent identity formation, articles should, 2) include a connection to the middle grades concept and cite middle grades specific work.	Does not include both criteria listed.

Table 2

Articles That Met All Three Criteria of the Conceptual Framework

Article	Defined Terms	Structures Discussed to Change the Status Quo	Middle School Concept Structures Addressed
Anfara, V. A. (2004). Creating high-performing middle schools. In Sue C. Thompson and Vincent. A. Anfara (Eds.), *Reforming middle level education* (pp. 1-18). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.	• Middle grades concept	• Advisory • Common Planning Time • Exploratory Programs • Family/Community Involvement • Heterogeneous/multi-age Grouping • Integrated Curriculum • Interdisciplinary Teaming • Transitions	• Advisory • Common Planning Time • Exploratory Programs • Family/Community Involvement • Heterogeneous/multi-age Grouping • Integrated Curriculum • Interdisciplinary Teaming • Transition Programs
Arambula-Greenfield, T., & Gohn, A. J. (2004). "The best education for the best is the best education for all." *Middle School Journal, 35*(5), 12-21. doi: 10.1080/00940771.2004.11461445	• Paideia • Tracking/Detracking	• Detracking • Paideia Curriculum • Critical Thinking • Teachers' Personal Support	• Family/Community Involvement • Interdisciplinary Teaming
Brinegar, K. (2010). "I feel like I'm safe again": A discussion of middle grades organizational structures from the perspective of immigrant youth and their teachers. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 33*(9), 1-14. doi: 10.1080/19404476.2010.11462072	• Deficit Thinking • Dialogic Intervention • Ethnic Identity Development • Multiage Grouping • Teaming • Transcultural Identity	• Asset-based Thinking • Supporting Students' Cultural Identity Development	• Heterogeneous/multi-age Grouping • Interdisciplinary Teaming
Brown, D. F., & Leaman, H. L. (2007). Recognizing and responding to young adolescents' ethnic identity development. In S. B. Mertens, V. A. Anfara, & M. M. Caskey (Eds.), *The young adolescent and the middle school*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.	• Advisory Programs • Assimilation • Blended Biculturalism • Curriculum Integration • Ethnic Identity Development • Exploratory Studies • Integration • Oppositional Identity • Separation	• Asset-based Thinking • Racial Integration • Supporting Students' Cultural Identity Development	• Advisory • Exploratory Programs • Integrated Curriculum

Article	Defined Terms	Structures Discussed to Change the Status Quo	Middle School Concept Structures Addressed
Clauss, B. A. (2006). Family and consumer sciences delivers middle school multicultural education. *Middle School Journal, 37*(4), 17-24.	• Multicultural Education • High Context/Low Context Culture	• Critical Thinking • Family and Community Sciences Curriculum • Multicultural Education	• Family/Community Involvement • Heterogeneous/multi-age Grouping
Davis, D. M., & Thompson, S. C. (2004). Creating high-performing middle schools in segregated settings: 50 years after *Brown*. *Middle School Journal, 36*(2), 4-12.	• Apartheid Schools • Cultural Identity Development • Education	• Challenging Cultural Stereotypes • Effective Principals • Inclusion of Students in Decision-Making • Ongoing Professional Learning	• Integrated Curriculum • Interdisciplinary Teaming
Deering, P. D. et al. (2005). It takes an '*Ohana* to educate young adolescents in a multilingual, multicultural society. *Middle School Journal, 37*(2), 15-21.	• Caring • Tribes School	• Cultural Identity Development • Culturally Appropriate Behaviors • Multicultural Education	• Advisory • Family/Community Involvement • Integrated Curriculum • Interdisciplinary Teaming
Fenzel, L. M. (2009). Effective alternative urban middle schools: Findings from research on NativityMiguel schools. *Middle Grades Research Journal, 4*(3), 1-17.	• Nativity Miguel Schools	• Extended School Day • Homework Help • Summer School	• Advisory • Family/Community Involvement • Interdisciplinary Teaming
Lys, D. B. (2009). Supporting high school graduation aspirations among Latino middle school students. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 33*(3), 1-12.	• Assimilation/Acculturation	• Detracking	• Transition Programs
Storz, M. G., & Nestor, K. R. (2003). Insights into meeting standards from listening to the voices of urban students. *Middle School Journal, 34*(4), 11-19.	• Curriculum • Integrated Curriculum	• Inclusion of Students in Decision-Making	• Exploratory Programs • Family/Community Involvement • Integrated Curriculum

Article	Defined Terms	Structures Discussed to Change the Status Quo	Middle School Concept Structures Addressed
Thompson, S. C., Davis, D. M., Caruthers, L., & Gregg, L. (2003). A constructivist approach to developing transformational urban school leaders. In P. G. Andrews, & V. A. Anfara (Eds.), *Leaders for a movement* (pp. 323-342). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.	• Culturalism • Democratic Education • Education • Organizational Culture • Reculturing • Social Deficit Theory • Socially Equitable Schools	• Asset-based Thinking • Effective Principals	• Family/Community Involvement
Tonso, K. L., Jung, M. L., & Colombo, M. (2006). "It's hard answering your calling": Teacher teams in a restructuring urban middle school. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 30*(1), 1-22. doi: 10.1080/19404476.2006.11462034	• Activity Theory • Teacher Teams • Teamwork	• Ongoing Professional Learning • Inclusion of Teachers and Parents in Decision-Making	• Interdisciplinary Teaming
Vagle, M. D. (2007). Middle school teacher qualities: Looking for signs of dignity and democracy. In V. A. Anfara & S. B. Mertens (Eds.), *The young adolescent and the middle school* (pp. 323-342). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.	• Democracy • Dignity • High Pedagogy	• Critical Thinking • Supporting Students' Cultural Identity Development	• Integrated Curriculum
Virtue, D. C. (2007). A glimpse into the school lives of young adolescent immigrant and refugee students: Implications for the middle level. In V. A. Anfara & S. B. Mertens (Eds.), *The young adolescent and the middle school* (pp. 273-254). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.	• Acculturation • Garcia's Risk Factors • Uprootedness • Cultural Ecological Framework	• Supporting Students' Cultural Identity Development	• Advisory • Family/Community Involvement

1. Defines terms, focuses on changing the system, and focuses on the middle school concept	2. Defines terms, focuses on changing the individual, and focuses on the middle school concept	3. Defines terms, focuses on changing the system, does not focus on the middle school concept	4. Defines terms, focuses on changing the individual, does not focus on the middle school concept
5. Does not define terms, focuses on changing the system, and focuses on the middle school concept	6. Does not define terms, focuses on changing the individual, and focuses on the middle school concept	7. Does not define terms, focuses on changing the system, does not focus on the middle school concept	8. Does not define terms, focuses on changing the individual, does not focus on the middle school concept

Key: (Y, or "yes," agrees with our theoretical framework for each of the three dimensions named)

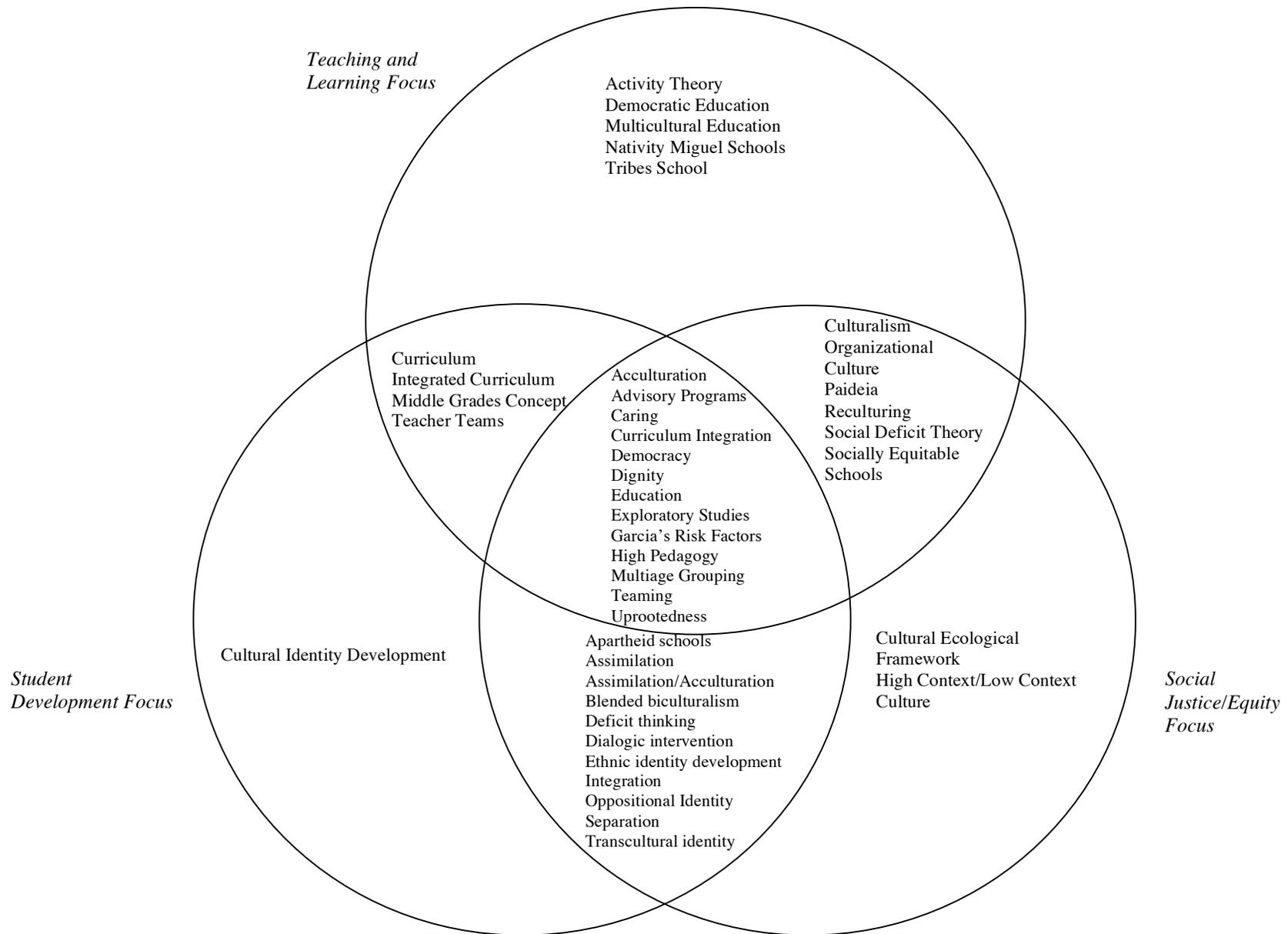| 1: YYY | 2. YNY | 3. YYN | 4. YNN |
| 5. NYY | 6. NNY | 7. NYN | 8: NNN |

Figure 1. Aggregate Categories Used in Data Analysis

Figure 2. Categories of Definitions of Terms Used in The Articles That Met Criteria

Institutional Structures
- Detracking
- Racial integration
- Extended school day
- Homework help
- Summer school
- Graduate support

Schools and teachers should modify practices to enact democratic education/social justice.[1]

Curriculum and Instruction
- Paideia model
- Family and Community Sciences
- Critical thinking

School Leadership
- Effective principal
- Inclusion of teachers and parents in decision-making
- Inclusion of students in decision-making

Educators' Supportive Practices
- Personal support
- Developing students' cultural identities
- Educators' culturally appropriate behaviors
- Multicultural education

Teacher Beliefs and Learning
- Asset-based (versus deficit-based) thinking
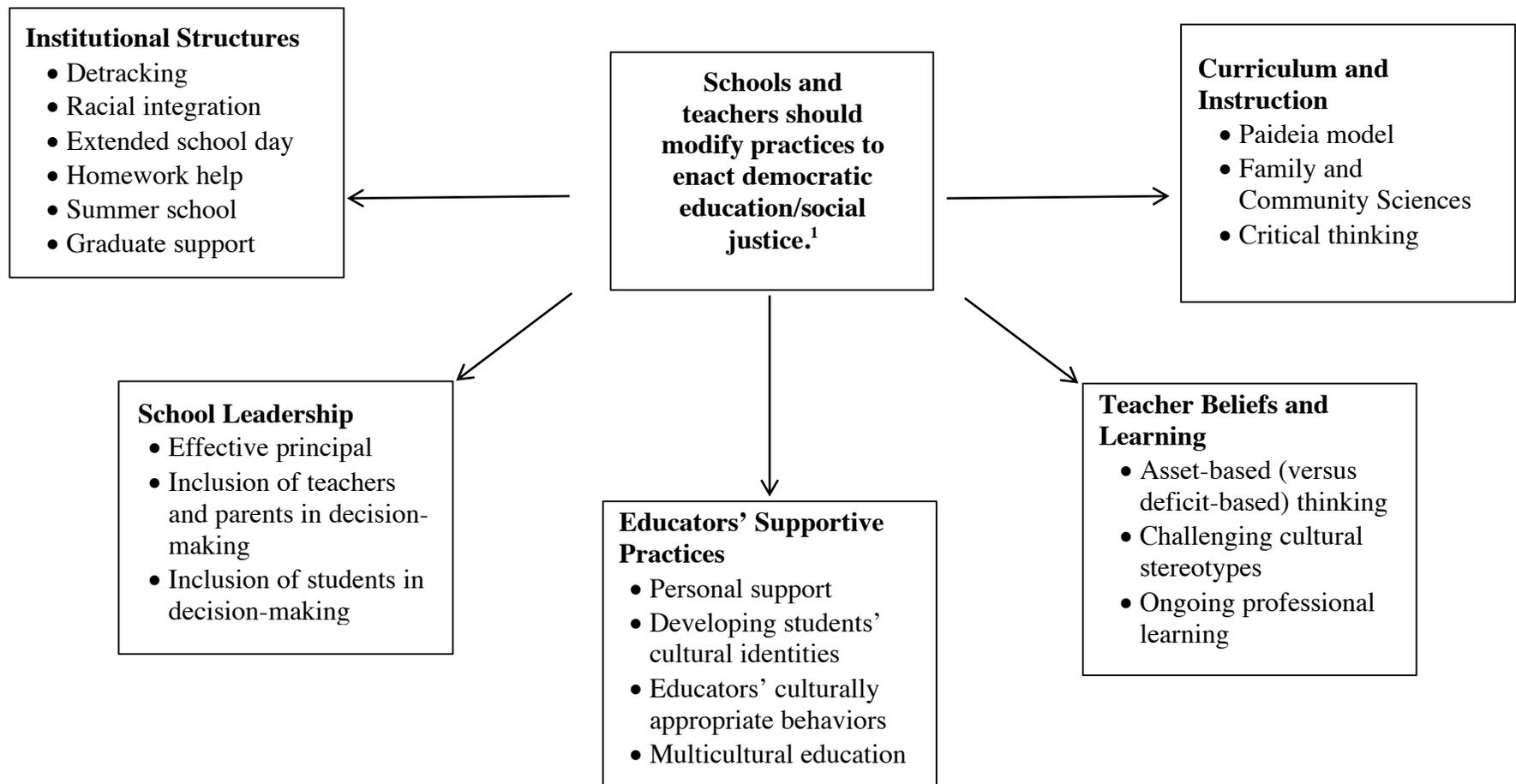- Challenging cultural stereotypes
- Ongoing professional learning

Figure 3. Practices Addressed By Category 1 Articles That Could Challenge the Status Quo.

[1] These practices do not include those addressed in the middle school concept, which are listed in Table 1.