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more, revamping teacher education, or extending the principal's role, although he favors appropriate attention, in time, to all such matters. Rather, the core of his program is the improvement of interpersonal relationships within the school building and carrying out the school-based planning that positive relationships facilitate. Schooling is about relationships with the people you see every day, he believes, whether they are students, teachers, or secretaries, and any reform that fails to recognize this is not likely to be effective. Almost everybody in our society agrees on the practical goals of education and can get access to the same teaching materials and information on how to teach. Thus leverage for reform comes from wanting to teach and wanting to learn. It is up to schools to provide an environment that stimulates the orderliness, respectful relationships, and the school-centered planning that are prerequisites for teaching and learning. Some may consider these simple, old-fashioned remedies, but the process of attaining them necessitates a major renovation of the attitudes and structures that have developed in our urban schools.

#### NOTE

1. In one instance, an especially energetic and dedicated coordinator facilitated the Comer Process in 10 schools for a time-limited period.

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*Expanded teacher role; collaborative, relevant learning; and cooperation between school and college: a recipe for success.*  
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## MEMBERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT AT MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

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Wehlage's (1989) study of 14 urban American high schools that effectively serve at-risk students, described the fundamental characteristics of those programs: (1) All effective schools created a structure in which students could feel themselves members of a community of learners and teachers. (2) Programs and curricula engaged students, responding to their needs, interests, and strengths. (3) Teachers accepted a proactive moral responsibility for educating at-risk youth. Putting these characteristics into practice is the task of educators today.

When it was founded in 1974 by Janet Lieberman, Middle College High School on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City was designed to meet the special needs of potential drop-out adolescents. Middle College combines the resources of a high school and a college to create a collaborative structure that promotes school membership and academic engagement. The educational community fostered by this unusual structure has produced teachers, programs, and curricula that combine effectively to engage at-risk youth. An unusually high percentage of students who complete Middle School go on to college or work. The statistics for the class of 1985, the last one for which compar-

ative numbers are available, show that 83% of Middle College students graduated compared to the 50% figures for citywide New York. In 1989, 75% of Middle College graduates went on to college. This very effectiveness makes Middle College a case worth studying in any discussion of at-risk education.

The location of Middle College High School on a community college campus provides a concrete spatial connection to the next stage of learning. Students participate fully in the life of the college, which thereby becomes a realistic goal as well as a motivation for completing high school. They attend some college classes, receiving college credit that also counts toward a high school diploma. They have college IDs and access to the entire college facility—library, cafeteria, recreational facilities, a theater, language labs, a writing center, a TV studio, and additional computer labs. They have all the benefits of a small school without the handicaps usually associated with small-scale education. The school's calendar coincides as much as possible with the college calendar and the time schedules mesh, so that students can take high school and college classes and college faculty can serve as adjunct instructors in the high school. Administratively, the high school is a department of the college, its principal holding the informal rank of chairperson. The funding in the initial planning stage was provided by the Carnegie Foundation and the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education. Now, the annual operating costs are borne by tax levy funds from the New York City Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education, with the state of New York. Students, faculty, and administrators—all are members of Middle College, a high school and a college.

### A QUESTION OF BELONGING

One of the founding assumptions of Middle College was that school membership was essential, that it would help students feel that they belonged, that their teachers cared about them, and that their peers accepted and valued them. For the disaffected student, there is often an underlying belief that acquiring a high school

diploma is worthless, and no argument on the part of adults can change that student's perspective. For this student to accept membership in the school community, some sense of belonging has to be fostered, not just to peers, but to adults as well, so that he or she can accept some of these adults' beliefs concerning the value of the diploma and of education. Social bonding implies a connection with peers and adults and some belief in the norms of the school and in the legitimacy of the institution. Students with high attachments to teachers and counselors have a personal stake in meeting the expectations of those adults, which inspires a commitment to remain in school and gain a diploma. For the student who does not see the promise of any reward for that commitment, the school must provide concrete experiences that foreshadow a successful future, a job, and a college education.

The culture of Middle College promotes a sense of belonging by creating positive relationships between adolescents and adults. Everyone is on a first-name basis, which signifies that adults are accessible, open to more familiar relationships. That respect is not automatic; it must be earned, but the first-name relationship sets up expectations for a more equal relationship with a teacher than many students who have problems with authority have experienced. This is a first step in the development of genuinely respectful relations.

Students wrote the first Middle College Constitution with codes of conduct that apply both to students and teachers. When alcohol was prohibited for students, it was also forbidden for staff parties. If a student can be brought up on charges of misconduct, it is only fair that students should be able to bring charges against teachers as well. In practice, no teacher has ever come before the student-faculty review, but students do bring complaints about teachers to their counselors and the principal with every expectation that problems will be corrected.

The structure is fashioned to promote the greatest communication of concern. The school's maximum enrollment of 500 students is subdivided into 30 families, each having 170 students, a guidance counselor, and a family worker. Every counselor has three daily group counseling sessions during half the lunch period with 14 students in each session. In the group session students talk about

their concerns, sharing with their peers, many of whom have similar problems. The counselor helps develop coping strategies for difficult home situations and the other tasks of growing up. Students who are failing classes are selected for the group, attendance is required and recorded, and students receive a pass/fail grade for the group work. A 1986 study reported that 84% of the students passed more courses while in the group than they did before group counseling (Cullen and Moed 1988)

Each of the three families described above is divided into 12 houses, with 15 students assigned to each house. For stability and continuity, a student stays in the same house with the same adviser, guidance counselor, and house mom for 3 years. Every faculty member, administrator, and counselor has a house and meets with students for 70 minutes each week. The house teacher becomes the primary adult in the student's passage through high school, helping him or her to develop an individual program based on graduation requirements and personal needs. A biweekly parent support group has developed from the student counseling program. When a student reports difficulty in dealing with a parent, a counselor invites the parent to join a group in the evening for which parents set the agenda. Those attending regularly report that they gain strategies for dealing with their difficult teenagers.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The initial contact between potential students and Middle College conveys a message of active help. The school invites prospective students, recommended by a junior high school or high school guidance counselor, to meet with student government representatives or peer counselors. This interview encourages a new student's interest in the school. Students with a history of failure need to feel chosen for the program. They also need acceptance by an older student member of the community. It is all a part of the process of socializing new members to the social ambiance of Middle College.

Orientation for incoming students takes place in August of each year. Workshops run by faculty introduce the students to their teachers and to the various programs; in an atmosphere of games

and a picnic, new students join students and teachers to hear the success-oriented values of the school.

For two cycles of his or her first year, a core course, combining social studies and English, offers the student a double-period, team-taught, intensive academic experience, in classes limited to 25. The focus is on Africa, Asia, and Central and South America through the theme of repression, revolution, and social change, which engage students' interest. Each area study ends in a student-produced activity, such as a play or mock demonstration.

Even the grading system stresses achievement and realization of potential. The school uses letter grades of A, B, C, and D. There are no failing grades. A student gets an "incomplete" if it is possible to pass with some additional work. NC, no credit, is given if the student can make up the course at a later date or in summer school; he or she is not held back because of failure. The school is not divided by grade levels, so students are not held over or stigmatized for being over age. Students progress at their own rate by accumulating credits toward graduation, reviewing progress cards with the house teacher three times a year. This provides a fairly constant exchange on progress rather than occasional news about failure.

The schedule follows the college schedule as much as possible, giving students more classroom time. Classes meet for 70 minutes four times a week in each subject area. Students take only four classes of 25 students during each cycle, which means more time for teachers to know the students and their work. One morning a week is reserved for house activities and one afternoon for club activities while teachers participate in staff development. Teachers have two 70-minute periods of unassigned time and semiprivate offices, so that they can meet with students individually. There is formal tutoring in mathematics, and one of two computer labs is always available for students for written assignments.

### THE LOOK AHEAD

The message of "work hard now to get a good job later" is meaningless for many at-risk students. Many live with unemployment; many see illegal easy money; many have such poor self-

images they cannot believe in their own success. The school connects students to the next stage of their development by its structure, its environment, and its academic program. Students mingle and interact with college students, many of whom share ethnic backgrounds and neighborhoods. These role models suggest a student can include college in his or her plans. Students can take college classes easily and receive credit for required high school courses when they pass a college course. When Middle College students attain success in high school classes and are within a year of graduating, they can register for college. The transition is a natural one.

The career education program connects Middle College students to the next phase of their development as well. Every student is required to complete three full- or part-time cooperative education internships during the four years of high school. The internships orient the student toward the community through the learning activity of experience, usually in community service. The annual three-cycle calendar enables students to complete a year's work in two cycles and use the remaining cycle for work experience in 1 of 356 placement sites in New York City, largely public-sector job sites such as hospitals, schools, child care agencies, police stations, and community-based organizations.

There are three preparation-for-internship courses that teach concepts that are applied in the internship experience. A weekly seminar reinforces the concepts and values. The career education teacher gives the prep courses, acts as the internship monitor and seminar leader, and counsels the student for the entire time that he or she is at Middle College. With such guidance, students choose internship sites based on their interests and their basic skills competencies. For many students, the internship is the first real success they experience in school; for many, it is the most rewarding. Most receive an A from their site supervisor, in part because the student and supervisor have set realistic goals and in part because the student's effort and hard work impresses supervisors. For the student, the future is now. No need for the wait-till-you-have-a-job advice. Middle College offers students who have not yet formed goals the chance to experiment simultaneously with college and work.

## TEACHERS WHO CARE

Wehlage's third requirement of an effective school for high-risk students — teachers who accept the proactive moral responsibility for educating these students — is realized by the staff of Middle College. They have accepted the greater role of teacher-mentor-counselor responsible for the emotional and academic growth of their charges over the narrower one of subject-matter specialist with considerable enthusiasm. Middle College is a school in a district with one of the most militant teacher unions in the country; nevertheless, the teachers extend themselves to help students master content and skills of courses and to participate in weekly staff training sessions and biweekly family meetings of counselors and house teachers. As members of the personnel committee, they hire new staff members who understand that this extended role is the heart of teaching at Middle College.

The school governance structure, the hiring practices, the weekly staff training, and the physical setting, which includes some amenities New York City teachers are totally unaccustomed to, reinforce the expanded role of teacher. The relationship with LaGuardia Community College offers teachers the chance to be adjunct instructors there. This gives the high school faculty special status compared to their colleagues in other high schools. The college insists that the high school faculty be treated as professionally as the college staff, which means each teacher has a cubicle office of his or her own.

The faculty's expertise in counseling varies greatly. The weekly staff-development sessions concentrate on curriculum development for house, with strategies for handling some of the sensitive topics covered in the house curriculum. All faculty participate in the development of house curriculum, as members of one of three writing committees: academic advisement, participation in government, or leadership. Committees meet once a month to share and critique new lesson plans, and whole staff meetings share the plans. Topics include AIDS, sex, birth control, local government elections, the census, study tips, SAT preparation, and communication with parents. Through the discussion the house teacher comes to know his or her students, to give his or her perspective to important issues.

The governance structure gives the staff a sense of belonging and of control. All staff, including paraprofessionals and secretaries, serve on one of four committees—Climate, Curriculum, Personnel, and Oversight. They meet once a month with an assistant principal as the facilitator, and a chair elected annually from the staff. This year, students and parents have been added to the Oversight Committee. Decisions are reached by consensus.

The Climate Committee developed a reward structure for students that includes a public award ceremony held three times a year, displays of student achievement throughout the school, and student-faculty activity days. The Curriculum Committee decides on all new courses and textbooks and makes recommendations for curriculum and policies to be adopted by the whole school. The Personnel Committee recruits and hires all new faculty and staff. The Oversight Committee is the ultimate decision-making group, making all decisions about educational policies and their implementation.

### ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

High-risk students are not the only ones who are uninvolved in academic work at school. Goodlad (1983) and Sizer (1984) both report a lack of student engagement. Students “rarely planned or initiated anything, read or wrote anything of some length, or created their own products. And they scarcely ever speculated on meaning, discussed interpretations, or engaged in projects calling for collaborative effort” (Goodlad 1983, 468). At the same time they report the absence of engaging materials or variety of presentation, commenting that the fault does not lie wholly with the student. For the at-risk student, however, it is doubly important that the curricula provide successful experiences that motivate the mastering of difficult skills. Intrinsic rewards for mastering skills and concepts often elude the high-risk student for reasons over which he or she has no control. Delayed gratification is difficult in any case, but it certainly does not work for a student who has a poor self-image and very little belief in a positive future. Most high school teaching is verbal, abstract, and competitive, covering vast amounts of infor-

mation that seem meaningless and superficial—all of which prevents students from experiencing the joys of learning.

To enhance the learning experience, Middle College focuses on the peer group. Classroom methodology stresses collaborative strategies in which students interact to master material and prepare projects, changing learners from passive recipients to active participants in the learning process. Students can form alternate peer groups that promote learning and academic engagement. The 70-minute period militates against the teacher-dominated classroom because it is almost impossible for a teacher to sustain student interest for that period of time. Teachers must provide activities for the students in groups. Part of staff-development activities focuses on the development of materials for collaborative student projects. Several courses designed by teams of teachers provide stimulating interaction between two adults in the classroom, which then becomes a model for student interaction.

Academic engagement is encouraged by high-interest materials and informal, open-ended remedial classes. Every course requires students to write, frequently using the computer. The New York City Writing Project of Lehman College trained the faculty from all the disciplines in the teaching of writing, rewriting, criticism, and self-criticism.

Several team-taught interdisciplinary courses have been designed to engage students' active response.

A thematic English course—The African-American Experience—draws Middle College urban adolescents to examine the transition from indentured servitude to slavery in the American economy, the literature of protest, Malcolm X, the nature of personal relationships among African-Americans, and the press coverage of the Tawana Brawley case. In each case or theme, the students read, write, research, and evaluate their sources and references.

Math and Motion studies physics of motion and the mathematics needed to understand the application of the physical principles. The teaching team consists of a high school math teacher, a college math teacher, and a high school physics teacher. Working together, they made a conscious decision to cover this topic in depth in the physics curriculum rather than attempt to give students a survey of topics

generally covered in a high school physics course. This enables the student to learn in depth the principles of motion. Time is spent in experiencing physically the properties associated with motion before generalizing to the principles and then to the application. Students construct a balance beam from two-by-fours, then using a fulcrum, stand on the beam, testing the relationship between weight and distance with their bodies. Then they extrapolate an equation that captures this relationship. No math or science prerequisites are required; the class is composed of students of various ages, levels of credit completion, and levels of skill development. Through its structure the class encourages students to join groups to work on experiments. The groups make presentations at the end of each experiment and receive a common grade that reflects the level of understanding achieved by all group members. Groups of students may choose from three levels of tests (A, B, C), which allows them to set goals and work for the highest mark they can get on a test. The responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the student, for him- or herself and for all students in the group.

The American social history class is yet another collaboration of teachers and students, of the college and the high school. A history teacher and an English teacher, one of whom is a college teacher, work for a double period on social history materials, corresponding roughly to the post-Civil War period through the industrial revolution to the present, offering a history of the period from the eyes of ordinary men and women. The materials are all original sources, illustrated, and have an accompanying video. Students identify with the people in the materials, which makes history come alive.

Many English teachers complain about students' sparse reading and their dependence on videos. In a short story and media class, students read and view short stories, comparing the presentation in each. The course combines the two media and asks students to compare, thus directing them to read and to learn to value the difference in the two experiences. For a final project, students write a short story and develop the outline for a screenplay of the short story. This, like most English classes, finishes with the publication of a magazine containing all the short stories and screenplays written in class. Many of the materials are written by groups of students.

## CONCLUSIONS

Not every course at the Middle College is collaborative, cooperative, and student centered, but that is the ideal. Faculty work to design new courses that will capitalize on the adolescent tendency to work with peers, to be motivated by quick results and by issues relevant to their lives and interests. Cooperative learning methods that incorporate group rewards have consistently positive achievement results according to Slavin (1986). Cooperation is essential to success in adult life; it is notoriously difficult to teach. Team teaching provides the teachers with opportunities to work collaboratively in the classroom, to develop the skills for cooperation, and to serve as models to the students of effective working together. Students' collaborative work not only enhances the content-learning experience, it also provides an exercise that allows experiencing the difficulties of team work—the unevenness of abilities, the differences of opinion, the concerns for feelings of others, the problems of decision making and reaching consensus—as well as the pleasures of leadership, support, and positive criticism. These difficulties and pleasures of the learning process are intrinsic to the collaborative approach that has made Middle College High School such an effective instrument in keeping at-risk students engaged with learning and living.

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