

## **Collaborating to Build An Effective Standards Based Middle School Licensure Program: The Valparaiso Initiative**

John Ellis  
Valparaiso University  
Perry Riffel  
Valparaiso University

Higher standards from state and national accreditation agencies, as well as increased expectations from middle school administrators and faculty, are requiring new and innovative responses from teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher learning. Since the beginning of the middle school movement, middle schools have been staffed by teachers who have received their primary training at either the elementary or secondary level (Swaim & Stefanich, 1996). Junior High school advocate Aubrey Douglas recognized that a major cause for failure of junior high education would be inadequately trained teacher (Douglas, 1920).

Middle school "youth need and deserve developmentally responsible schools staffed with knowledgeable and capable teachers who are expert at their profession, not strangers to middle level classrooms and young adolescents who spend much of their lives there" (Swaim & Stefanich, 1996). Middle school administrators and classroom teachers strongly favor additional preparation in the areas which specifically address the developmental needs, such as adolescent development, curriculum development, and field experience (McEwin & Allen, 1983).

### **Steps in Building Effective Middle Level Licensure Programs - The Valparaiso University/Michigan City Schools Initiative**

- Networking: Licensure programs are developed at the state level. In Indiana, this network process began in 1989. The POMLE began the task of carving out a strategy for ultimately recommending the establishment of separate middle level license in the State of Indiana. This group continued to meet twice a year at the expense of each individual institution.
- Keeping the network alive. The Indiana POMLE found it necessary to meet more frequently and for longer periods of time to accomplish their task. A grant was secured for outside financial support from the Eli Lilly foundation. The grant was approved for a week-long planning retreat that was held at Wabash College in the summer of 1995. Attendees were required to bring with them a middle school principal with who they had worked in placing student in clinical field experiences. Partnering with Valparaiso University was Kirk Rogers of Krueger Middle School (KMS) Michigan City, Indiana. By the beginning of the fall semester

the elements of the partnership agreement was approved by the Department of Education at Valparaiso University and the Michigan City Area Schools. Additional funds remained from the grant to allow for three weekend meetings plus a pre-conference day at the Indiana Middle Level Education Association (IMLEA) state conference. At a pre-conference session each partnership group presented their progress in program development.

- Maintaining the commitment: The total number of professor/principal partners was reduced to half of the original meeting by the fourth and final meeting. The partners that remained in the consortium of professors and principals of middle level education applied for and received additional funding for one additional year from the Department of Education of the State of Indiana. During the second year of the grant, staff development funds were made available to local school corporations. A call for application for participation in the Middle Level Teacher Development Project was made at each participating school. Cooperating teachers were selected through a screening process by the university and local school district. During the second year of the grant, DOE funds were used to pay for substitute teachers one day per month for staff development. Simultaneously, the IPSB drafted standards for the Early Adolescent Generalist Teacher consistent with INTASC. This draft document served as the basis for the collaborative development of a teacher preparation and assessment program for a separate middle school license. Essentially, professional development sites were being established between university teacher education programs and partner public middle schools. Approximately eight such partnerships were started across the state. The Michigan City Area Schools applied for a third grant from Title II funds. The grant paid for summer work-days and for a team to make a presentation of its work in progress at the NMSA National Conference in Orlando, Florida. The remainder of the year was used to pilot the assessment system with middle school candidates. A grant was requested for a fourth year of support under Title II. The request was denied due to cuts in federal allocations.
- Securing university approval for a new program: The Department of Education at Valparaiso University requested an additional person to assist in the development of the new middle level education program. That provided two faculty members with middle level expertise. Their charge was to develop a middle level teacher education program that would be consistent with

university degree requirements, NMSA/NCATE standards, the ten INTASC principles, and IPSB EAG standards. Because the latter standards are performance based, rather than based on credits earned, it was necessary to determine which courses candidates needed to take to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to be effective teachers. Feedback was sought from all stakeholders in the initiative:

- *Shared vision*: The mission statement of the university and the College of Arts & Sciences and the conceptual framework of the Department of Education became the focal point of dialogue for program development. Using this framework contributions were sought from stakeholders to assess the best strategies for developing curriculum.
- *K-12 teacher input*: The teachers at KMS approved the program as presented, but suggested that all middle school candidates should take Elementary Math Methods I.
- *Candidate input*: The candidates who were presently enrolled in a field experience at the field site approved the program with the suggestions that they also take the Elementary Math Methods II course and operations.
- *Department of Education Approval*: The only major changes to the proposed program were a modification to the original Principles of Middle Level Education course and the addition of a six credit integrated curriculum methods block.
- *A & S faculty input*: The reworked program was submitted to the Teacher Education Committee, which is made up of representatives from each department from the College of Arts & Science. There was no objection by these members to the proposed middle level degree program. Several members advised the department to make corrections in regards to the sequence of course offerings. The final step was to present the proposal to the Curriculum Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences. After Curriculum Committee approval, it was sent to the University Academic Policy Committee and on to the University Senate for approval. This resulted in the establishment of a new degree at Valparaiso University - the Bachelor of Science in Middle Level Education.
- Candidate recruitment: The curriculum was translated into advising sheets, which were distributed on campus visitation days. Any candidate who entered the university prior to the fall of 2001 would continue to

be able to complete their program under the old licensure structure. Candidates entering after the fall of 2001 would have available the option of securing a separate middle school license.

As a new licensing structure comes into effect in the state, more and more of the teacher preparation institutions in Indiana will have to re-evaluate their method of preparing teachers for the middle level. Some institutions still believe that students can major in elementary education, meeting all of the given middle level standards. They also believe that by meeting all of the middle level standards their students can obtain licensure for the middle level. If students take this avenue they will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to complete a given degree program in the traditional four-year period of time.

Middle level preparation can no longer be perceived as an add-on curriculum for either elementary or secondary trained teachers. It must be elevated to a major or "stand alone" program, as done at Valparaiso University.