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978-0-521-29207-8 - Middle Start: An Experiment in the Educational Enrichment of Young Adolescents

J. Milton Yinger, Kiyoshi Ikeda, Frank Laycock and Stephen J. Cutler

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## Middle Start

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# Middle Start

An experiment in the educational enrichment  
of young adolescents

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## Preface

We are living in a day when aspirations are rising among all segments of the population, but most dramatically among the economically disadvantaged. And once the possibilities of a new life are made visible to all, there is no way, as David Riesman once put it, to ration dreams. It is also a time when the enormous complexities and difficulties of social engineering are becoming increasingly apparent. The disparity between the rate of change in aspiration and the rate at which obstacles are being removed has no doubt contributed to the tensions of a heterogeneous, urban society. Confronted with these tensions, one is tempted to indulge in utopian dreams or, alternatively, to resort to cynicism — or to vacillate between them. But neither utopianism, ungrounded in the social realities, nor cynicism, disarming effort, holds much promise of realizing newly formed aspirations. The research reported here supports a quiet confidence that we can, by taking thought, make some progress toward solution of the problem.

Interested in both the structure of opportunity and the processes of socialization, we asked if an imaginative program to help educate and stimulate thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds could eliminate or reduce educational deficits resulting from economic deprivation in the family and the community. (Such deficits, we believed, were more closely associated with the structure of opportunities than with individual characteristics.) To find an answer, we designed a field experiment in which we recognized the need for varied forms of intervention and for controlled observation, and analyzed its impact over a seven-year period. We report in the role of research workers, but it will be clear that we have a strong interest in the program. Although we were not directly involved in its administration, we did help to design it and we sought to make it successful. Readers can decide better than we whether our active interest in it — and in the critical problems it addressed — has affected our analysis.

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We are indebted to scores of people, more than in most studies of this scope. School personnel in five cities, administrators and teachers in the program, colleagues in many parts of the country, college counselors, interviewers, parents, and the students themselves, along with research assistants over the seven years, *all* made important contributions. At the risk of omitting the names of some who have been particularly helpful, we must thank at least the following: Professor John Antes, now of the University of Wisconsin, and Mr. William Parker, now at the Educational Testing Service, who ably served as directors of the program; Dr. Alva Dittrick, Mr. Julius Dix, Mrs. Nancy Fields, Dr. Margaret Fleming, Miss Ella Johnson, Dr. Samuel Shepard, and Mr. Donald Swift, officials in the school districts with which we worked, all of whom gave staunch support to both the program and the research.

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10-255.) Finally, our thanks go to Oberlin College for furnishing – with little regard to the cost – facilities, research space, computer time, and a most stimulating environment.

J. Milton Yinger  
Kiyoshi Ikeda  
Frank Laycock  
Stephen J. Cutler

*Oberlin, Ohio*  
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