

AFTER *TURNING POINTS*: EVIDENCE OF THE ADOPTION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORMS IN THE UNITED STATES 1987-2000.

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The purpose of this study was to explore the adoption by U.S. middle schools of key practices recommended by the 1989 *Turning Points* report. Three questions were examined: (1) To what extent have the organizational practices identified by research to impact the development of “small learning communities” been adopted by U.S. middle schools? (2) To what extent do the instructional practices of U.S. middle school teachers reflect developmentally responsive or traditional/bureaucratic methods?, and (3) Do the instructional practices of U.S. middle school teachers differ between those who teach in schools with developmentally responsive organizational practices and those who teach in schools with more traditional/bureaucratic organizational practices?

National data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics through the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey were extracted for this study. A sample of 423 fulltime sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers of core academic subjects was derived from the 1994-95 Teacher Followup Survey (TFS) component. Frequency distributions were run on five dimensions of organizational practices identified with the development of “small learning communities”, in order to determine the extent of use of each practice in U.S. middle schools. Mean levels of the use of fourteen

instructional practices identified as “active”/developmentally responsive and eleven as “passive”/traditional practices were computed and categorized in rank order to examine the predominant instructional practices of U.S. middle school teachers. One-way ANOVAs were run to compare instructional practices of teachers who teach in schools with developmentally responsive organizational practices and those who teach in schools with more traditional/bureaucratic organizational practices.

Findings indicated that 7.1 percent of U.S. middle schools could be characterized as having organizational practices that support the development of “small learning communities”, while the organizational practices of 43.7 percent reflected a “traditional/bureaucratic” pattern. Passive learning activities were more frequently employed than were active and/or developmentally responsive instructional strategies: Seven of the top ten most frequently used teaching methods found in the study reflected traditional, teacher-centered practices. Examination of the differences between the instructional practices of teachers in schools reflecting developmentally responsive organizational practices to those in schools with more traditional, bureaucratic organizations provided some, though slight, evidence that teachers in schools organized as “small communities of learning” reported more frequent use of nine of the ten selected developmentally responsive instructional practices than did teachers in the more traditionally-organized schools.