

ABSTRACT

The transition from elementary to middle school is a significant period of change for adolescents and is remarkable for several reasons, including the opportunity for new experiences and the potential for other developmental changes to occur simultaneously. Existing literature on transition includes both positive and negative outcomes for adolescents in areas of achievement, peer relations, self-esteem, and self concept, with gender differences including more negative outcomes for girls.

The possibility of multiple transitions occurring simultaneously (i.e. puberty and academic transition), along with literature suggesting that the elimination of the middle school model and replacing it with a K-8 building configuration would reduce negative student outcomes, provided the rationale for the current study: an examination of early adolescents either making an academic transition following the fourth grade or remaining in a K-8 building, and the potential influence on self concept. In addition, student perceptions of school related issues were surveyed.

A repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance revealed no significant interactions of time and either group status or gender on self concept. The information from the student perception survey suggested students in the Transition group were more likely to report school as being very different before and after transition. Environmental factors, such as having a locker and more choices in the cafeteria, were more important to students than making new friends or facing increased difficulty in academics. The findings of the current study lend support to academic transition occurring at an earlier age and suggest a greater emphasis on environmental aspects of transition and protective factors in facilitating positive outcomes.