

# **IN** Transition

Journal of the New York State Middle School Association



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# NYSMSA MISSION STATEMENT AND GOALS

**MISSION:** The New York State Middle School Association (NYSMSA) represents those who serve the educational needs of all young adolescents in New York State. We are committed to creating, promoting, and supporting effective middle-level programs that are academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate.

**VISION:** NYSMSA acts on our belief that all young adolescents are entitled to academically rich and developmentally appropriate programs. Toward this end, we work collaboratively with the educational community to make high-performing middle-level programs the norm in New York State through full implementation of the Essential Elements and application of cutting-edge research.

NYSMSA's goals are listed below. Taking into consideration current research and available resources, these goals will assist the Association in fostering the creation of new curricula in support of the NYS learning standards and, in general, supporting the improvement of instruction for middle-level students in New York State.

## **AWARENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Promote a climate of acceptance and understanding of young adolescents;
- Stimulate and promote the development of the middle level as a distinct educational structure for young adolescents;
- Promote middle-level education and be a significant advocate for the appropriate education of young adolescents;
- Offer a variety of professional development activities that positively impact the attitudes, performances, and practices of middle-level educators.
- Compile, maintain, and respond to current research and development initiatives.

## **SUPPORT**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Be a significant source of information and resources on young adolescents and their schooling;
- Offer consultant support to schools and districts in refining and strengthening their middle-level programs;
- Provide a variety of resources (video, publication, teleconferences, position papers, etc.) in support of appropriate programs for young adolescents;
- Seek, secure, and provide grants and other financial resources to support planing and implementation of effective middle-level practices;
- Provide, throughout the year, member services to public and non-public urban, suburban, and rural schools;
- Engage regional directors who provide, assist, and support regional and state activities;
- Support the ongoing importance of communication and interaction between State Education Department personnel and members of the Association.

## **CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Influence the quality and content of pre-service and in-service education for prospective and practicing middle-level educators;
- Support teachers, schools, and districts in refining and strengthening their middle-level programs;
- Work with constituent groups to identify effective models for curricular, instructional, and assessment issues;
- Disseminate position papers that provide guidance on appropriate curricula, instruction, and assessment issues;
- Monitor the implementation of the NYS learning standards at the intermediate level, promoting programs with strong academic rigor within the framework of good middle-level practice;
- Monitor the intermediate assessment results, seeking to ensure the results measure good middle-level practice and are developmentally appropriate in scope, content, and administration.

## **COLLABORATION**

NYSMSA believes that we must:

- Work with other associations in sponsoring professional development activities;
- Implement a collaborative relationship with universities, departments of higher education, SED, NMSA, parent-teacher organizations, and other groups that impact on the lives of young adolescents;
- Develop and expand cooperative ventures and relationships with corporations and businesses;
- Create networks of educators, parents, and others involved in the lives of young adolescents;
- Serve on the boards of supportive organizations;
- Engage in continuous planning through participation and shared decision-making;
- Provide for internal assessment of all major Association functions with provisions for external audit where appropriate.

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"Brimming Over" — Photo taken by Brian Sherman, NYSMSA Secretary and Superintendent of the Schoharie Central School District.



# A few thoughts from the President...

Jeannette Stern, Ed.D.



Jeannette Stern

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

— Margaret Mead

Welcome to the 2006-2007 school year! All of the NYSMSA leadership joins me in wishing you a productive year.

## Some News...

### David Payton retires and Marybeth

**Casey joins SED:** As many of you know, Dr. David Payton retired over the summer as Supervisor of Middle-Level Education for the NY State Education Department. He will remain on the NYSMSA Board of Directors, however, as Director of the Schools-to-Watch Program. David was honored last May for all he has done over more than two decades in helping to develop, disseminate, and support those of us “in the middle.”

We welcome Marybeth Casey, who has just joined the State Education Department and will be the new Middle-Level “Go-To” person and the SED liaison to the NYSMSA Board. She has been a long-time child advocate and we look forward to working with her. In the few meetings members of the NYSMSA Board and Liaisons’ Leadership Team have had with her, she has shown a

great degree of caring for students and educators and a sincere willingness to work hard on our behalf. Marybeth will be at our Annual Conference in Niagara Falls and is looking forward to meeting with the attendees.

## Other SED Updates

- Jean Stevens continues to fill the role vacated by Jim Kadamus. His position was recently re-advertised in the *NY Times*.
- Jim Butterworth left SED on August 31.
- We have received word that the scores on the 3-8 testing conducted during the 2005-2006 school year will be available two weeks later than originally announced. ELA scores should be available at the beginning of the school year with math available at the end of September.

## NYSMSA Updates

At our summer retreat, we revisited our organizational mission and vision. The following were adopted:

**Mission:** The New York State Middle School Association (NYSMSA) represents those who serve the educational needs of all young adolescents in New York State. We are committed to creating, promoting and supporting effective middle-level programs that are academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate.

**Vision:** NYSMSA acts on our belief that all young adolescents are entitled to academically rich and developmentally-appropriate programs. Toward this end, we work collaboratively with the educational community to make high-performing middle-level

programs the norm in NYS through full implementation of the Essential Elements and application of cutting-edge research.

Please help us work towards our mission and vision by renewing or becoming a member, reading our publications, becoming familiar with the many valuable documents and up-to-date information on our website, and, most importantly, attending our annual conference. This year, at the new conference center in Niagara Falls, we will be offering a full program of pre-conferences (including one by John Nori of NASSP on the new *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* publication), feature presentations, vendors, and practitioner workshops designed to share “what works in the middle.” Please reserve the dates of October 19-21 and join us in Niagara Falls!

The materials for applying for the second cohort of the **Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch School Recognition Program** are available at our website. Please consider reviewing the self-assessment document and using it in your school to evaluate your program, even if you are not interested in applying.

The 2006-2007 school year promises to be an exciting and challenging one, as we enter the second year of 3-8 testing and receive and begin to analyze the results of last year’s tests. We will keep you informed of the latest SED information on this process as well as what valuable information can be gleaned from this data. Visit our website, contribute to our publications, and please become involved. Obtain the name of your regional director or officer whom you wish to contact, the membership form, and other pertinent information from our website ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)).

Again, we all wish you a successful school year!

## Membership and Publication Information

*In Transition* is a benefit of both individual and building membership in the New York State Middle School Association. Annual membership dues are \$50 for individual membership and \$150 for building membership. Memberships are on an “anniversary date” basis; renewal invoices are mailed approximately one month prior to end of membership.

For any changes in membership information, please contact Julie Schwartz at the NYSMSA office by e-mail ([schwartz@nysmsa.org](mailto:schwartz@nysmsa.org)) or phone/fax (914-747-9241).

Individual and Building Membership applications can be downloaded from our Web site: [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org). Additionally, new membership applications paid via credit card can be completed online.

**NYSMSA gives permission to its membership to reprint  
any portion of this publication.**



# The Executive Director's Message

Dennis M. Tosetto



Dennis Tosetto

This morning as I sat down to write this piece for *In Transition*, I had not yet decided on a topic. So, in order to put off the inevitable for a short while, I poured a cup of coffee and decided to first read the local morning newspaper; and there it was, in

bold print: "Report: N.Y. spends high on schools, with so-so results." It was a Gannett News Service article, so many of you may have also read this same article that day.

There was nothing new in what was presented under that headline. The article claimed that New York educators are the fourth highest paid of our profession in the country and New York State results are mediocre by comparison. It stated that taxpayers spent an average of \$12,930 per pupil in the 2003-04 school year, higher than any state except New Jersey (\$12,981), and that New York's per pupil expenditure is 56% above the national average of \$8,287. It went on to speak to class size, teacher pupil ratios, and other topics that placed New York State among the best in the profession, but which were not producing the best results as compared with our colleagues from around the country. Of course, as is usually the case, middle-level assessment results were cited in a less than positive way.

Upon reading the article, I did have a feeling of déjà vu. It hit me that I have been reading this same article (with different statistics) on a regular basis over the past several decades, and I had to wonder why our public relations ball has not moved forward now that New York State has on paper the most comprehensive middle-level program of any state in the union. Based upon recent meetings with national middle-level leaders, I know this to be an unequivocal fact.

Of course, these newspaper articles come replete with arguments and counter-arguments citing statistics, urban vs. suburban issues, etc.; however, these are issues and topics that I will leave to others to debate. When it comes to root cause, I believe all we have to do is ask the question: are we doing what we, ourselves, say we should be doing? Ten to twenty years ago, many different people were suggesting that we should be doing a variety of things to improve middle-level instruction. Many of these things were in conflict with one another, and there was little supportive research-based information to help us out. That is no longer the case.

Today, thanks to SED's recently retired Dr. David Payton, NYSMSA, and a host of other individuals and organizations, New York State has become the only state in the union to provide middle-level educators with a comprehensive, researched-based road map to success. To our credit, we no longer have an endless, sometimes contradictory, instructional smorgasbord of possibilities from which to choose. Recent middle-level regulations, the establishment of the middle-level Essential Elements, and an updated Regents policy on middle-level education all seamlessly come together to direct

educators to a quality educational program, which demonstrably meets the diverse and changing needs of today's young adolescents.

The best part of it is that many of us who work in local middle-level schools and/or professional organizations were significant contributors to each of these SED documents. We can attest to their quality and appropriateness. It would seem that, in New York State, we are now at a tipping point. As professional educators, do we have the will and momentum to implement these best practices in all of our local schools? If not, then we have wasted a great deal of time, money, and energy for no good purpose.

Currently, I am unaware of any base-line data or statistics relating to the implementation of the middle-level Essential Elements in New York State. However, from my recent travels and conversations, it would appear that most of our state's middle-level educators remain unaware of exactly what is now required of them by SED and the documents cited above. In fact, although the middle-level Essential Elements were adopted years ago, I believe, based on conversations with other educators, that fewer than half of the state's middle-level teachers could provide a thumbnail sketch of what is in the new middle-level regulations, including the Essential Elements. If I am correct in my analysis — or even in the ballpark — it doesn't bode well for full implementation any time soon, and research shows that partial implementation of what is in the Essential Elements may actually result in a decrease in assessment results.

So, where does all of this leave us? For me, the conclusions are obvious. They include the following:

1. Current middle-level assessment results seem to be predicated on instructional strategies that are not congruent with current research and state requirements. However, because SED clearly states and requires what a good middle-level program should be, it is assumed that these new methods and

structures are not working when students are not meeting with success. Is it, in fact, that there is no middle-level program in place in those schools? Putting the words "middle school" in a school's name does not change the guiding instructional concept from "junior high" to "middle level."

2. While moving a school into compliance with SED's Regents Policy Statement and Essential Elements can involve significant change, most of what is required involves common sense and is not difficult to do once one understands the rationale and makes the commitment to move forward with a long-term plan. I know this to be true from personal experience.
3. Middle-level educators should not wait for others to lead, as we may not like the destination. History demonstrates that educators are educated professionals who have an abundant capacity to lead and know how to work cooperatively to bring about change. All that is needed is the collective will to do so and an understanding of what is the responsible thing to do.

SED and the New York State Middle School Association stand ready to support you and your middle-level school in this endeavor. We have the resources, and most of what will be needed is available free or at a very moderate cost. Remember, we are you. As an organization, we are not-for-profit and we serve as unpaid volunteer educators whose sole purpose is the improvement of education for New York State's young adolescents.

Have you been to our website ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org))? It's free to all and easy to use. All pertinent SED middle-level documents are available to be downloaded, as are materials that can be used to inservice staff, parents, and board members. There is also a plethora of other material and information ranging from conference materials, Call for Presenter Forms, recent informational newsletters, etc. Every middle-level educator should check the NYSMSA

website regularly to stay on top of what is new in the profession.

Attend our annual conference in Niagara Falls on October 19, 20, and 21. It's relatively inexpensive and the price gets better for groups. The Niagara Falls conference is usually attended by a few thousand of your colleagues from around the state and features a large number of local and national presenters. Additionally, about one hundred vendors fill the vendor hall and a free continental breakfast and lunch are provided. This is the time to quickly update your middle-level skills, learn what is new, and open networks with other professionals having like interests.

We also offer a Middle-level Institute at the Corning Museum of Glass (CMoG) in early summer each year for up to 100 educators who wish to participate in a few intensive days of hands-on learning in small groups. Participants sign up for one of six topics, which becomes their focus for the entire time.

Included in our many publication offerings is a free NYSMSA E-Letter that comes out about every two weeks during the school year. As the editor, writer, and "type setter," I can vouch for the quality of this publication. In truth, what it offers is very current information on topics that impact middle-level education. Included are items from the folks at SED, changes in requirements, and due dates; other important dates, offerings, and events; and a wide variety of other information that is sent to me or that I happen upon as I comb through the Internet. To subscribe, send me a note by email (dtosetto@nysmsa.org) with your name, job title, school (if school-based), and school district. (We need this information because the E-Letter is routed to you through your Regional Director. The E-Letter is free to anyone who subscribes.)

Is your school up-to-speed and ready to be acknowledged for full implementation of the Essential Elements? If so, go to our website

(www.nysmsa.org) and read up on our nationally based Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch (EE:STW) Recognition Program. Middle-level schools that believe they meet the characteristics of an Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch school are encouraged to apply for recognition. Schools that are approaching, but have not yet achieved, excellence can be designated Rising Schools-to-Watch.

What does an *Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch* (EE: STW) school look like?

- will serve as a model of exemplary implementation of the Essential Elements
- has made marked progress in meeting all eligibility criteria, including measurable gains in the academic achievement of all students
- will serve as a model and mentor for other schools seeking to improve
- will continue its own efforts to improve and provide an exemplary educational program for young adolescents

It is one thing to say that you have a quality middle-level program in your school, but it is a much stronger statement when it is made by an external organization at the conclusion of an intensive site visitation that involves all stakeholder groups.

Now is the time to be a part of history through your active involvement in making New York State's middle-level Essential Elements a reality for every young adolescent. As a first step, we need to provide every middle-level educator with a copy of both the *Regent's Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*. If this has not been done in your middle-level school, you can support this effort at the grass roots by downloading copies of these and other materials from the NYSMSA website and sending them to your colleagues as an email or printed copy.

Please carefully consider the thoughts presented above. We have a lot to accomplish, but I believe that through cooperation and some work all involved will benefit as the middle-

level movement continues to move forward with the momentum that is created by commitment, strong leadership, and a shared vision for the future.

## NYS Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Program

### 2006 "Schools to Watch"

Oliver W. Winch Middle School  
South Glens Falls, New York  
Mark Fish, Principal

•

Twelve Corners Middle School  
Rochester, New York  
Terence Quinn, Principal

•

Moravia Middle School  
Moravia, New York  
Bruce MacBain, Principal

•

Barker Road & Calkins Road Middle Schools  
*formerly* Pittsford Middle School  
Pittsford, New York  
Michael Pero and Scott Reinhart, Principals

•

Sayville Middle School  
Sayville, New York  
Walter Schartner, Principal

•

Victor Junior High School  
Victor, New York  
Carl Christensen, Principal

## Congratulations!



# Research at a Glance

Jeff Craig, NYSMSA Director of Research and Technology

## An Introduction to Professional Learning Communities

These days, professional literature is filled with references to professional learning communities (PLCs) and the promise that they hold for schools. There are all sorts of books, scholarly and casual articles, videos, conferences, on-line courses, DVDs, etc. about professional learning communities. The promise of professional learning communities seems to be considerable. Indeed, an impressive collection of researchers has very publicly endorsed the concept of PLCs, including Roland Barth, Linda Darling-Hammond, Milbrey McLaughlin, Fred Newman, Grant Wiggins, Michael Fullan, and many others (Schmoker, 2004). Douglas Reeves, Rick Stiggins, Dennis Sparks, and Larry LeZotte have also written in support of the concept (Dufour et al, 2005).

As the attention being paid to the concept of professional learning communities increases, it is timely to provide *In Transition* readers with some basic information about professional learning communities. This column will attempt to introduce the concept and identify some resources for further investigation.

### What is a Professional Learning Community?

Like many constructs, there are varying operational definitions for a professional learning community (PLC). Mike Schmoker points to widespread agreement among researchers with the idea that a professional learning community is "...continuous, structured teacher collaboration [that] improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student

learning and professional morale in virtually any setting (2004)." This general definition seems to do a good job of introducing the concept and is paralleled by this definition, where professional learning communities are "pursuing clear, shared purpose for student learning, engaging in collaborative activities to achieve their purposes, and tak[ing] collective responsibility for students' learning" (Lieberman, 1999).

Although there are references to professional learning communities (PLC) or PLC-like systems operating within schools and other organizations dating back several decades (Horde, 1997), the most frequent mentions of PLCs are those described by their foremost advocate, Richard DuFour. DuFour has repeatedly detailed the attributes of professional learning community construct and detailed successful PLCs. The seminal book that seemed to launch the construct and is the interpretation that is most generally applied in current, school-based contexts lays out the key ingredients (DuFour & Eaker, 1998):

- Having an effective and articulated **mission and vision** that provides direction to guide daily operations and improvement initiatives.
- Practicing a process of **collective inquiry** that enables staff to view the world differently and to make significant changes in the school culture.
- Basic work structures inside a professional learning community are **collaborative teams** that share a common purpose.
- Intolerance for inaction and a willingness to experiment are evidence of an **action orientation**.

- Systemic and systematic discomfort with the status quo and **continuous improvement**.
- Reliance on data and results to assess efforts characterize a **results orientation**.

Those aforementioned attributes are the most generally accepted qualities of PLCs. Recently, DuFour framed the construct in terms of three big ideas: ensuring that students learn, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results (2004). Note that collaboration alone does not a professional learning community make. A superficial exploration of professional learning communities might result in the faulty conclusion that it is the collaboration among the adults that defines a PLC. Collaboration, though, is itself an insufficient condition: “Mere collegiality will not cut it (Schmoker, 2004).” Nor is a focus on data-based decision making alone sufficient. Similarly, nor is a focus on learning in and of itself adequate. It is the syntheses of these three qualities that defines the professional learning community. According to DuFour, professional learning communities require “...the school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work[ing] collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold[ing] itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement (2004).”

Schools that are operating as professional learning communities are places where the staff is actively and collaboratively committed to a relentless focus on learning. In these schools, learning teams of staff members are regularly and deliberately looking at data and using that data to inform day-to-day instructional decisions. The success of their efforts is monitored, again with data, and further instructional decisions are made. This collaborative dedication to continuous improvement is present throughout the school and is woven into the fabric of the school culture. In a PLC, everyone is working together for the goal of learning. Student achievement skyrockets in such schools and the professional satisfaction of the teachers in such schools similarly rises (Horde, 1997). It is

probably these two features of working PLCs that are so attractive to educators. Increased student learning and a happier staff? That is a win-win situation if ever there was one. If these ideas are attractive to the reader, here are some places to turn in order to learn more. This list is by no means exhaustive and the list of resources is growing.

## An Overview of Suggested Resources

Many educators first learned about professional learning communities from *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* by Rick DuFour and Robert Eaker. This is the book that lays out the attributes of PLCs and is a good place to start.

A comprehensive description of what schools do to ensure student learning in a functioning PLC is detailed in *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. If your school is looking to inspire the system of Academic Intervention Services (AIS), then this could serve as a source. It could reshape your whole approach to AIS.

A collection of articles from a variety of contributors is contained in *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. This compilation of noteworthy authors enlightens the PLC landscape by making connections to other aspects of educational reform and best practices.

Mike Schmoker has described, in detail, protocols that teams within professional learning communities can use. He's written *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* and the accompanying *The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools*. These anecdotes and case studies can serve as examples for your schools and learning teams.

More practical information for school leaders can be found in *Educators as Learners*:

*Creating a Professional Learning Community in Your School* by Ward and Castleberry. Included in this resource are school-based, realistic examples as well as practical tools that are readily applied.

Giselle Martin-Kniep makes connections among PLCs, curriculum design, action research, portfolios, and assessment. She describes teacher practices inside professional learning communities that are incredibly rigorous and profound. The book, *Developing Learning Communities Through Teacher Expertise*, includes practical examples, rubrics, organizers, and other tools for the professional practitioner.

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# Lea's Lessons

Lea Macdonald



## Setting the Stage for Success: Creating a Positive Learning Environment

*“Raising student achievement requires more than choosing the right instructional strategies and classroom curriculum to meet student needs. If schools are centers of learning, they must be relationship-based, student-focused places that help our young people know well their own strengths”*

— Breaking Ranks in the Middle, 2006

As we begin another school year, it's important to remember that taking time to know your students, to build community, and for students to know themselves as learners are critical for success. As I traveled the state and country this summer working with middle-level teachers, three questions were universal: How can we create classrooms where all students take ownership of their own learning? How can they realize the benefits of collaboration? How can we ensure that all are actively engaged in the process of education? In this first issue of *In Transition*, I'd like to share some strategies that I implement in the beginning of the year to lay the foundation for a successful year.

In light of the push for high stakes testing and accountability, I was amazed and excited to hear teachers going beyond the “test “and talking to the heart of the matter. In *Turning Points 2000*, there is a chapter devoted to the importance of relationships in the school community. Research shows that when middle-level students feel that they belong to the group and are accepted by their teachers and their peers, motivation and performance increases. Belonging within a supportive web of relationships

motivates young adolescents to take the risks necessary to ensure academic success. This is essential for setting the stage for academic success.

Teaching young adolescents in an interactive and engaging way necessitates creating a cooperative, tolerant classroom. In this environment, students will learn to share ideas, to work together collaboratively, to tolerate differences, and to create a place where all students feel valued and respected. In order for meaningful, engaged learning to take place the foundation to develop a sense of community in the classroom must be laid in the beginning of the year. Teachers must be willing to invest time to develop collaborative skills that will yield greater learning throughout the year. Your investment will yield powerful results:

- The class develops a sense of community and trust.
- All students feel respected and valued.
- Students interact more freely because they are safe from ridicule
- Students learn to tolerate differences and respect others ideas.
- Classroom management is proactive and consistent.

### Know Your Neighbor

In the beginning of the year, I involve my students in orientation activities to break social tension and build rapport. During advisory the first week of school, the students are engaged in an ice-breaking activity — *Know Your Neighbor*. Each student must get the signature of another student who has seen the same movie,

# Learning Styles Questionnaire

**Directions:** For each item, circle “T” if the statement is true for you most of the time; circle “F” if the statement is false for you most of the time.

- |                                                                                                               |   |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. I have poor handwriting.                                                                                   | T | F |
| 2. I have trouble copying from a book or chalkboard.                                                          | T | F |
| 3. I easily forget what I read unless it is talked about in class.                                            | T | F |
| 4. I prefer teachers to explain directions out loud instead of having to read the written directions.         | T | F |
| 5. I prefer listening to music to watching TV.                                                                | T | F |
| 6. I prefer talking on the phone to writing a letter to someone.                                              | T | F |
| 7. I would rather be in a group discussion than read about a topic.                                           | T | F |
| 8. I like to take part in dramatic events like plays.                                                         | T | F |
| 9. I would rather read about a topic than listen to a teacher tell about it.                                  | T | F |
| 10. I like to read ahead in class when material is being read aloud.                                          | T | F |
| 11. I like classrooms that have lots of pictures and posters to see.                                          | T | F |
| 12. I can learn to spell words by simply reading them several times.                                          | T | F |
| 13. I prefer watching TV to listening to music.                                                               | T | F |
| 14. I have difficulty remembering directions that were told to me.                                            | T | F |
| 15. I would rather go to a movie than to a concert.                                                           | T | F |
| 16. I would rather watch an athletic event than participate in them.                                          | T | F |
| 17. I would rather participate in athletic events than watch them.                                            | T | F |
| 18. I don't understand math well unless I work out a lot of problems.                                         | T | F |
| 19. I would rather do experiments in science than read about them.                                            | T | F |
| 20. I like to make models or other hand crafted projects.                                                     | T | F |
| 21. I get bored in classes where you just have to sit and listen to the teacher talk.                         | T | F |
| 22. I have difficulty remembering directions told to me if I have not done a similar activity before.         | T | F |
| 23. I like being outdoors and doing activities like hiking, biking, swimming, horseback riding, camping, etc. | T | F |
| 24. I dislike going to museums where I can't touch anything.                                                  | T | F |

## Directions for Scoring

- Total the number of “T” responses in items 1-8. \_\_\_\_\_  
This is your auditory or hearing score.
- Total the number of “T” responses in items 9-16. \_\_\_\_\_  
This is your visual or seeing score.
- Total the number of “T” responses in items 17-24. \_\_\_\_\_  
This is your tactile (touching) and kinesthetic (moving) score.

Any area in which you scored a lot higher than the others is your learning strength.

Any area in which you scored a lot lower than others is your learning weakness.

Similar scores in all 3 areas mean you can learn things in almost any way they are taught.

wears the same size shoe, etc. It immediately breaks the ice on that first scary day of school.

Our seventh grade team decided to try something a little different last year — *Making a Heart Map*. Each student created a heart map of his or her likes, memories, hobbies, et cetera, and shared it with the class.

### **Making A Heart Map**

On a blank outline of a heart, write down things that you hold dear and close to you. *What's at the center? The edges? What's in your heart?*

1. People, places important to you
2. Things you do well or like to do
3. Hobbies, interests, sports, clubs
4. Family, friends, pets
5. Unusual experiences
6. Favorite movies, books
7. Adjectives to describe you
8. Cultural symbols representing your heritage
9. Anything you want to share about “YOU”

Keep in mind the placement of information. Things most important to you go in the middle, least important go towards the edge, and things that are not a part of you anymore can go outside the heart.

These ‘hearts’ were posted in our advisories for the entire year. Students regularly stopped to read about their friends in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Learning Styles Questionnaire**

I have my students take a self-assessment of their learning styles (*see page 12*). They are always surprised at how they learn best.

Students record their dominant modalities, intelligences, and interests on a 3x5 card that I keep on file and use for forming teams throughout the year. To end this class period, students participate in a “Human Intelligence Hunt” to discover the many talents that are present in

their 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class. Each one then completes a multiple intelligence survey to guide his or her learning throughout the year.

### **Brainstorming**

Lastly, in order to build a sense of shared decision-making, students work in teams to brainstorm the class rules for the year. As each team presents its list, the whole class votes on the top ten rules for the class. Even before the textbooks have been removed from the shelf, students are working together, making decisions, and taking ownership of their learning.

Collaborative small group activity has been shown to be effective for school learning and increased achievement; however, group work requires teaching students the rationale and techniques that will ensure group and individual success. Begin early in the year to lay the foundation of collaboration. It’s worth the effort!

Finally, knowing your students learning styles, intelligences, and interests will help you plan instruction and ensure success for all your students as they make their journey through the middle years.

In the upcoming issues for this school year, I plan to focus on instructional strategies that prepare our students to be successful in reaching the standards, ensure success on state tests, and engage all learners in the classroom.

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# Five Favorite Strategies to Help Your Students Get Organized and Succeed in School

Linda Tilton

The average person spends about **150 hours each year** looking for lost items and papers. Think about some of your students. Can you even imagine how many hours each school year some students devote to searching for assignments, books, notes, clothing and other items? Can you imagine how many of these searches are fruitless? It boggles the mind. If those 150 hours could be spent *learning* rather than *looking*, our students would be far ahead academically.

A critical component of school success lies in organizational skills. The late Erma Bombeck loved to accuse the washing machine of eating socks. At school, socks may not be a problem, but how many of you have come into contact with homework-eating backpacks? Students' lockers can be an even bigger culprit.

In working with students at all grade levels, I have used many, many different organizational approaches and techniques. Here are five of my favorite "tried and true" strategies that really work!

## Strategy #1. Tame the Paper Monster

Many students have a paper problem. It's all over the place — crumpled in the bottom of the backpack, strewn in a locker, stuffed into books, and falling out of folders. Loose papers confuse, distract, and overwhelm the student. The most important rule of paper organization is: No Loose Papers!

One of the best ways that I have found to contain paper is the accordion file. Sturdy plastic expandable files are available at discount stores and come with a variety of divisions. Six pockets are handy. The concept is simple and

easy to implement. Encourage students to label pockets in the same order as the student attends class during the day. Every paper has a "home." Think about math. Every math paper, worksheet, assignment list, review page, *anything related to math* goes into that math pocket. Retrieval is easy later when students know where to look.

Many accordion files have zipper pockets in front to hold supplies. It is important for students to go through the folder periodically. Many students need guidance in deciding what to keep, what to throw out, when and where to store papers that will be needed later.

One parent told me that her children, both of whom had significant learning disabilities, found this tool to be the single most effective organizational strategy all the way through high school. Both successfully managed their classes by always carrying their accordion files with them wherever they went.

An accordion file with *twelve* pockets is an excellent tool for *parents* to use in creating a *school file* for each child in the family. It becomes the designated place to save report cards, portfolio summaries, awards, and standardized test scores. Everything is arranged by grade level from first through high school graduation. Parents may also want to file a photo of each child at each grade as well as include copies of birth certificates and other important papers.

## Strategy #2. Clear the Workspace

Think now about the student's workspace at school or at home. Only what the student is working on *at that time* should be visible. Anything else distracts. Encourage the student to remove books and papers from other subjects

not related to the immediate task. Put materials that are not needed under the desk or on a shelf.

At home, if a student is doing homework at the kitchen table, move everything else to the far side or, if possible, clear the table completely. Reducing clutter reduces stress, making the immediate task seem more manageable. It also puts the student in control of the task at hand rather than feeling overwhelmed by too much at once. Some students like to create a personal study carrel by using a three-sided box or by setting up two manila folders to eliminate all visual distractions. When that assignment is finished, encourage the student to put it where it goes immediately, whether it's in the accordion folder, a three ring binder or the backpack.

### **Strategy #3. Use a Clipboard**

When faced with more than one task, some students are overwhelmed and flit from one thing to another like a hummingbird. Everything gets started but nothing gets finished. A simple strategy for written work is to put the study guide, worksheet, or other paper-pencil task on a clipboard. This signals to the student, "Do this first. Finish it before doing something else." The clipboard is also a great tool to use for working in the car or sitting on the floor. As a teacher, I used a clipboard myself when walking around the room to help students. When I stopped at a desk and asked a student to put the assignment on the clipboard, it meant that that student had my full attention and other students needed to wait a minute for help. It worked.

### **Strategy #4 Practice on a Key Ring**

Punch a hole in the corner of note cards and attach them to a key ring for a simple but very effective way to contain flash cards for spelling, vocabulary, math facts, or main ideas. Students can flip through the rings to review and then store them on a hook, in a shoebox, or in a desk to study again at a later date. I found that if students cut 3 X 5 cards in half and attached them to a ring, they fit easily in a pocket.

During a staff development session at one elementary school, I had suggested placing spelling words on a ring. New words could be written on note cards each week, a hole punched in the corner, and the note cards could be attached to a key ring.

When I went back to the same school for a follow-up meeting several weeks later, I learned that the entire building had adopted this simple concept. "Spelling-on-a-Ring" had become the rage! Students hung the key rings on their backpacks and were trading key rings at recess. They especially liked the key rings with an expandable cord that fit on a wrist.

When I speak to parent groups, I frequently suggest using key rings for "glove compartment learning." Place math facts, colors, shapes, and vocabulary cards on note cards and attach them to key rings. Store them in the glove compartment in the car. Reviewing on the run becomes much more manageable when time spent waiting for a sibling becomes "the teachable moment."

### **Strategy #5. Make "To Do" and "I Did It" Lists**

Making lists helps students organize their thinking as well as their materials. I like two types of lists: a daily "To Do" list and an end of the day "I Did It" list.

A "To Do" list is really a list of goals and helps good intentions become a reality. It also helps students create a big picture that can be arranged by priority. Having a plan instills confidence and a positive attitude.

Perhaps not everything on the "To Do" list was crossed off at the end of the day, but perhaps several important tasks were accomplished or at least moved forward. The second list focuses on progress. By recording what has been done on an "I Did It" list, kids learn to celebrate making headway. It is an opportunity to step back and take a satisfied, deep breath and say,

“A-a-ah... Today was a good day! Now that I look at it, I accomplished a lot.”

These five strategies — Tame the Paper Monster; Clear the Workspace; Use a Clipboard; Practice on a Key Ring; Make “To Do” and “I Did It” Lists — are some of my favorite organizational tools that I have used successfully with students. While no single strategy works for every child in every situation, these are some solutions to try in your classroom or at home with your own child. When a student discovers something that really makes a difference, the

response may be like the elated third grader who promised, “I’m going to use an accordion folder for the rest of my life!”

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**Linda Tilton** (lindtilton@aol.com) is an educational consultant and author. For more strategies, see her book: *The Teacher’s Toolbox for Differentiating Instruction — 700 Strategies, Tips, Tools and Techniques*. She can be contacted through Covington Cove Publications; 5620 Covington Road; Shorewood MN 55331; 1-888-LEARN-11.

## New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program (Second Cohort, 2006-07)

Do you believe your middle-level school is a model for others? If so, please consider completing the application for the second cohort of schools in New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program.

New York State is seeking to identify a small number of diverse, high-performing, model middle-level schools that will constitute the second cohort of schools selected for inclusion in New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program. These schools must be academically excellent, developmentally appropriate, socially equitable, and organized to ensure continuous improvement, as they will serve as exemplars for the implementation of the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the State Education Department’s *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*.

Eligible schools and districts interested in being considered for the second cohort of New York’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program should view and download the application announcement and related information at the New York State Middle School Association’s website ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)) and follow the directions to complete the school self-rating and the formal application.

Completed applications must be postmarked no later than Friday, October 13, 2006.

# THE FIRST DAY

by Ross M. Burkhardt

It's the first day.  
In they come —  
Some pausing hesitantly  
At the door,  
Wondering and waiting;  
Others boldly asserting  
Their presence  
As they stride to seats.

Heads swivel,  
Eyes contact the classroom:  
Posters and pictures,  
Multi-colored images  
Meet curious glances.  
Saving seats for friends,  
Adjusting clean-cover  
notebooks  
Filled with clean ruled sheets,  
They sit, expectantly,  
In crisp clothing.

For some, the boredom of  
August  
Gone at last.  
For some, the restraints of  
structure  
Unwillingly accepted.

For most, an unexplored world  
awaiting.  
New seats permit new  
perspectives,  
New possibilities, new patterns.

The student asks:  
“What does he expect of me?  
What is this room all about?  
Who is this teacher?”  
The teacher asks:  
“Who are these people?  
What are they all about?  
What do they expect of me?”

A simultaneously shared  
journey  
Through days and months  
ahead  
Beckons. But for now,  
All is new and trembling  
Because  
It's the first day.

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**Ross M. Burkhardt** (rossnewm@aol.com), a past president of both NYSMSA and NMSA, is a consultant and author. This poem is included in his new book, *Using Poetry in the Classroom: Engaging Students in Learning*.

# NYSMSA presents: Middle Level

October 19-21, 2006

## Thursday, October 19

### Choose Either...Middle School Visitations

Arrange for visits to area schools to see best practices in action. The list of participating middle schools is available online at [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org).

### Or...Full-Day Pre-Conference Workshops, 9 AM-3 PM

Pre-conference sessions are offered on a first-come, first-served basis with limited registration for each session. The following sessions are offered.

- **Managing Classrooms through Good Instruction** with Jack Berckemeyer will focus on great teaching strategies and classroom management strategies that can be put to immediate use.
- **READ — WRITE — THINK! Strategies to Foster Literacy across Content Areas** with Lea Macdonald and Janie Fitzgerald will provide participants with activities, lessons, and strategies to foster reading and writing skills across the curriculum.
- **The Changing Face of Mathematics Instruction** with Nanci Smith “unpacks” the standards — looking at what content needs to be taught at each grade level and the best ways to attain the process standards.
- **Breaking Ranks in the Middle™ — Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform** with John Nori and Judith Richardson will highlight the recommendations, challenges, benefits, and examples as well as some of the tools that are included in the book and on the NASSP website.
- **Ideas! Ideas! Ideas! The Teacher’s Toolbox for Differentiating Instruction** with Linda Tilton offers dozens of “take back and use” ideas to help your middle school students succeed.

### Middle-Level Reception at the Power Vista, 4-6 PM

Sponsored by the New York Power Authority; complimentary shuttle bus will be provided between the Conference Center and the Power Vista, which overlooks the beautiful Niagara Gorge.

### Banquet with Keynote Address, 7-10 PM

“Teaching in the Middle — The Wonder of It All” — Lea Macdonald

In this age of testing and accountability, middle-level educators need to stop and remember why we work with young adolescents...the laughter, the vulnerability, the promise of the future.

Conference Director:  
Linda Ruest ([ruest@nysmsa.org](mailto:ruest@nysmsa.org))

Local Conference Chair:  
Nancy Sampson ([sampson@nysmsa.org](mailto:sampson@nysmsa.org))

Forms & Information at: [www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)

# ...The 8th Natural Wonder

## Niagara Falls, New York

### Friday, October 20

#### Trade Exhibit, 7 AM-3 PM

Pick up some new ideas, and maybe a sample or two, from the vendors in the Exhibit Hall. And be sure to turn in your completed Scavenger Hunt entry for a chance at a door prize! To date, these vendors have registered (and others yet to come):

- Amsco School Publications
- Camcor
- Cape Cod Sea Camps
- Capt. John Boats
- Carnegie Learning
- Castle Software
- Continental Press
- Curriculum Associates
- EXAMgen
- Great Source
- Holcomb's Educational Resource
- Interactive Products — Numonics
- Little Caesar Pizza Kit
- Love to Teach
- N&N Publishing
- Neufeld Learning Systems
- NY Newspaper Publishers Association
- NYS Historical Association
- NYSMSA Bookstore
- Peoples Education
- Premier
- Prentice Hall
- Rand McNally Education
- Reynell Education Resources
- Saxon Publishers
- Scholastic Education
- School Datebooks
- School Specialty
- Schoolplanners.com
- Science Kit & Boreal Labs
- SRA / McGraw Hill
- Texas Instruments
- Troxell Communications

#### Conference Sessions, 7:15 AM-3:30 PM

##### General Assembly with Keynote, 8:30-10 AM

"Middle Level — Wondering Why We Love It" — Jack Berckemeyer

##### Featured Presentations

Nationally-known experts share their expertise via featured presentations scheduled throughout the day, including: Jack Berckemeyer, *Understanding Adolescents*; Jeff Craig, *Middle-Level Essentials*; Kim Loucks, *Blue, Gold Green, Orange (True Colors™)*; Lea Macdonald & Janie Fitzgerald, *Reading across the Content Areas: Strategies for Fostering Literacy*; John Nori, *Breaking Ranks in the Middle™: Using the Tools*; Judith Richardson, *How to "Walk the Walk" and Thrive as a Middle-Level Leader*; Linda Ruest, *Toward Middle-Level Excellence*; Linda Tilton, *Ideas! Ideas! Ideas!*

##### Practitioner Workshops

Over 100 workshops covering pertinent middle-level topics. All workshops are posted on the NYSMSA website ([www.nysmsa.org](http://www.nysmsa.org)).

### Saturday, October 21

#### Breakfast with Champions, 8:30 AM-12 Noon

Keynote: "Creating Middle-Level Communities That Lead" — Dr. Giselle Martin-Kniep

##### Break-out Sessions



## *Breaking Ranks in the Middle™: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform*

*The New York State Middle School Association is honored to have two “Breaking Ranks in the Middle™” experts from NASSP provide training sessions at NYSMSA’s annual conference in Niagara Falls. John Nori, Director of Instructional Leadership Resources, and Judith Richardson, Resident Practitioner for Assessment and Accountability, will jointly conduct a pre-conference workshop on Thursday, October 19. They will each give a feature presentation on Friday, October 20.*

*The following is excerpted from the March 1, 2006, press release announcing the publication of “Breaking Ranks in the Middle™: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform.”*

*Breaking Ranks in the Middle™: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform* challenges middle level principals to take responsibility for improving the academic outcomes of all of their students and for getting them on track for success in high school and beyond.

The report — which was developed in collaboration with the Education Alliance at Brown University and a commission of middle level practitioners and experts— details nine cornerstone strategies and 30 specific recommendations for improving student achievement. It includes four full-length profiles and a number of vignettes of schools that put the report’s recommendations into action.

The ultimate goal of *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* is to move from isolated, often profiled, model high-performing schools to an entire system of excellent schools benefiting all students. *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* proposes strategies that are applicable to all

types of schools—big or small, urban, suburban, or rural.

The nine strategies are concentrated in three key areas: (1) collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and the strategic use of data; (2) personalizing the school environment; and (3) creating rigorous student-centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The first set of strategies and tools focuses on the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will successfully support every student in their middle level school experience. The second set focuses on the need to provide every student with meaningful adult relationships that can best support every student and lead to the development of personalized learning, where students see their learning as meaningful and relevant. And the third set focuses on building relationships between students and ideas through rigorous and challenging curriculum, instruction, and assessment, ensuring their success both within and beyond middle level school.

*Breaking Ranks in the Middle* engages principals, teacher leaders, and the entire school community in transforming their middle level school into an academically rigorous, personalized learning environment that is improved through collaborative leadership. The strategies and recommendations of *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* support and prepare students for the important transition from middle level to high schools and are closely tied to *Breaking Ranks II™: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*.

# How to Beat the Bully

Michael Reed



Remember the old Charles Atlas advertisement where the 98-pound weakling was on the beach having sand kicked in his face by the muscle-bound jerk and then was forced to watch helplessly as the muscle man took his date? What did that weakling do in response? He lifted weights, ate right, and then confronted the bully, taking back what he considered his. How has that story translated over the years? The new weakling also confronts the bully and anyone else who gets in the way. Tragically, today that confrontation takes place with a gun or homemade bombs and the outcome can be disastrous. As educators, we have some responsibility to prevent bullying from detracting from a student's ability to learn and to protect the safe learning environment. How can we help students beat the bully? My district is trying a multi-faceted approach that seems to be having success.



First, parents, faculty, and staff need a common definition of bullying. Without one, bullying issues become a management nightmare. The definition we use comes from our sixth-grade student workbook, *Preventing Bullying At School* (Bitney, 2001, p. 4): bullying is "whenever someone uses his or her power *unfairly* and *repeatedly* to hurt someone." The first key idea is that of power. Students can have power over other students in many ways. The most obvious is physical size or strength, when a student threatens another using physical strength, like the advertisement example. This type of bullying does not happen as often because it is easy for teachers to see and

punish. Another type of bullying is social, when students use their popularity or peer group to have power over another student. The final kind of bullying is emotional, which is when a student uses insults or put-downs to establish or maintain power over another person. We have found both social and emotional bullying to be far more prevalent in our middle school. Girls reported the highest frequency of bullying events in grades 6-8. This is not surprising, since it is very difficult for the staff and teachers to monitor the subtle actions and statements that are considered social or emotional bullying.

A second key to determine if a student is being bullied is the repetitive nature of the action. This differs from a peer conflict. Students will have conflicts with other students on a variety of issues. These conflicts may be heated, but they end fairly quickly and the students move on. With bullying, the conflict is repetitive. The bully is trying to maintain the upper hand in terms of power, and needs to keep the victim in a subordinate role. When one issue ends, the bully chooses another one in order to keep harassing the victim.

Our students are taught a variety of ways to deal with bullying. They learn strategies to deal with the incident while it is happening, like walking away, telling the bully to stop, or avoiding situations where bullying is most likely to occur. Most importantly, they are instructed to tell someone that they are being bullied. That

someone will hopefully be an adult, but could be a friend. Another strategy is for friends to provide positive support for the victim. We try to empower bystanders to report or intervene if they see someone being bullied. This is very difficult for students to do. They fear that they might become the next victim of the bully. They don't realize that they could be the next victims of the bully's behavior. Sometimes just having friends around can dissuade the bully from picking on the victim. Students are also taught to differentiate between reporting and ratting. Reporting a bullying incident is done with the intent to protect someone from being harmed socially, emotionally, or physically. Ratting or tattling is done with the intent to get someone in trouble. While reporting may get someone in trouble, it is not the main purpose. If tattling is not addressed, then school employees will spend a lot of time dealing with issues that may not even be related to bullying.

After a bullying incident is reported, the issue, unless severe, is turned over to the grade level team of teachers. The teachers meet with both the victim and the bully to determine what has happened. The victim is counseled that he or she has done the right thing and not to hesitate to report any further bullying. The bully is then counseled about why what he or she is doing is considered bullying and how the victim feels as a result. This meeting is documented and bullies are warned that any further bullying will result in stage two consequences. Stage two includes a report to the parents and a "think about it" worksheet that requires the bully to put into writing why he or she bullied and how he or she thinks it made the victim feel. This way, the school is trying to work with the bully to think about how actions impact others and develop empathy.

These messages are taught to our sixth grade students and reinforced in the seventh and eighth grade in various ways. We organize a field day as a kick-off event, with the help of parent volunteers. Information about the types

of bullying, the consequences of bullying, and ways to stop bullying are given to the students. Recently, a state trooper who specializes in bullying spoke to all sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students about the consequences of bullying for both the victim and the bully. We also conducted a survey of students and parents to determine the effectiveness of the program, and received good results. Parents indicated that they would like more information about bullying incidents involving their child, especially if their child was the bully. Plans are also under way to develop a bullying flow chart for open house to show the process used when a bullying complaint is received.

Bullying is a major issue confronting students in our schools. Students are not encouraged to deal with a bully on their own. They are encouraged to report it so that adults may address bullying behaviors before a serious incident takes place. By instructing students, faculty, and staff how to recognize bullying behavior, how to deal with those behaviors, and who to report it to they can begin the process of counseling both the bully and the victim. Stopping bullying altogether may be an impossible task, but we do need to create a safe environment for all students. Having a process in place to deal with bullying behaviors helps make students feel safe. Assessing the program by gathering input from parents and students helps to make sure the program is working and allows for weaknesses to be addressed and changes made.

## Reference

Bitney, J., & Title, B. (2001). *Preventing bullying at school: Student workbook, grades 6-8*. Center City MN: Hazelden Foundation.

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# Getting the Attention of the Pre-Adolescent

Joyce Jackson-Kalinoski, Ph.D.



ATTENTION! The very word brings to mind a line of soldiers standing perfectly still. Obviously we do not want our students to be standing (or in this case, sitting) at attention. But what is PAYING attention? We tell them countless times to pay attention. What do you pay with? Whom do you pay? What really is the price teachers should pay for grabbing the attention of their students? How can teachers enable students to attend and learn?

To begin, let's look at various ways of defining attention. Langer (1997) states that paying attention means staying focused on one thing at a time. While this may be the case, it is a highly complex mental process that involves both zooming in on detail and stepping back to survey the big picture. Attention has also been defined as the ability to select part of the environment, focus on that part, and disregard the rest. Stafford and Webb (2005) also say that attention is what it feels like to give more resources over to some perception or set of perceptions than to others.

For some students, the brain is unable to tune out any of the sounds, sights, feelings, and smells that are bombarding them in the environment. They always hear the cars passing by, see the fluorescent light flickering, feel the clothes on their body, and smell the odors in the room. Such students may have Sensory Integration Dysfunction, a treatable but not curable condition. If you suspect this, you should refer the student to Pupil Services for possible evaluation. This way of perceiving is also seen in some highly creative people such as artists and inventors. In this case, while being exhausting and difficult to deal with on a daily basis, it is a gift

and blessing that is part and parcel of their creativity. These individuals, in rare cases, may even exhibit synesthesia, the crossing over of sense modalities enabling them to see smells, feel tastes and hear colors.

Attention may also be the momentary extra importance you give to something that catches your eye. It may also be defined as a way of limiting information; of narrowing down all the possibilities, leaving a single conscious experience to which to respond; the prioritization of some objects at the expense of others. The fact that you make out more detail in things you are paying attention to than in other things has been conceptualized as a spotlight directed at those stimuli or thoughts currently being processed. As we will see, this focus may shift according to external stimuli.

Attention is a very important concept for teachers since it is the first process of memory. While it is not the same thing as learning, little learning takes place without attention. Feinstein (2004) states, "Our first objective as teachers is to capture students' attention. You can only maintain students' attention if you've already captured it." There are two ways to do this. One is by introducing novelty using strategies such as varying the pace and tone of your voice, circulating around the room, using colors and an environment that engages all the senses, flowers, good smells, appropriate music, etc. The appearance of some new item or movement, something that looks out of place, will trigger the brain to attend to it. The brain's job is to scan the environment for novelty, potential danger, and patterns because one of the main purposes of attention is survival. When danger

is involved attention is called vigilance. Vigilance is very tiring and declines over time. Soft-vigilance, or attention to things we enjoy, is energizing and can be sustained for long periods of time. When we are hyper-vigilant, we are locked in an object of attention. Soft-vigilance remains open to and, therefore, receptive to further information and learning. This type of attention is conducive to mindful learning, as we will see later.

As educators, we should present novel stimuli to our students in many ways, using all of the senses and emotions.

One facet of this includes movement. Why does something catch your eye? Color, light, aroma, or movement may be involved. Movement is an eye-catcher when the object to be attended to moves; it also helps students to attend when they are moving. Maintaining physical activity permits the brain to secrete an important neurotransmitter. Being sedentary for only 20 minutes decreases the output of this chemical and slows learning.

Perspective is an intellectual way of providing movement. Varying one's perspective in relation to the stimulus physically or in the mind is invigorating and provides novelty by providing varied views and challenges. This is what happens when playing a sport. Bringing a change of perspective through movement is helpful to all children, especially "hyperactive" students who may become active to provide novelty or for the physical pleasure.

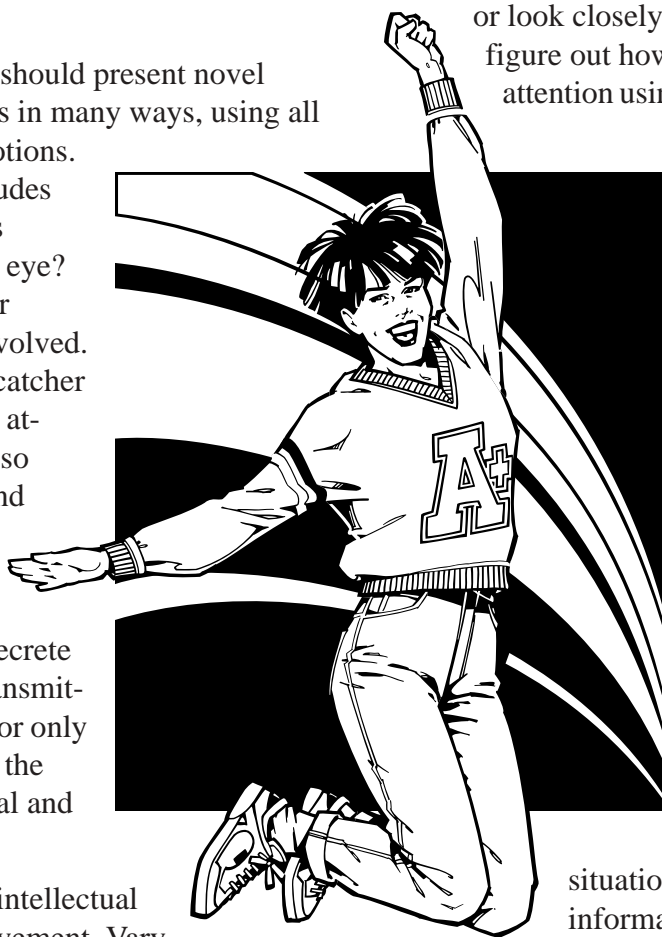
Mental movement has been seen as an important aspect of attention. Scanning an object from several perspectives in a linear and

horizontal fashion provides new perspectives on the issue or idea. Langer (1997) concludes that mindfully varying perspective helps us pay attention. Students who have difficulty paying attention in class do successfully pay attention to many things in the course of the day. For instance, when playing games, including videogames, they may attend for hours. Remember that in games we try to fool our opponents or look closely at all aspects of the situation to figure out how to win. This is mindful attention using horizontal and vertical

scanning. It also allows the student to consider many outcomes and possibilities for a given situation. There is no one right answer or outcome.

Langer's (1997) concept of sideways learning is important to consider when thinking about attention. This type of learning allows one to be open to novelty, alert to distinction, sensitive to different contexts, and have implicit awareness of multiple perspectives and orientation in the present. This approach leaves us receptive to changes in an ongoing

situation. Spoon-feeding students information and rote learning do not create an awareness of discriminatory detail. When students are allowed the opportunity of attending to multiple ways of approaching a problem, they can come up with multiple explanations and ways to solve it. Being asked to consider something in a mindful way, giving attention to more than one perspective and making comparisons of similarities and differences, greatly increases attention and memory and enhances recollection of details. Similar approaches to solving problems have been called fuzzy thinking and lateral thinking.



Another purpose of attending to something is to maintain pleasurable feelings. If the object is not of any interest to the student, if it has no personal meaning and does not produce any endorphins in the student's brain, the object will be passed over and will not be attended to. This does not mean that everything we teach students has to be exciting or attractive to every student, but it does mean that it must have a positive emotional hook for each one. It is our job to provide that hook in our presentation.

Students are always paying attention to something. When a lesson makes no sense to them and has no personal meaning, the students' brains will turn inward to find novelty and pleasure. We call this daydreaming; when a person is distracted, he/she is actually just paying attention to something else. In this case, we should consider what is so attractive about the alternative stimulus. How can we add the attractive elements to the stimuli to which we want our students to attend?

Feinstein (2004) points out that because the adolescent brain seeks out novelty and emotion, worksheets, lectures, and objective exams are difficult to attend to. He explains that this is because "worksheets require students to pay attention to something that evolution and instinct quite frankly say is irrelevant to life. Lecture...is not emotionally charged. Objective tests, such as those in multiple choice or true/false formats, rarely generate emotion and are extremely difficult to apply to real-world applications." Because of this need for positive emotion and novelty, Feinstein says, "People who know how to entertain an audience are almost always sure to get their educational messages across." As my colleague, Amanda Burt, and I have stressed many times in our brain-based teaching workshops, you must RAZZLE-DAZZLE them!

Why is this razzle-dazzle even more important for the pre-adolescent brain than that of an adult? To answer this we must look at the

development and workings of the brain. The areas of the brain involved with attention include the arousal centers in the brainstem and the frontal lobes that are involved in executive functions such as judgment and abstract thought. In young children's brains, the frontal lobes are just developing and are not used in the decision-making process. This immaturity of the frontal lobes in adolescents and pre-adolescents is responsible for their need for hands-on activities and movement in order to attend to instruction and learn. Brain-Gym, energizers, charades, and games are appropriate. Very importantly, pre-adolescents make decisions emotionally, using the amygdala. The amygdala remembers pleasant experiences and can associate academic content to that feeling. The reverse is also true. Adults rely much less on the amygdala than on the frontal lobes of their brains to respond in a rational way to decisions. They can act logically and reasonably. The pre-adolescent and adolescent respond emotionally and impulsively.

On the other hand, what are the distractions (dis-attractions, or things that draw the focus of attention from the lesson to other things)? We should reframe the concept of distraction by conceiving of it as being otherwise attracted. Noises, such as the lawnmower going past the window; a fire-drill; a sneeze or other student noise; repetitive movements by the teacher, such as playing with a necklace; uncomfortable seating; student disruption; a phone call or announcement; and many other things can focus attention elsewhere. It can take up to 15 minutes to regain a deep state of concentration after such distractions.

Items that receive attention are more likely to enter long-term memory. So, what factors have we seen promote attention?"

- The subject is important to the student.
- The student has experience with the subject (hooking).
- The speaker is personable and the environment is non-threatening.

- There are visuals and other examples so that the student is not just listening with his/her ears but with his/her eyes and other senses as well.
- The student can actively respond to questions and directions.
- There are opportunities for kinetic activity.
- The environment is not distracting and is conducive to listening and interacting with the teacher.
- The student has a positive attitude toward the subject. If this is not initially present, the teacher presents the subject in a way that promotes enthusiasm by using attention-getting devices (instead of the student!) and providing a lively environment.

As middle-school teachers, we have an exciting opportunity to teach our students subject matter, as well as providing them with the skills to become successful learners in high school and beyond. When you think about it, isn't getting and maintaining attention just plain good teaching? But, you may protest, I have 100 students to teach per day and I cannot make math or science or Spanish exciting, active, and relevant for each of them. Sure you can. The large majority of your students will have some interest in what you are presenting anyway. You just need to play off your own interest in the subject and let your passion for it come through.

Don't be afraid to try out some new ideas yourself. If you are a life-long learner, you can create more! Some students already come from enriched environments that have provided a plethora of neural connections, linking art to science to music to history and so on. Others are not as blessed and need you to show them how things can connect, a skill that will help build their cerebral highways. And then there is the student who is sad, tired, friendless, or the target of teasing and, sadly, maliciousness. Your classroom can be a sanctuary for this student and a place to have fun. By not spoon-feeding

your students, you can challenge them to figure things out for themselves and feel the joy of being validated for a unique perspective. Catch their eye, include the unexpected, Razzle-Dazzle 'em, and they'll pay attention without ever being told!

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# High Stakes Assessments Need Not Emphasize High Stakes Preparation

Thomas B. Reardon, MS



## One (Rather New) Teacher's Approach to Test Preparation at the Middle Level

Since the creation of the *No Child Left Behind* Legislation and the subsequent testing that accompanies the mandate, all educators, particularly those at the middle level, have certainly felt the pressure to perform. Special emphasis has been placed upon the achievement of middle-level students, as it is at this point where one typically observes an “inverse bell-curve” effect in regards to test scores. While administrators and state education officials attempt to diagnose the deficiencies of middle schools and their lower scores, this scoring phenomenon is quite easily explained with one word: *motivation*.

The typical elementary school student's motivation is quite high, as he/she is still predominantly affected by teacher approval. Elementary students are particularly vulnerable to praise, and do not want to disappoint their teacher. Learning, at this point, is a relatively new experience, along with the entire assessment process. Thus, it is no surprise that elementary students would perform to their potential on these tests. High school students, though at times disaffected, have the ability to see the connection between assessment (Regents) performance and post-secondary plans. If nothing else, high school students realize that if they are to graduate, they must pass these tests; the grades are recorded on their transcripts and are a significant portion of their final course average.

The true disconnect and “dip” in the curve can be associated with middle-level students, who lack the motivation to perform, as poor

performance lacks any tangible consequence. Simply stating that successful completion of the exam is used to determine Academic Intervention Services placement does not register as important at this juncture of a student's life. Since the exam is not a part of their numeric average, extrinsic motivation is impossible. While there is a large population of students who still seek perfection in all that they do, it is very difficult for an unmotivated student to see the purpose in working to his/her potential on an exam that their teacher might never see or score. While misrepresented, the bell-curve is accurate in portraying the need for attention at the middle-level. Unfortunately, this attention has manifested itself in fear.

In an effort to raise scores (and in some cases, prevent School In Need of Improvement, or SINI status), a great deal of time and energy is expended in the form of test preparations. While there are numerous publications and resources available to reinforce test skills, the intense fear instilled by teacher and school accountability has caused many teachers to simplify their teaching, never leaving the confines of the test. Glorified versions of “skill and drill” practice activities pervade classrooms and drive curriculum, leaving teachers at a deficit for time to cover both the testing requirements and authentic, enriching learning experiences. With such emphasis placed on district and building scores, it is not a mystery as to which activities are sacrificed within a 180-day school year.

With all of that said, such comments do not take away the ramifications of poor test performance. In my career as a middle school teacher, I initially began with the assumption that if I repeatedly and voraciously covered the material

on the standardized assessments, modeled my rubrics after the state rubrics, and created all questions in the image of previous test questions, my students would be destined for success. Thinking I was bringing my students to higher levels of achievement, it was the asking of five simple yet poignant words a week before the exam that truly captured the essence of success that I had clearly missed: *Why are we doing this?* Despite my attempt to illustrate the “ins and outs” of the exam, my students were simply doing as they were told. They answered the questions and wrote the essays, but had absolutely no idea *why* they were doing this. When I responded via asking them why they hadn’t posed this question sooner, they tritely responded, *You are grading us.* I cringed at the thought of the sharp disconnect that would occur when students were to sit down and take the state assessment that they *knew* was not being graded.

Those simple words changed my entire curriculum for the following year, saved me a lot of paper, and left a lot of room for the passionate teaching and learning that should exist in all classrooms. This is not to say that I eliminated going over previous exams and grading students against state-created rubrics. However, I spent more time with my students doing the following activities and less time on rote exercises:

- **Don’t show, tell.**

It is vital not only to familiarize your students with state grading rubrics, but also to take the time to explain *what* the state is looking for.

- **What a great time for discussion...**

There is no reason why these grading standards cannot be the subject of a great class discussion. If students are given the rubrics and a forum to agree, disagree, question, or draw conclusions from, the ice is broken, and the disconnect between test preparatory activities can be dissolved.

- **Teach them the game.**

Though it goes without saying that the skills measured on state assessments are valuable, there is nothing wrong with honesty, and explaining to students that whether or not they agree with the practice of standardized testing, it is a game to be played (and to use a cliché, the *ONLY* game in town). Regardless of whether or not the test is boring or graded, I see nothing wrong with explaining to students the inverse-bell curve of scores, and warning them of the mistakes many have made via disregarding their performance.

- **Reflection is vital.**

Spend some time allowing students to reflect on their performance. What skills do they possess that will help them on the test? What portions of the exam are intimidating? Allow students to work together on test preparatory activities, observing and learning from each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

- **Spice it up.**

Teachers make the assumption that innovative instructional strategies cannot be used when doing something as serious as test preparation. Cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and the use of multiple intelligences should not be absent from such activities. Creativity does not have to be the antonym of test preparation.

The influence of NCLB is certainly upon us, but there is no reason to discard the zeal of passionate teaching for rote practice. If nothing else, high stakes testing has reminded us of the vitality of the middle-level educator to take the otherwise boring and make it extraordinary.

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# A Big Buddy Program

Catherine Janson and Lynda Lowe



Four years ago, York Central School formed its first team to participate in the Special Olympics in Track and Field as an extracurricular activity. The first year, only three elementary students participated. The following year the number of athletes increased to six elementary students. In order to make this day more successful for the athletes, a Special Buddy Program was created.

Middle and high school students are given the opportunity to volunteer to be a Special Buddy to an athlete participating in Special Olympics. Each athlete is assigned a Big Buddy, who is responsible for the athlete on the day of Special Olympics. Prior to the Special Olympics day, Big Buddies are encouraged to get to know the athletes. This opportunity is given during the school day. When available, the Big Buddy also goes with the athlete during training sessions to cheer the athlete on and give advice on techniques for running track and throwing softballs.

On the event day, the Big Buddy is responsible for his or her athlete. The Big Buddy makes sure that the athlete arrives at the correct place on the track at the right time; follows the athlete to the award stand; then takes the athlete over to the softball throw area for the next event. Other organizations set up tents with face painting, bean bag toss, and other carnival type activities for the athletes to participate in following the events. Each athlete is also given a lunch ticket. The Big Buddy is responsible for the athlete until the athlete's family is able to find him or her. The week following the Special Olympics, the athletes and their Big Buddies enjoyed one last activity together: an ice cream sundae party to celebrate the success of the day.

Each year, the number of athletes has increased as well as the number of Buddies. The middle/high school students have been the first to initiate conversations with the adult coordinators about Special Olympics each year, eager to know who their athlete will be. Both the athletes and their Buddies look forward to the event. Its success has been based on both the athletes' excitement to have older students work on an individual basis with them and the buddies' excitement to watch their athletes be successful in their events.

The Big Buddy Program has also given middle/high school students the opportunity to work with students with disabilities and to understand a variety of needs. It helps develop the whole child and establishes a partnership between the home and the community. Since it is a volunteer program, the students involved are pursuing their personal interests. Some of the volunteers have continued with their student athletes after the Olympics. Some have also become student volunteers in special education classrooms on a regular basis. This program has been successful because of the middle/high school students' enthusiasm, compassion and respect for the Special Olympics athletes.

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## A Student Speaks...

### Integrated Curriculum in a Standards-Based World

Rebecca Goelz

Imagine a classroom in which the students designed the curriculum they were to learn; an education system that nurtured the democratic ideals of the American society; a middle school where children were engaged in the learning process that catered to their developmental needs. Imagine an educational structure without boundaries, one that shatters the divisions between the core areas. Teachers are no longer instructors, but facilitators and mentors. Is it possible to have such an educational program in a standards-based society that is strictly monitored by government programs such as No Child Left Behind and annual proficiency tests? Is it possible for such a student-oriented learning environment to exist at the middle level? Yes. Welcome to the concept of integrated curriculum: an educational system wherein the middle-level student is nurtured in a way that builds his or her self-confidence, where the curriculum is centered on the student rather than the subject areas. After a thorough study of the concept, application, objections, and utilization of the integrated curriculum model, it will become clear that such a middle school environment is possible. Students can enjoy going to school.

Theories on curriculum integration are not a recent development. Teachers and researchers have been studying the effects of curriculum integration for several decades. As early as 1935, the National Council of Teachers of English was defining the very concept of cur-

riculum integration: "Integration: the unification of all subjects and experiences" (Drake and Burns, 2004, p. 8). Nearly six decades later, it is James Beane who is recognized as the father of integrated curriculum. Beane's *Guidelines for a Middle School Curriculum* provides the foundation for his personal development of an integrated curriculum model. The eight guidelines include:

1. The middle school curriculum should focus on general education.
2. The central purpose of the middle school curriculum should be to help early adolescents explore self and social meanings at this time in their lives.
3. The middle school curriculum should respect the dignity of early adolescents.
4. The middle school curriculum should be firmly grounded in democracy.
5. The middle school curriculum should honor diversity.
6. The middle school curriculum should be of great personal and social significance.
7. The middle school curriculum should be lifelike and lively.
8. The middle school curriculum should enhance knowledge and skills for all young people (Knowles & Brown, 2000, pp. 86-88).

*One of the goals of every educator is to help others become educators. We are taking this notion one step further by printing exceptional papers from undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolled in courses geared to teaching "in the middle." For those of you who are teaching at the university level, if you have articles you feel are worthy of sharing, please e-mail them to us at [editor@nysmsa.org](mailto:editor@nysmsa.org) and be sure to include written permission from the author.*

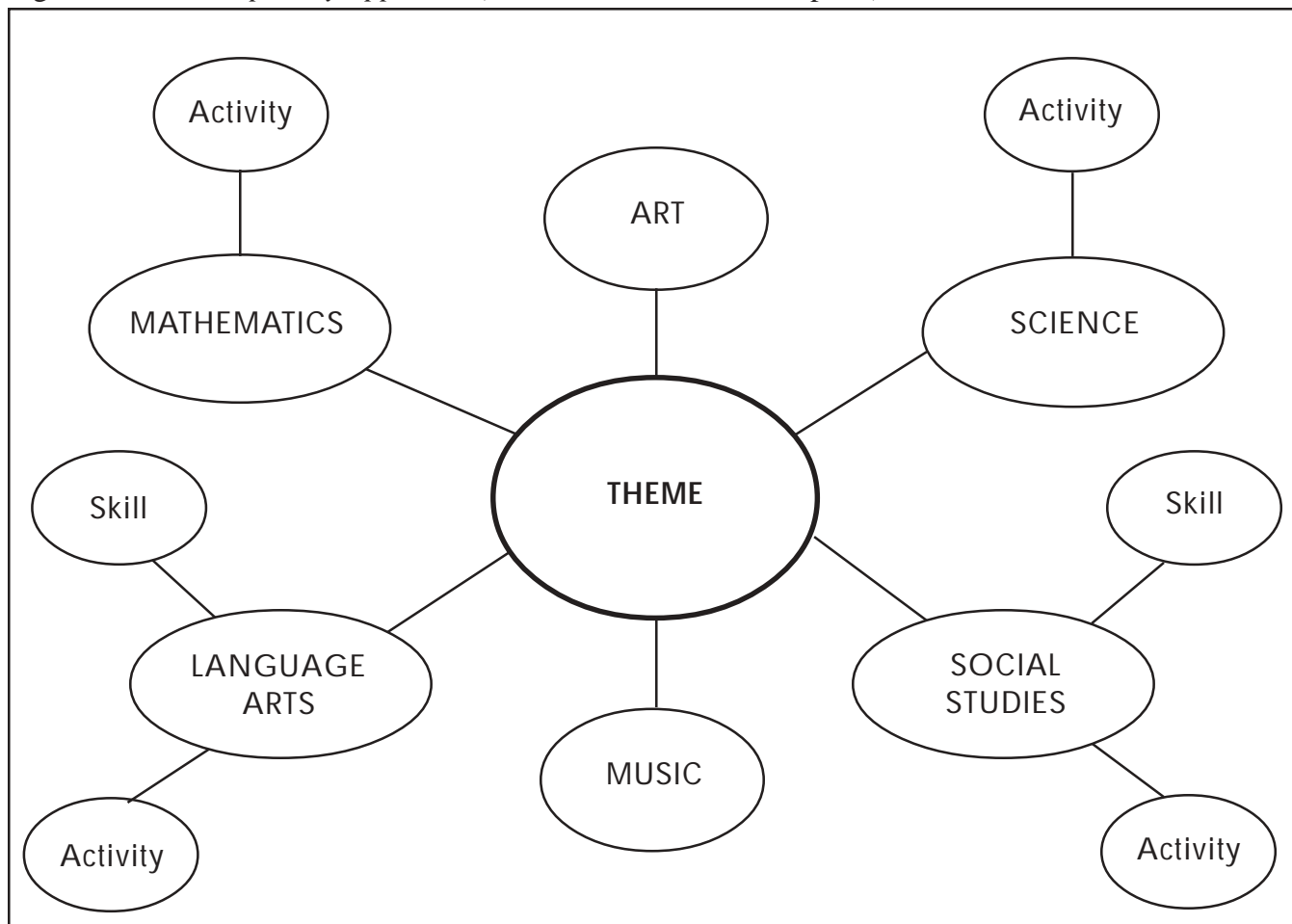
After reading Beane's eight guidelines, one may ask why such concepts cannot be met using the multidisciplinary approaches that are commonly implemented in middle schools today. Although both approaches share a similar theme of cross-curriculum integration, the differences arise in the construction and implementation of the lessons. In a multidisciplinary approach, a minimum of two teachers is required to work together in order to design a unit in which the teachers choose the theme and how it will relate to their specific subject areas. In some cases it is up to the student to recognize the correlation between the subject areas. In Figure 1 (*below*), the central theme is chosen and then it is divided into subject areas. The division of the subject-areas and teacher-based construction of the unit prevent the middle-level students from *exploring self and social meanings* and exemplify an

autocratic rather than democratic atmosphere for student learning.

In order to clear up any confusion between the multidisciplinary approach and the integrated curriculum approach, it is imperative that the development and implementation of the integrated curriculum model be considered. The implementation of the integrated curriculum approach in the classroom is characterized by Beane's five-step model. Unlike the multidisciplinary approach, the integrated curriculum model exemplifies the direct control of students in developing a course of study within the classroom. Beane's five-step approach to curriculum integration includes:

1. Student Reflection
  - a. The teacher asks the students to jot down words or phrases that characterize who

Figure 1. *Multidisciplinary Approach* (Knowles & Brown, 2000, p. 80)



- they are and what they like.
- b. The students are then asked to identify words or phrases they would like to have on their lists and those they wish were not on their lists.
2. Ask Students Two Questions
    - a. “What questions and concerns do you have about yourself?”
      - i. After individually answering the question, students are instructed to share their answers in small groups.
      - ii. After combining similar ideas, the groups present a list to the class.
    - b. “What questions and concerns do you have about the world?”
      - i. The students will again share their ideas in small groups and present their lists to the class.
  3. Students Identify Connections Between Personal and Social Concerns
    - a. The connections between the personal and social concerns of the students will generate common themes, i.e. *power, future, health, etc.*
  4. Initial Theme Is Chosen
    - a. Students compromise upon which themes they would like to study first
    - b. Remaining topics are saved for later study
  5. Students Identify Past Questions That Relate to the Theme and Suggest Activities to Help Explore the Concept
    - a. This brainstorming activity reinforces the theme they have chosen and allows students the opportunity to generate new questions pertaining to the general theme (Knowles and Brown, 2000, p. 89).

The integrated curriculum approach delegates the power to the students. Student development of the themes, brainstorming of questions pertaining to the theme, and development of methods to solve the questions, reinforces the importance of the student and not the teacher; moreover, it is the lack of divisions between the

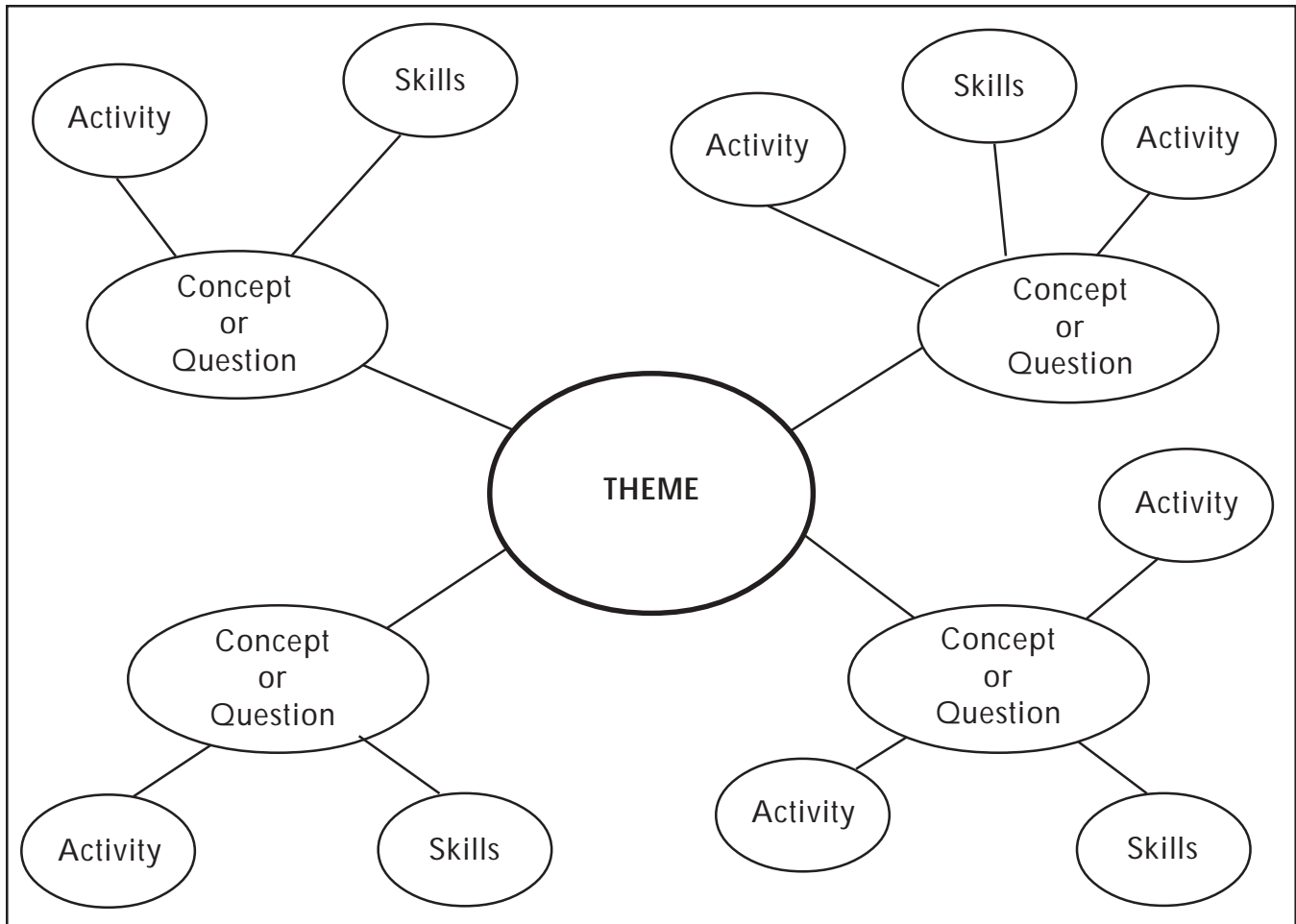
subject areas that is so drastically different from the multidisciplinary approach. In Figure 2 (*top, page 33*), the construction of a theme and grouping that ensues reinforces the concentration on concepts, not subjects.

If it is up to the students to create the curriculum and analyze the information in a meaningful way through personal research and investigation, what is the role of the teacher? According to Beane, the role of the teacher is redefined; he/she is no longer the “Knowledge Gatekeeper” or the “Meaning Maker”, but rather the “Guide” and the “Facilitator” (1992). Dave Brown addresses the issue of the teacher’s role within an integrated classroom during his story on Mark Springer’s classroom. Springer has created his own integrated curriculum program, known as *Soundings*. According to Brown, teachers within the *Soundings* program are referred to as “Coordinators” rather than teachers, because of the role that they play within the classroom. Coordinators are in charge of the initial instructions at the beginning of the process, direct and moderate discussion within the classroom to insure equal participation of students, ask questions to clarify any confusion, and establish the curriculum framework for the year (Brown, 2002).

Perhaps the only role that the teacher has that is similar to an ordinary classroom is that of the assessor. Assessment within an integrated curriculum classroom varies depending upon the instructor. Without any standardized tests and quizzes, the instructor must develop a way to analyze the students’ growth throughout the school year. A strategy for assessment that worked well in J. Scott Clark’s classroom included four methods.

1. Informal Teacher Observation
  - a. Informal observation occurs during class discussion and group work/collaboration
2. Daily Journal Entries
  - a. Students are required to keep a journal throughout the unit and record personal

Figure 2. *Curriculum Integration Model* (Knowles & Brown, 2000, p. 93)



accomplishments, reflections, and feelings each day

3. Review Notebooks Used in Problem-Solving Process
  - a. Along with the journal, students are also required to have a notebook in which they record all of their research pertaining to the project
4. Final Student-Devised Solution within Student Reports
  - a. At the end of the problem-solving process, students are instructed to choose a way in which to demonstrate what they have learned.
    - i. This may include a final paper, a pamphlet, a presentation, or a school-wide assembly (Knowles and Brown, 2000, p. 100).

According to Drake and Burns (2004, p. 68), a teacher must ask him/herself the question, “How do we know that students have learned what they are supposed to learn?” The assessments should be specific to the project, varied in type and weighting, and above all they must be authentic. Drake and Burns find the following activities to be effective assessment strategies, including self-assessment, peer assessment, performance, rubrics, journals, portfolios, observations, and checklists.

Unlike assessment in a subject-based, standards-regulated classroom, the integrated classroom is an atmosphere where even those students who are labeled “at risk” show promising signs of improvement. This is not a program for only gifted students; it is a program for all students. According to the studies done by

Drake and Burns (2004, p. 22), although gifted and talented students perform well in these programs, it is the “at-risk” students who have shown increases in their achievement scores as a result of integrated curriculum. By channeling their energy and interests into their research, there are fewer discipline problems with at-risk students.

In Mark Springer’s *Soundings* program, forty students are randomly selected to participate. Almost one hundred apply for a seat in the program. The students’ intellectual talents range from gifted to those students with individualized education programs. The only criterion for entering the program is a parent’s permission slip (Brown, 2002).

As good as the integrated curriculum approach may sound, in today’s society of standardized tests and state curriculum mandates, it is nearly impossible to teach the students what the state and federal government standards require the children must know. With such restrictions on what a teacher must teach, how could one possibly structure his/her classroom around the curriculum integration philosophy? These are only a few of the many questions critics stress when faced with the decision to implement integrated curriculum within their schools.

Parental objections to the integrated curriculum approach result from their fears of the unknown. Because this system is radical compared to the way in which they were taught, teachers are afraid that this method will be ineffective. Parents worry about how this program will adversely affect their student’s SAT scores, high school performance, and acceptance into college (Knowles and Brown, 2000, p. 97). Fortunately for the program, studies have shown that students in any type of integrated program do as well or better on standardized tests than those students in conventional programs (Vars and Beane, 2000).

The objection that is perhaps the most pertinent to the topic at hand is that of the standards and proficiency tests required by the states. In the United States Education System, standards are devised in accordance with subject areas (Vars and Beane, 2000). This unrealistic approach to learning impedes the total realization of curriculum integration. In the real world there is no distinction between the subject areas; moreover, educators are preparing their students for the real world in an unrealistic manner. The integrated curriculum approach is still possible in such a standards-based society; however, slight changes must be made in the implementation of the methodology.

In order to incorporate curriculum integration within the classroom, teachers must adjust the way they implement the standards within their classrooms. One way in which the standards are recognized is through “back-mapping”. Once the unit is complete, the teachers revisit the unit and identify where the students were using certain skills that pertain to specific subject areas; furthermore, in those activities each teacher identifies where and what standards are met (Vars and Beane, 2000).

Another way in which to implement the standards into the integrated curriculum program is to involve the students in the identification process. During the brainstorming portion of the planning process, the teachers should provide the students with the standards that must be addressed in the unit. By making the students aware of what they have to cover, they can brainstorm activities within the unit that implement the standards. According to Vars and Beane, in order to make sure that the standards are implemented, teachers should post the standards in the classroom so that both the teacher and the students can refer back to the standards whenever it is necessary (Vars and Beane, 2000).

Hope is not lost. The integrated curriculum program is not a dream, but rather a reality that

is gaining strength. Programs such as Mark Springer's *Soundings* and integrated curriculum experiments in classrooms such as J. Scott Clark have given teachers hope for a promising future. The greatest sign of achievement in the area of integrated curriculum is demonstrated in those middle schools whose philosophy is one of integrated curriculum. Such a middle school can be found in Pensacola, Florida. Brown-Barge Middle School's philosophy is proof of the fact that integrated curriculum can work:

We believe that each student, working at his own pace, has the right to pursue academic, social, and personal goals in a nurturing, supportive environment. We believe that secure students will be motivated to accept the challenge of differentiated integrative curriculum designed to produce academic excellence at Brown Barge Middle School. The ultimate goal at BBMS is to assist students in becoming happy, productive, and knowledgeable young people who believe in themselves and their ability to make a positive contribution to society (BBMS website).

It is the realization of the integrated curriculum program that provides proof of the transitioning middle school education system.

In the twenty-first century, we are still years, perhaps decades, behind the theorists in terms of implementing the most affective and effective education system. The future of the education system relies on those risk takers who are not afraid to break away from traditional schooling; risk takers who believe that there must be a way to reach not just the majority of their students, but all of their students. It is those passionate individuals like Mark Springer and J. Scott Clark who provide hope for other passionate educators, encouraging them to try something new; to challenge the system. And it is ultimately those middle schools, like Brown-Barge Middle School, that chance their reputation and credibility in hopes that their students will benefit from a new form of instruction. It is the responsibility of the dedicated middle school

teachers of America to make the changes that the education system so desperately needs. The nation's future is in the hands of its students, and those students' futures are in the hands of their educators. What better way to prepare our students for the future, than to allow them the responsibility to control their education and make it meaningful to them.

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## Submission of Articles

*In Transition* accepts manuscripts for publication consideration. Our journal is produced by the New York State Middle School Association and is dedicated to those teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and others serving the needs of students aged 10-15. *In Transition* is a juried publication; all manuscripts are reviewed and approved for publication by a panel of members from the NYSMSA Board of Directors.

Manuscripts describing successful programs, stimulating projects, exemplary teaching techniques, unique team concepts, action research, and promising practices are welcome! We are particularly interested in articles on implementing the new Standards, teaming, interdisciplinary instruction, authentic assessment, flexible scheduling, integrating technology into instructional programs, and application of the *Essential Elements*.

Please note the following format guidelines:

LENGTH: 400-2,000 words (two to eight pages)

FORMAT: MS Word or compatible, double space, Times New Roman 12, 1-inch margins. Citations of referenced works should follow current APA standards.

ILLUSTRATIONS: All illustrations, tables, charts, photographs, etc. must be high quality, black and white or grayscale. Photographs must be in JPEG format and include captions identifying subjects, activity, and source or photographer. All illustrations become the property of NYSMSA.

COVER PAGE: Each article submitted **must** include a cover page with the following information; bolded items will be included as contact information.

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A brief synopsis of the content of the manuscript (optional)

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editor@nysmsa.org

***Please note: Only e-mail submissions will be considered; do not mail or fax paper copies of manuscripts.***

DEADLINES: To be considered for publication, manuscripts must be received by August 15 for the fall issue, December 15 for the winter issue, and March 15 for the spring issue.

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# Top Ten Reasons to Attend NYSMSA's 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

**NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK  
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- #10 Held in the brand new, state-of-the-art Conference Center Niagara Falls in downtown Niagara Falls, NY
- #9 Cost-effective way to participate in excellent middle-level professional development
- #8 Opportunities for networking and developing collegial relationships with fellow middle-level educators from across New York State
- #7 Trade Exhibit with the latest and greatest in middle-level products and services
- #6 Support for middle-level school improvement plans and reform efforts
- #5 NYS middle-level practitioners sharing classroom-tested lessons and instructional strategies
- #4 Nationally-acclaimed presenters presenting the latest research-based middle-level practices
- #3 Focus on NASSP's *Breaking Ranks in the Middle*
- #2 Focus on the *NYS Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education*



**#1 Good for kids! Learn important ways to support your middle-level students' learning.**

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