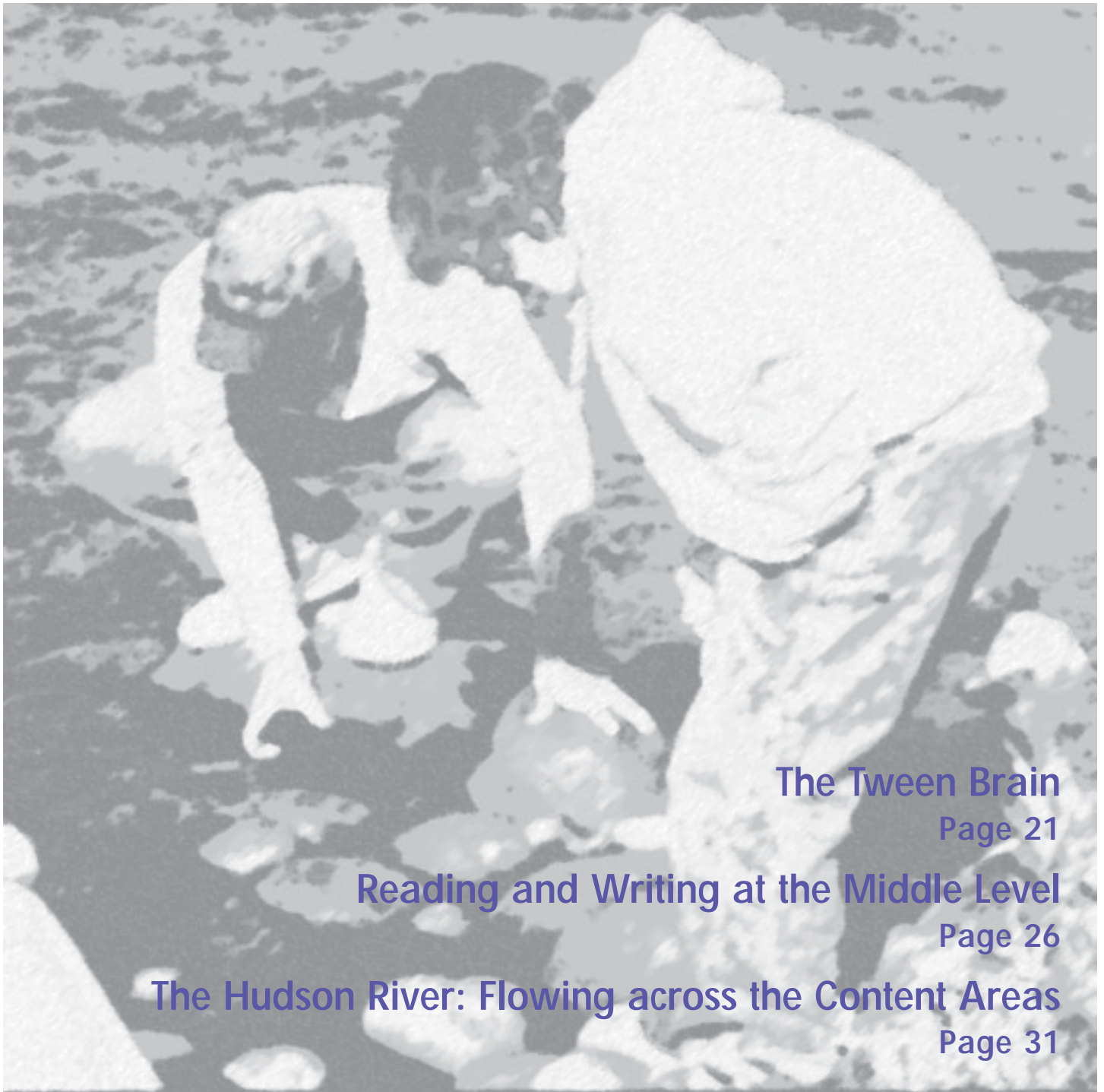


IN Transition

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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On the Cover

Creative alteration of a photo taken by Cherilyn Dempsey, a seventh grade science teacher at Oliver W. Winch Middle School, South Glens Falls NY.



From the Editor's Desk

Chris Reed



Chris Reed

I hope you enjoy this issue of *In Transition*. We have several articles that cover a nice array of topics including brain research, organization, collaboration, interdisciplinary instruction, reading, and more. To an extent, NYSMSA's goal in publishing a journal is to provide

something for all of our constituent readers. We offer articles on cutting-edge research and the very latest in the field of educating the middle-level child. We love to present submissions from our friends in higher education and, in fact, welcome the opportunity to increase the dialogue among our groups. Finally, a key feature of the journal is (and will remain) thoughtfully written articles from middle-level educators. What are our best practices? Who is willing to share a new or creative way of delivering an instructional unit? Advocacy, academic intervention services (AIS), differentiated instruction (DI), interdisciplinary instruction, response to intervention (RTI), technology, scheduling, extra curriculars, fund raising, co-teaching - pick a topic. As an educator, you may be sitting on a gold mine of information that could be of great use to other educators in the field. Please consider capturing that information in the form of an article for *In Transition* and share it with your colleagues across the state. You will find article submission information elaborated in detail in this issue.

About the Cover

Students at the Oliver W. Winch Middle School collected invertebrate samples on the Hudson River banks back in September of this year. The collection site is located at The Fish Hatchery in Warrensburg, New York. This is one of two sites that the students of Red 7 visit yearly in an organized effort to expand upon an interdisciplinary project that focuses on this great river.

This interdisciplinary project encompasses all of the core content areas and is explained in detail in *The Hudson River: One Team's Approach to Flowing across the Content Areas*, an article that begins on page 31 of this publication. Throughout the year, the students will develop a greater knowledge base of the Hudson River by comparing and contrasting the two river sites visited. The two field trips, which will incorporate parallel lesson plans as well as assessments, will scaffold off one another. Ultimately, based on their prior knowledge, students will develop a greater understanding of the influence of the Hudson River and its impact on American history.

For further information on one team's approach to a successful interdisciplinary project, please contact Victoria Leroux at lerouxv@sgfallssd.org.

A few thoughts from the President...

Linda Ruest



Linda Ruest

On September 11, 2001, my radio station of choice became National Public Radio. And because I spend an inordinate amount of time in my car, that choice is an important one to me. I appreciate NPR's in-depth coverage of issues

that matter to me; I appreciate the interviews with famous, infamous, and little-known people; I appreciate NPR's reporting of national, international and local news; I even appreciate the attempts at humor during annual pledge drives. But some of the things that I appreciate most about NPR are the "This I Believe" essays, written and read on air by listeners.

According to the National Public Radio website: *This I Believe* is an international project engaging people in writing, sharing, and discussing the core values that guide their daily lives. These short statements of belief, written by people from all walks of life, are archived here and featured on public radio in the United States and Canada, as well as in regular broadcasts on NPR. The project is based on the popular 1950s radio series of the same name hosted by Edward R. Murrow.

I am routinely impressed and sometimes surprised to hear what people believe in strongly enough to put pen to paper, or fingertips to keyboards, and share their beliefs with

the world. And I very frequently share their beliefs. Like Nobel Laureate, Elie Wiesel, I believe in "A God Who Remembers." Like chemist John Warner, I believe in "Asking the Right Questions." Like newspaper reporter Laurie Granieri, I believe in "Leaving Work to Watch the Sunset" (although I admit to not acting on that belief often enough.)

So, I often listen to these on-air essays and contemplate what I believe in strongly enough that I would put pen to paper to share those beliefs with NPR's listeners. And inevitably, my thoughts bring me to the world of middle-level education and the core beliefs that have shaped my actions throughout my life as an educator.

As a middle-level teacher, I was strongly motivated by my belief that "all students can learn." And I further believed and continue to believe that students learn best from teachers who act on this belief.

As an administrator, I was strongly motivated by that same belief and additionally by my belief that, in order for all students to learn, both human and fiscal resources must be committed to ensuring that they do.

As an educational consultant, I am strongly motivated by my belief that, in order for all students to learn, a school's mission, vision, goals, and actions must have the common focus of providing a developmentally responsive, academically challenging education for all students.

As a middle-level advocate in New York State, I am strongly motivated by the State Education Department's *Essential Elements of*

Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools or Programs. And because I believe in the essential nature of the Essential Elements, I further believe that:

- The Essential Elements should be implemented in every middle-level program in New York State;
- Middle-level faculties across New York State should be assessing their degree of implementation of the Essential Elements and developing a plan of action for full implementation.

All of this leads me to an articulation of my core belief as President of NYSMSA: “We’re All in This Together.”

This I Believe: We’re All in This Together

The NYSMSA Board of Directors takes very seriously its responsibility to advocate for full implementation of the Essential Elements in all middle-level schools in New York State. We know that SED can’t do it alone. We know that schools and districts can’t do it alone. We know that none of the many educational organizations that support the Essential Elements can do it alone. And we know that our fifteen-member NYSMSA Board cannot do it alone. We are in this together, and we need to act accordingly.

Toward that end, our Board has committed to planning and co-sponsoring a Middle-Level Educational Summit to be held this summer, bringing together leaders from various educational organizations, business, and government around the issue of middle-level education in New York State. The purpose of the Summit is to bring about a common understanding of current New York State policy and regulations relating to middle-level education and to develop a statewide implementation plan that will bring these best practices into our schools and classrooms. We believe that, together, we will be able to effectively achieve our NYSMSA vision — to make high-per-

forming middle-level programs the norm in New York State through full implementation of the Essential Elements and application of cutting-edge research.

Additionally, because we’re all in this together, our Regional Directors have committed to organizing Regional Teams of middle-level educators who are interested in moving forward the middle-level agenda in their regions. These teams will be charged with organizing and hosting regional meetings and professional development events that inform and inspire middle-level educators to plan for, implement, and assess programs that address the Essential Elements. Members of these regional teams will be invited to serve on NYSMSA committees, contribute to NYSMSA publications, and present at NYSMSA conferences and institutes. In short, they will actively contribute to the work of NYSMSA. To join one of these Regional Teams, visit www.nysmsa.org and click on *NYSMSA Leadership*.

According to journalist Edward R. Murrow, his *This I Believe* program sought to “point to the common meeting grounds of beliefs.” In the world of middle-level education in New York State, our meeting grounds of beliefs are the Essential Elements. I hope that you share my belief that we’re all in this together and that you will act on that belief by becoming an active participant in advocating for their full implementation in New York State schools.

The Executive Director's Message

Dennis M. Tosetto



Dennis Tosetto

Middle-level educators and the New York State Education Department have known for a long time the value of utilizing a well-rounded, integrated approach to education. We understand the importance of finding ways to ensure that each

individual middle-level learner gains an understanding of real-world connections among diverse subject areas.

It now seems that this has become an important topic of conversation nationally, and it extends well beyond the educational community. In fact, some current nationally recognized authors and journalists are speaking out about the need for American college students to be proficient at integrating skills and knowledge relating to subjects as diverse as math, science, art, and music. Moreover, they see this integration of skills and knowledge as a necessity if the United States is to remain an important global economic leader.

The February 2008 edition of *The School Administrator*, a publication of the American Association of School Administrators, features a discussion between Daniel Pink, the author of *A Whole New Mind* (2005; 2006 paperback edition) and Thomas Friedman, the author of *The World Is Flat* (2006; 2007 paperback edition).

During the discussion that was referenced in the above article, Friedman presents his rationale for why a liberal arts education is more important than ever before. What he has to say directly supports our rationale for interdisciplinary instruction at the middle-level. Below is just a brief portion of what he had to say:

Pink: So what's the answer? What should we be telling our kids?

Friedman: It's really several things. In the latest edition, I added a whole section on why liberal arts are more important than ever. It's not that I don't think math and science are important. They still are. But more than ever our secret sauce comes from our ability to integrate art, science, music and literature with the hard sciences. That's what produces an iPod revolution or a Google.

Pink: It's the combination of the left brain and the right brain. Left-brain thinking — rule-based, linear, SAT-style thinking — used to be enough. Now right-brain thinking — artistry, empathy, narrative, synthesis — is the big differentiator.

Friedman: Exactly. You know, I just came back from China and they're always proud of how many engineers they're educating. They are and bless them for it. But they're not educating rounded engineers. I hope we are.

Pink: You write in *The World Is Flat* about Georgia Tech emphasizing art and music for engineers. Is that the right approach?

Friedman: Yes. The Georgia Tech model

says your job is most likely not going to be a pure engineering job. Let's say you work for CNN as a computer specialist. It's very likely you will be asked to integrate different kinds of content with different kinds of technology platforms. If schools can actually produce people who are good synthesizers, they're going to be more effective and innovative workers.

(*Note:* I requested that the National Middle School Association post the complete Friedman article and NMSA has indicated that it will request permission from AASA to do so. Hopefully, by the time you receive this issue, you will be able to download the entire Friedman article by going to www.nmsa.org.)

Of course, none of this comes as a surprise to those of us who are well versed in current middle-level research and best practices. In fact, it is easy to see the supportive connection between what Friedman has to say in the AASA article and what the New York State Education Department requires of middle-level educators as presented in the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education (part 100.4).

Part 100.4 requires school districts in New York State to ensure that their middle-level programs align with *The Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education* and the State Education Department's *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*. (Both of these SED documents are available at www.nysmsa.org.)

The Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education is very comprehensive as it covers all aspects of how a young adolescent must be educated in New York State. In part it states:

“Teachers must be provided with regular opportunities to interact and collaborate to ensure that instruction is consistent and inter-related across and within the subject

areas. Scheduling flexibility is necessary to provide a comprehensive educational program, interdisciplinary curricula, targeted and timely academic intervention services, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and opportunities for students to engage in leadership and community service projects.”

It also states that:

“Creating effective schools with middle-level grades will necessitate systemic change and require a philosophy and mission committed to developing the whole child, a challenging and rigorous educational program, a supportive organization and structure, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who use effective instructional practices, strong leadership, a network of support appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents, ongoing professional learning, and a strong will to succeed.”

When Pink suggests that greater intellectual power comes from being able to use both the left and right sides of the brain and when Friedman says that today's students will have to be able to do things such as “integrate different kinds of content with different kinds of technology platforms,” they are really speaking to intellectual creativity being the key to our collective future as a nation.

As educators, we understand this to be true and we also know that we are charged with the responsibility for teaching these creative skills to our young adolescent students as part of a team effort. As was pointed out above, The NYSED Regents Policy Statement requires, as a matter of policy, that “Teachers must be provided with regular opportunities to interact and collaborate to ensure that instruction is consistent and inter-related across and within the subject areas.”

Developing creativity is not enough; we are also required by regulation (and common sense) to use best practices to meet the learn-

ing potential that exists in every child. The formal policy of the Board of Regents speaks to having at the middle-level “a philosophy and mission committed to developing the whole child.” This means that we must utilize methods that allow every child to develop so that he/she can attain his/her full potential. As educators we also understand that all children are different and that one size does not fit all. Therefore, we must be well versed in a variety of skills and strategies to ensure that whenever we review our level of success, we don’t find that some few students were missed in our quest for excellence because they didn’t fit into some rigid educational mold.

As Friedman points out, we are competing globally. Therefore, we need to understand the competition and ensure that we don’t rest on past accomplishments and fall behind. For example, we need to keep in mind that an aggressively competitive country such as China has more honor students than the entire student population in the United States. Consequently, not only must we ensure that all of our students are well educated, but we must also understand that we cannot afford to miss even one budding “Einstein” or “Edison.”

After all, there is no doubt that if we don’t consistently utilize best practices in our schools each day we will certainly miss numerous children with high potential without our even being aware that it happened. As educators, our goal should be to become both skilled enough and flexible enough in our schools and our classrooms to ensure that the needs of each and every student are consistently met. Just think of the possible result — we may end up with an “Einstein” or “Edison” every few years rather than one every century or so.

How many of these young people with the potential for greatness have we lost in the past? History tells us that while in school

Thomas Edison’s mind often wandered and his teacher called him “addled.” After three months in school, Thomas Edison’s formal schooling ended because he did not fit into the structure of that rigid instructional program. Consequently, his mother home schooled him from that point forward. Despite the odds, Edison proved himself to be one of the most productive scientific inventors of all time and, as such, he changed the world in very positive ways. While Thomas Edison’s experience as a student might be an extreme example, so too were his accomplishments. How many students in our schools today will miss out on a quality education both because they don’t measure up to predetermined expectations and because the “system” continues to be too inflexible to accommodate them?

One can only wonder how many potential “DaVincis,” “Edisons,” and “Einsteins” had both their creativity and their potential contributions to mankind arrested as a result of a stereotypical “old school” junior high education that mainly supported what we now know to be inefficient teaching — teaching that evidences a constant emphasis on rote memorization; requires thinking only within the box; and attempts to teach subjects as discrete, segregated entities without real-world connections.

We must find and teach to each student’s strengths while shoring up areas of weakness. As educators, we must not overly focus on the perceived deficits we find in our middle-level students. Rather, we must constantly seek out the uniqueness and natural creativity in each child and ensure that we utilize that uniqueness and creativity in our efforts to help that child to learn and to grow in his/her understanding of the real world. Success comes when that child is both able and motivated to regularly draw on diverse skills and knowledge as a means to bring creative solutions to real world needs.

It is one thing to be able to divide fractions, but it is quite another thing to **understand** the mathematical process and to know how and when to apply the concept in the real world. These higher level skills are very different from those needed to operationally determine the correct answer to a math computation. These higher level skills are best learned through guided exploration and directed real-world practice. Children naturally question and explore and this is part of a learning process that has developed through necessity over the ages for good purpose. Questioning and exploring should not be discouraged, but, rather constructively utilized by teachers to assist the student to further develop his/her creative thinking potential in all aspects of life. We seem to intuitively realize that this is the most effective way to work with younger children, so why not continue to practice through the middle grades what we know works?

So far, this article has spoken to the growing national understanding that teaching and learning should to be integrated across subject lines, that we need to use best practices to help all children meet their potential, and that our measure of instructional success should, at least in part, be based on the child's ability to creatively apply diverse learning to real-world problem solving. In addition to the above, we also need to instill in our students a sense of disciplined inquiry, the use of good judgment, and the ability to think logically "outside the box."

The following paragraphs were excerpted from the recently published book *Einstein*, by Walter Isaacson (2007).

Near the end of his life, Einstein was asked by the New York State Education Department what schools should emphasize. "In teaching history," he replied, "there should be extensive discussion of personalities who benefited mankind through independence of

character and judgment."

At a time when there is a new emphasis, in the face of global competition, on science and math education, we should also note the other part of Einstein's answer. "Critical comments by students should be taken in a friendly spirit," he said. "Accumulation of material should not stifle the student's independence." A society's competitive advantage will come not from how well its schools teach the multiplication and periodic tables, but from how well they stimulate creativity.

Therein lies the key, I think, to Einstein's brilliance and the lessons of his life. As a young student he never did well with rote learning. And later, as a theorist, his success came not from the brute strength of his mental processing power but from his imagination and creativity. He could construct complex equations, but more important, he knew that math is the language nature uses to describe her wonders. So he could visualize how equations were reflected in realities—how the electromagnetic field equations discovered by James Clerk Maxwell, for example, would manifest themselves to a boy riding alongside a light beam. As he once declared, "Imagination is more important than knowledge!"

That approach required him to embrace nonconformity. His success came from questioning conventional wisdom, challenging authority, and marveling at mysteries that struck others as mundane. This led him to embrace a morality and politics based on respect for free minds, free spirits, and free individuals. Tyranny repulsed him, and he saw tolerance not simply as a sweet virtue but as a necessary condition for a creative society "It is important to foster individuality," he said, "for only the individual can produce the new ideas."

This outlook made Einstein a rebel with a reverence for the harmony of nature, one

who had just the right blend of imagination and wisdom to transform our understanding of the universe. These traits are just as vital for this new century of globalization, in which our success will depend on our creativity, as they were for the beginning of the twentieth century, when Einstein helped usher in the modern age.

As we know, Albert Einstein was a very smart and productive person who knew how to think outside of the box. What few people probably know is that the development of his theories that served to shape the 20th century—including The Theory of Relativity—were arrived at not in a laboratory, but through “thought experiments” that only required a pencil, some paper, a comfortable chair, and his mind.

As you can see from the above passage, almost a century ago Einstein understood what was needed to bring about an innovative transformation. After the completion of con-

siderable research over the past few decades, American educators currently have reason to know how instructional methodology must be transformed in order to meet the innovative challenges that will impact our nation’s future productivity.

In New York State an excellent road map has been provided in the form of Part 100.4 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. It is now our responsibility as middle-level educators to do what we must to ensure that these regulations are translated into action in every middle-level program in our state—not just because it is required, but because it is clearly the right thing to do.

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) or phone/fax (914-747-9241).

Individual and Building Membership applications can be downloaded from our Web site: 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.



Research at a Glance

Jeff Craig, NYSMSA Director of Research and Technology

Where to Turn for Middle-Level Advice

Recently, yet another model about middle level reform was issued, this time from the Albany Institute for Research in Education (AIRE) of the University at Albany School of Education. Issued under the title *What Makes Middle Schools Work?*, the report identifies five common elements among ten higher-performing middle level programs in New York State as compared to six similar schools with average results (Albany Institute for Research in Education, 2007). Researchers went into the higher-performing middle schools and looked for common characteristics that could be used to explain the higher academic performance in these ten schools.

The advice for middle-level programs contained in the *What Makes Middle Schools Work?* report is not the only advice that reform-minded middle schools can turn to. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) has issued their recommendations for middle-level programs in their position titled: *This We Believe In: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (National Middle School Association, 2003). NMSA identified 14 characteristics to which middle-level programs should aspire. NMSA has also issued companion volumes of research and guidance since these were issued in 2003.

There's more. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) recently issued its recommendations for middle-level programs, entitled: *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle*

Level Reform. Included in this advice is a set of nine cornerstone strategies for middle-level programs and an accompanying list of thirty recommendations (National Association of Secondary School principals, 2006). NASSP first examined a similar report about high schools; later their sights were set on middle schools.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform has their own set of recommendations they think we ought to follow. These recommendations have been incorporated into the *School to Watch* program criteria: Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity, and Organizational Structures and Processes (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2002). There are eight to ten recommendations that belong to each of the criteria. Many states, including New York State through its *Essential Elements: Schools to Watch* program, actually use these criteria to identify and recognize middle-level schools and programs.

And then there's the classic collection of recommendations from the Carnegie Foundation's: *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. This was the "10 years later" version of the first Turning Points document and it suggests seven guiding principles and six practices in which middle level programs ought to engage (Jackson et al, 2000). The original Turing Points shined the spotlight on middle level education across the nation. This revisiting of the original work continues to be a frequent reference.

On top of these well-known documents and highly respected organizations, there are a number of comprehensive school reform models that specifically include recommendations for the middle level, including *AIM at Middle Grades Results*, *Different Ways of Knowing*, *Making Middle Grades Work*, *Making Schools Work*, *Middle Start*, *Talent Development Middle School Model*, and *Turning Points Transforming Middle Schools*.

This cacophony of advice can be confusing to say the least. It is hard for a middle-level educator to know where to look for guidance in school improvement. The good news is, however, that all of these approaches have in common a vision for middle-level programs that are engaging, rigorous, relevant, and rich. Payton, in 2006, conducted a crosswalk of some of these models and clearly identified the commonalities (Payton, 2006). We're lucky that in New York State there is particular clarity. There exists a single set of recommendations for us to follow, recommendations that have actually been codified by the Board of Regents and are incorporated into the Commissioners Recommendations. The recommendations are known as the *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs*. There are seven Essential Elements to which all middle-level programs in New York State should aspire. All of our school improvement and school reform efforts should begin with the *Essential Elements*. There exists a comprehensive collection of resources about the *Essential Elements* which can be found at nysmsa.org in the "Middle Level Essentials" section. You can find all sorts of documents, protocols, tutorials, presentations, etc. that you can use in your school. Now there is even a wiki to join to add your voice to the discussion about implementation of the *Essential Elements*.

Listed below are the different collections of advice for middle-level programs. A quick glance is all it takes for you to see for yourself

the overlap among them. It is my recommendation, and incidentally also the recommendation of our Board of Regents, that we use the *Essential Elements* as the road map to lead to success for all of our early adolescents.

Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.
2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.
3. An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and leadership.
6. A network of academic and personal support available for all students.
7. Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

What Makes Middle Schools Work

1. Trusting and respectful relationships: Relationships based on mutual trust and respect among administrators, teachers, students and parents are fundamental to all of the common elements in the findings. Nurturing these relationships provides the backbone for successful learning.
2. Students' social and emotional well-being: Higher-performing schools recognize that creating a sense of security for middle school students provides them with a support network and a connection to their

- school, removing significant barriers to learning.
3. **Teamwork:** Higher-performing schools establish a collaborative environment and organizational structure that support teamwork between and among teachers, school leaders and administrators. Groups of teachers, administrators, and specialists meet frequently and focus on specific instructional strategies and student performance within and across grades.
 4. **Evidence-based decision making:** Sharing and using data from a variety of sources to make decisions is critical to helping schools achieve success. Data are frequently gathered, analyzed and used in decision making regarding the impacts of new programs, instructional practices and interventions.
 5. **Shared vision of mission and goals:** When teachers and administrators build a vision of success and share goals, this leads to better communications, mutually agreed-upon expectations and more long-term success.

National Middle School Association Beliefs

1. Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so. Effective middle level educators understand the developmental uniqueness of the age group, the curriculum they teach, and effective learning and assessment strategies. They need specific teacher preparation before entering the classroom and continuous professional development as they pursue their careers.
 2. **Courageous, collaborative leadership.** Middle level leaders understand adolescents, the society, and the theory and practice of middle level education. As the prime determinant of the school culture, the principal influences student achievement and teacher effectiveness by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining an effective instructional program.
 3. A shared vision that guides decisions. All decisions made about the school should be guided by a shared vision and the mission statement derived from it.
 4. An inviting, supportive, and safe environment. A successful school is an inviting, supportive, and safe place, a joyful community that promotes in-depth learning and enhances students' physical and emotional well-being. In such a school, human relationships are paramount.
 5. High expectations for every member of the learning community. Educators and students hold themselves and each other to high expectations. Such confidence promotes positive attitudes and behaviors and motivates students to tackle challenging learning activities. Successful schools recognize that young adolescents are capable of far more than adults often assume.
 6. Students and teachers engaged in active learning. The most successful learning strategies are ones that involve each student personally. When students routinely assume the role of teacher, and teachers demonstrate that they are still learners, a genuine learning community is present.
 7. An adult advocate for every student. Academic success and personal growth increase markedly when young adolescents affective needs are met. All adults in successful middle level schools are advocates, advisors, and mentors.
 8. School-initiated family and community partnerships. Successful middle schools promote family involvement and take the initiative to develop needed home-school bonds. The involvement of family is linked to higher levels of student achievement and improved student behavior.
- Therefore, successful schools for young adolescents provide:
1. Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory. An effective

curriculum is based on criteria of high quality and includes learning activities that create opportunities for students to pose and answer questions that are important to them. Such a curriculum provides direction for what young adolescents should know and be able to do and helps them achieve the attitudes and behaviors needed for a full, productive, and satisfying life.

2. Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity. Since young adolescents learn best through engagement and interaction, learning strategies involve students in dialogue with teachers and with one another. Teaching approaches should enhance and accommodate the diverse skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents, and draw upon students' individual learning styles.
3. Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning. Continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures provide evidence about every student's learning progress. Grades alone are inadequate expressions for assessing the many goals of middle level education.
4. Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning. The interdisciplinary team of two to four teachers working with a common group of students is the building block for a strong learning community with its sense of family, where students and teachers know one another well, feel safe and supported, and are encouraged to take intellectual risks.
5. School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety. A school that fosters physical and psychological safety strives to build resiliency in young people by maintaining an environment in which peaceful and safe interactions are expected and supported by written policies, scheduled professional development, and student-focused activities.

6. Multifaceted guidance and support services. Developmentally responsive middle level schools provide both teachers and specialized professionals who are readily available to offer the assistance many students need in negotiating their lives both in and out of school.

Breaking Ranks in the Middle

1. Establish the academically rigorous essential learnings that a student is required to master in order to successfully make the transition to high school and align the curriculum and teaching strategies to realize that goal.
2. Create dynamic teacher teams that are afforded common planning time to help organize and improve the quality and quantity of interactions between teachers and students.
3. Provide structured planning time for teachers to align the curriculum across grades and schools and to map efforts that address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of students, especially at critical transition periods (e.g., elementary to middle grades, middle grades to high school).
4. Implement a comprehensive advisory or other program that ensures that each student has frequent and meaningful opportunities to meet with an adult to plan and assess the student's academic, personal, and social development.
5. Ensure that teachers assess the individual learning needs of students and tailor instructional strategies and multiple assessments accordingly.
6. Entrust teachers with the responsibility of implementing schedules that are flexible enough to accommodate teaching strategies consistent with the ways students learn most effectively and that allow for effective teacher teaming, common planning time, and other lesson planning.
7. Institute structural leadership systems that allow for substantive involvement in deci-

sion making by students, teachers, family members, and the community, and that support effective communication among these groups.

8. Align all programs and structures so that all social, economic, and racial/ethnic groups have open and equal access to challenging activities and learning.
9. Align the school-wide, comprehensive, ongoing professional development program and the Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) of staff members with the requisite knowledge of content, instructional strategies, and student developmental factors.

Turning Points 2000

1. Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.
2. Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners.
3. Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
4. Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
5. Govern democratically through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best.
6. Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
7. Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

Schools to Watch

Academic Excellence

High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well.

1. All students are expected to meet high academic standards. Teachers supply students with exemplars of high quality work that meets the performance standard. Students revise their work based on feedback until they meet or exceed the performance standard.
2. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with high standards. They provide a coherent vision for what students should know and be able to do. The curriculum is rigorous and non-repetitive; it moves forward substantially as students progress through the middle grades.
3. The curriculum emphasizes deep understanding of important concepts, development of essential skills, and the ability to apply what one has learned to real-world problems. By making connections across the disciplines, the curriculum helps reinforce important concepts.
4. Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the concepts and skills being taught.
5. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess student performance (e.g., exhibitions, projects, performance tasks) and maintain a collection of student work. Students learn how to assess their own and others' work against the performance standards.
6. The school provides students time to meet rigorous academic standards. Flexible scheduling enables students to engage in extended projects, hands-on experiences, and inquiry-based learning. Most class time is devoted to learning and applying knowledge or skills rather than classroom management and discipline.

7. Students have the supports they need to meet rigorous academic standards. They have multiple opportunities to succeed and extra help as needed.
8. The adults in the school have opportunities to plan, select, and engage in professional development aligned with nationally recognized standards. They have regular opportunities to work with their colleagues to deepen their knowledge and improve their practice. They collaborate in making decisions about rigorous curriculum and effective instructional methods. They discuss student work as a means of enhancing their own practice.

Developmental Responsiveness

High-performing schools with middle grades are sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.

1. The school creates a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development. The school groups adults and students in small learning communities characterized by stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships.
2. The school provides access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.
3. Teachers use a wide variety of instructional strategies to foster curiosity, exploration, creativity, and the development of social skills.
4. The curriculum is both socially significant and relevant to the personal interests of young adolescents.
5. Teachers make connections across disciplines to help reinforce important concepts and address real-world problems.
6. The school provides multiple opportunities for students to explore a rich variety of topics and interests in order to develop their identity, discover and demonstrate their own

competence, and plan for their future.

7. Students have opportunities for voice—posing questions, reflecting on experiences, developing rubrics, and participating in decisions.
8. The school develops alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of their children. It involves families as partners in their children's education, keeping them informed, involving them in their children's learning, and assuring participation in decision-making.
9. The school provides students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills, uses the community as a classroom, and engages the community in providing resources and support.
10. The school provides age-appropriate co-curricular activities.

Social Equity

High-performing schools with middle grades are socially equitable, democratic, and fair. They provide every student with high-quality teachers, resources, learning opportunities, and supports. They keep positive options open for all students.

1. Faculty and administrators expect high-quality work from all students and are committed to helping each student produce it. Evidence of this commitment includes tutoring, mentoring, special adaptations, and other supports.
2. Students may use many and varied approaches to achieve and demonstrate competence and mastery of standards.
3. The school continually adapts curriculum, instruction, assessment, and scheduling to meet its students' diverse and changing needs.
4. All students have equal access to valued knowledge in all school classes and activities.
5. Students have on-going opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and

others' cultures. The school values knowledge from the diverse cultures represented in the school and our nation.

6. Each child's voice is heard, acknowledged, and respected.
7. The school welcomes and encourages the active participation of all its families.
8. The school's reward system demonstrates that it values diversity, civility, service, and democratic citizenship.
9. The faculty is culturally and linguistically diverse.
10. The school's suspension rate is low and in proportion to the student population.

Organizational Structures and Processes

High-performing schools with middle grades are learning organizations that establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence.

1. A shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does drives every facet of school change. Shared and sustained leadership propels the school forward and preserves its institutional memory and purpose.
2. Someone in the school has the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication.
3. The school is a community of practice in which learning, experimentation, and reflection are the norm. Expectations of continuous improvement permeate the school. The school devotes resources to ensure that teachers have time and opportunity to reflect on their classroom practice and learn from one another. At school everyone's job is to learn.
4. The school devotes resources to content-rich professional development, which is connected to reaching and sustaining the school

vision. Professional development is intensive, of high quality, and ongoing.

5. The school is not an island unto itself. It draws upon others' experience, research, and wisdom; it enters into relationships such as networks and community partnerships that benefit students' and teachers' development and learning.
6. The school holds itself accountable for its students' success rather than blaming others for its shortcomings. The school collects, analyzes, and uses data as a basis for making decisions. The school grapples with school-generated evaluation data to identify areas for more extensive and intensive improvement. It delineates benchmarks, and insists upon evidence and results. The school intentionally and explicitly reconsiders its vision and practices when data call them into question.
7. Key people possess and cultivate the collective will to persevere and overcome barriers, believing it is their business to produce increased achievement and enhanced development for all students.
8. The school works with colleges and universities to recruit, prepare, and mentor novice and experienced teachers. It insists on having teachers who promote young adolescents' intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and ethical growth. It recruits a faculty that is culturally and linguistically diverse.
9. The school includes families and community members in setting and supporting the school's trajectory toward high performance. The school informs families and community members about its goals for students and students' responsibility for meeting them. It engages all stakeholders in ongoing and reflective conversation, consensus building, and decision making about governance to promote school improvement.

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Note: I am still collecting contact information from people conducting research in New York State about the middle level, with the purpose of forming a casual network on NY middle-level researchers. If you are interested in exploring such a group, please contact me, Jeff Craig, at craig@nysmsa.org.

Nominations for Fall 2008 Election

NYSMSA is governed by a Board of Directors elected by its membership. Nominations are needed for the following positions:

- **Secretary**
- **Director of Region V**
- **Director of Region X**

Officers serve for a period of two (2) years. Regional Directors serve for a period of three (3) years and must work in the regions they represent.

The Board, along with other association personnel, meets approximately six times a year to direct the course of our professional organization.

You may nominate an individual or self-nominate for any of the open positions. All candidates for office must be members of NYSMSA.

Please provide the following information about the nominee:

- Name & Current Work Position
- Place & Address of Employment
- Work & Home Telephone Numbers
- E-Mail Address
- Position being sought

In addition, please include a photograph and a paragraph discussing your reasons for seeking this position. All nominations must be postmarked no later than **July 25, 2008**.

Mail to: NYSMSA
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Ballots will be mailed to the membership in late August. Election results will be announced at the October 2008 conference.



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Participants will select and participate in one of several instructional strands being offered by practitioner experts. Each session will provide participants with the tools needed to apply back in your middle-level school what is taught in practical ways. Instruction will include hands-on components with twenty-five or fewer individuals in each session.

Special activities have also been scheduled to encourage socialization and networking. We are hopeful that in addition to gaining cutting-edge middle-level education skills and learning of current research in the field, both instructors and participants will form lasting collegial networks that will support new and creative middle-level instructional endeavors long into the future.

Registrations will be accepted on a "first come- first served" basis.

Below are the hands-on workshops that will be offered during the Institute:

- **Designing a Sustainable Advisory Program to Support Student Learning** (Linda Ruest)
- **Differentiated Instruction: The Perfect Equation for Successful Learning Outcomes** (Matthew Conrick, Tina Hayes, Kathleen Skellie, and Olivia Sutton)
- **Why Raising Test Scores Alone Isn't Enough: Assessing and Improving Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) through ENGAGING Instruction** (Dr. Paul Vermette and Cindy Kline)
- **Learning is FUNDamental** (Vivian Demers-Jagoda)
- **Schools to Watch Boot Camp: Using the Essential Elements and STW Application to Improve Your School** (Carl Christensen, Mark Fish, and Terry Quinn)
- **Middle-Level Leadership That Works** (Jeff Craig)
- **Classroom Management and Student Motivation Strategies That Work** (Jack Berckemeyer)

Go to www.NYSMSA.org for detailed information and to download the NYSMSA/CMoG registration brochure today.

Lea's Lessons

Lea Macdonald



Response to Intervention: Assisting Our Struggling Learners

RTI is an education model that promotes early identification of students who may be at risk for learning difficulties (NRCLD).

History of RTI

Every year teachers are asked to make changes in their instruction and assessment to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms. One of the most recent additions in many schools across New York is the implementation of early intervention services for struggling learners. All school districts in New York State have Academic Intervention Services (AIS) in place to help at-risk students meet the New York State standards and meet the criteria for the state assessments. Secondly, many classroom teachers already follow a responsive protocol based on the differentiated instruction (DI) model to meet the varied needs of the diverse learners in the classroom. Teachers differentiate the content, process, and/or product based on the readiness, learning styles, and/or interest of their students. Teachers who use differentiated instruction in their classrooms are already offering responsive, student-centered, best practice instruction.

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized to address the need for prevention-focused instructional practices to be used in the regular classroom. These Early Intervening Services (EIS) are intended to help students who have not been identified as eligible for special education, but require additional academic support in order to succeed in the regular education classroom.

Research-based studies have found that the earlier interventions take place, the better the outcomes for struggling learners. With the support of new federal initiatives, more educators will be empowered to be highly responsive in assisting at-risk students.

What is RTI?

In many schools today, when a student can't keep up with class instruction, that student's only option for help is to qualify for special education services. However, if a student struggles at a school that uses the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, the staff's first thought is: Maybe the student isn't getting the instruction that he or she needs to succeed. These schools don't wait for students to fail. They act immediately to get the student the help he or she needs.

The purpose of RTI is to offer educators a framework in which to structure intervention services to all at-risk students. Students who do not make adequate academic progress and who are at risk for academic success receive increasingly intensive instructional services. The RTI process involves gathering and examining data about the learner from multiple reliable sources. Educators use these results to assess the effectiveness of the interventions and to determine appropriate new instructional plans. It is important to understand that no specific RTI model is prescribed in the law. RTI is about responsive teaching that benefits all learners; however, there are key essential elements that lay the foundation for RTI.

- Under an RTI framework schools implement school-wide screenings using tools such as DIBELS, AIMS web, 4Sight, DRA and

STAR, to name a few. These screenings are repeated periodically during the year and the results are used to guide instructional decisions on behalf of learners with different needs.

- Classroom teachers represent the first line of early interventions. Teachers are expected to implement researched-based instructional strategies that match a student's learning needs as identified through the initial screening process and classroom assessments. Instruction is adjusted accordingly to maximize student achievement.
- RTI requires that the progress of all students is closely monitored to provide for instructional options for different learning needs.
- Classroom teachers will collaborate with colleagues to explore additional instructional options if a student demonstrates the need for additional support.
- Students failing to respond to supplementary instruction and assistance may be given more intensive support on an individual basis.

Think of Response to Intervention as a series of steps:

1. Instruction in the general classroom: Screening assessments are given to reveal at-risk students.
2. Classroom teacher provides instruction or works with students in small groups.
3. Instruction with greater frequency or duration: If difficulty persists, specialists may be brought in for a comprehensive evaluation.

Future of RTI

Response to Intervention is now being used more to prevent academic failure than to specifically determine which students have learning disabilities. Also, it has been used mostly for reading in elementary schools. Almost no research results yet exist on how it works in middle schools; however, this should begin to

change over the next few years. The success of RTI isn't a one time event but, rather a new way of "doing school." Preparing teachers, developing responsive routines, and establishing procedures to support this initiative is critical. Because research has shown that well-designed instructional programs and strategies significantly improve learning when carefully monitored, the Response to Intervention approach may be a way to improve learning for all children.

Next year the focus of this column will be on strategies to assist struggling learners in academic, behavioral, and study skills/organizational areas. Meanwhile, check out the following website for articles, strategies, curriculum-based measurement data tools, and assessment methods for implementing RTI in your middle school: www.interventioncentral.com

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The Tween Brain: Midway between Infant Dependency and Adult Autonomy

Robert Sylwester



Our brain's maturation follows an intriguing 20-year rhythmic trajectory that helps to explain child and adolescent behavior. To simplify a complex process, this development encompasses two distinct 10-year periods — a childhood acceptance of dependence, and an adolescent reach for independence.

Each 10-year period begins slowly and awkwardly with a four-year initial activation of the brain systems that process the focus of that period, followed by a six-year developmental drive towards confident competence. Think of the four preschool years followed by the six K-5 years, followed by the four middle school years followed by the six high school and early college years.

Our brain is basically a social system. Even a simple task involves the collaboration of many of our brain's hundreds of systems and subsystems. For example, separate subsystems within our visual system process quantity, color, shape, location, and movement. Their collaborative activity can lead to the perception of a red ball rolling across a table — which may spark our brain's decision-making systems to grasp the ball, and our motor system to carry out the action.

These hundreds of cognitive systems don't mature simultaneously. Children can grasp before they can walk, and talk before they can read. Similarly, the early adolescent brain can successfully carry out many but not all the functions of a mature brain.

This article will focus principally on the brain development that occurs during late childhood and early adolescence (the *tween* years), perhaps our brain's most important

developmental period — but all educators should have at least a functional understanding of the entire organization and development of our brain in order to view their assignment in context. This article will provide that background.

Brain Organization and Development

Our brain is organized and develops from bottom to top, back to front, and right to left.

Bottom to Top Organization. Our brain is composed of (1) the relatively small subcortical systems such as the brainstem and cerebellum that are located at the base of our brain, and (2) the cerebrum, a large deeply folded overlying sheet of neuronal tissue called the cortex, and its dense underlying connective network. The subcortical systems regulate such innate subconscious survival functions as circulation, respiration, and automatic movements, and the cerebrum processes learned conscious thought and behavior. Childhood and adolescent brain development occurs principally within the cerebrum.

The cortex is a quadrant. An ear-to-ear fissure separates the sensory lobes at the back of the cortex from the frontal lobes, and a back-to-front fissure separates the two hemispheres. Each hemisphere contains a complete set of sensory and frontal lobes, and all major systems are highly interconnected.

Our brain's principal tasks are to *recognize* and *respond* to the *novel* and *familiar* challenges we confront. The four cortical regions identified above process key elements of these four tasks, and early adolescence initiates their integration into a functional unit.

Back to Front Organization. The paired sets of hemispheric sensory lobes receive and process information about our body and the external environment. They transform such sensory data into a comprehensive perceptual map of the current environment and its challenges. They thus *recognize* (or interpret) the nature of the current challenges as they identify, locate, and integrate the individual elements (as in the rolling ball illustration above).

The sensory lobes mature during childhood. For example, children initially master verbal language and then the greater complexities of written language. Language provides efficient memory pegs for the increasing amount of complex natural and cultural concepts we confront, and it enhances social interaction. Children similarly master increasingly complex mathematical concepts and skills over time because knowing the magnitude and space/time relationships of the dangers and opportunities we confront is also central to survival. By the time children reach the age of ten, most will have mastered the basic language and mathematical skills and the cultural information they will need during adolescence. The elementary school has a major responsibility to develop such factual knowledge and skills to the automatic level required in social interaction and frontal lobe problem solving.

Our frontal lobe processing systems receive the sensory lobes' interpretation of the current challenge, determine whether and how best to respond, and execute the appropriate behavior. Our frontal lobes can also shift us from reactive to proactive thought and behavior – to imagine, and then consciously predict and prepare for potential challenges.

It's important to quickly and accurately *recognize* the dynamics of a looming challenge, but it's often equally important to delay a decision in order to reflectively consider various alternatives before we *respond* to the challenge. For example, our sensory lobes' ability to

rapidly interpret a menu's information is cognitively different from our frontal lobes' decision about what to order.

Our frontal lobes mature during adolescence and early adulthood. Since our frontal lobes develop the solutions we need to survive, one might think that they should mature first – but then we would be trying to solve problems that we don't understand (something governments frequently and unsuccessfully attempt to do).

The cultural strategy for rearing children with immature frontal lobes is to expect the adults in their lives to make major frontal lobe decisions for them – where to live, what to wear, when to go to bed, etc. When children do make decisions, an adult is usually nearby to veto it if it's inappropriate. If no adult is nearby, children will typically do what they think an adult would do in that situation — and they usually know since they spend a lot of time observing adults making such decisions. Further we explicitly teach them how to make the important decisions they need to make — how to cross a street or ride a bus, how to use a phone to call for help, how to identify and respond to potential predators.

Children with immature frontal lobes are willing to let adults make many decisions for them. Infants who can't walk are similarly willing to let adults carry them. But just as young children generally don't want to be carried while they're learning to walk, adolescents don't want adults to make frontal lobe decisions for them while their frontal lobes are maturing.

The only way we can learn to walk is to practice walking on various surfaces, and the only way our frontal lobes can mature is to practice the reflective problem solving and advanced social skills that our frontal lobes process — even though early adolescents aren't very successful initially.

School should thus provide a non-threatening exploratory venue for a *tween* brain that is reasonably competent at recognizing the dynamics of a problem but is only beginning to develop reflective response capabilities. Infants insist on exploring independent movement, and early adolescents insist on exploring independent problem solving strategies — a significant shift from their childhood acceptance and use of adult-imposed rules, procedures, and algorithms.

Individual and collaborative classroom projects focused on budding interests, and the informal assessment of such enterprises provide excellent opportunities for exploration and feedback. The *tween* fascination with games, hobbies, and extended conversations with friends also demonstrate the seemingly innate exploratory drive *tweens* exhibit as they begin their cognitive shift from a sensory to a frontal lobe focus. School extracurricular programs provide further exploratory possibilities.

Right to Left Organization. The fundamental organizing principle for the right and left hemispheres emerges out of an important question a brain must ask whenever danger or opportunity looms: Have I confronted this challenge before?

The right hemisphere (in most humans) is organized to process novel challenges and creative solutions, and the left hemisphere familiar problems and established routines. For example we process strange faces principally in our right hemisphere, and familiar faces in the left.

Although both hemispheres are active in processing most cognitive functions, the relative level of activation shifts from the right to the left hemisphere with increased competence. The right hemisphere is thus organized to rapidly and creatively respond to a novel challenge, but the more stable left hemisphere processing systems eventually translate the successful initial responses into an efficient established routine that is activated whenever the challenge reoccurs.

The arts are unique, creative, aesthetic expressions of a phenomenon, and so draw heavily on right hemisphere processing. Crafts are reproducible artistic expressions and so draw heavily on established left hemisphere routines. Similarly, body language communicates creatively, while articulate speech provides a more efficient reproducible communication vehicle. Both hemispheric systems are thus critical to successful cognition, but things tend to begin in the right hemisphere.

What occurs within the sensory and frontal lobes of one brain that's confronting a novel challenge parallels the *brainstorming* that occurs within a committee of brains confronting a novel challenge. The process begins with the identification of all possible explanations and proposals, and eventually converges on a single acceptable explanation and decision. It doesn't have to be the best possible explanation and solution — just something that gains general agreement. The committee then saves its decision in the minutes, just as a single brain saves it in memory (or *saves it to disk*).

When a similar problem emerges later, the record is retrieved and edited to meet any different circumstances, and that decision is then saved. The process continues until the committee (or the individual) creates a policy or routine to automatically follow whenever this problem or a close variant occurs.

As we individually and corporately age we tend to develop an increasingly large repertoire of such routines and policies that we incorporate into the resolution of a wide variety of challenges. We may even come to resent novel challenges because we lack the energy they require for resolution. We thus become set in our ways. We further seek to impose our solutions to life's problems on young people who need to explore and resolve such challenges within the context of their own maturation and generation. We thus teach them our answers to questions they haven't yet asked.

The Educational Challenge

The term *tween* omits the first two letters of *between*, and yet the verb *to be* is central to what's occurring within our brain between late childhood and early adolescence. Our brain is shifting its focus from a receptive to a responsive cognitive mode, from the mastery of existing adult responses to the creative exploration of its own explanations and responses. *Tweens* thus have a current *being* integrity that educators should recognize and respect. Let them *be* who they are. They are neither really smart children nor incompetent adolescents. They're just trying their best to enhance the maturation and integration of some very complex cognitive systems.

It doesn't require a curricular revolution or a major reallocation of resources to seek *tween* analogs of adult challenges that can be individually and collaboratively explored in a non-threatening classroom. For example, genuinely involving *tweens* in the collaborative establishment and regulation of classroom management procedures helps to prepare them for family, work, and community management issues they'll later confront (Sylwester, 2003). Encouraging them to explore creative alternative approaches to curricular assignments helps to prepare them for an adult life characterized more by personal preferences and choices than by imposed rigid procedures. Teaching them about their brain and cognitive processes (such as the *brainstorming* analogy) helps them to understand and accept the validity of their current developmental status. Viewing error as a bump on the road to solution reduces their fear of risk. All such simple instructional shifts enhance *tween* brain maturation.

State standards and assessment programs for *tweens* are problematic. It seems legitimate for such testing programs to expect elementary students to master the cultural knowledge and skills that are requisite for effective problem solving, and it seems legiti-

mate to expect upper adolescents to explain the decisions they make in curricular tasks – but I'm dubious about what a high stakes testing program accomplishes for intellectually fluctuating *tweens*.

The frontal lobe maturation level of early adolescents is analogous to the sensory lobe maturation level of preschool children – but we shouldn't think pejoratively of the low competence level of either group. Language capabilities don't emerge instantly, and neither do problem-solving capabilities. We informally evaluate the cognitive development of preschool children, but typically encourage them to proceed at their own pace until they enter school, unless they're well behind the norm.

Educators should at least consider a similar policy for the *tween* years. Cooperative learning activities, portfolio and other informal diagnostic assessments, and continuous careful observation by teachers would encourage creative exploration and reduce the stress of high stakes tests in students who are already going through a stressful maturation period.

Students attend school for 13 years. Shouldn't they have recess at some point? *Recess* in its true historical sense is a very active student-centered time — an opportunity for students to explore rather than to perform, to socialize rather than to memorize, to *be* rather than to *do*. Thinking of the *tween* years in traditional *recess* terms might do a lot to help design a *tween* school environment, curriculum, and assessment program that puts the *be* back in *tween*.

We're currently observing the disintegration of the middle school movement at the same time that the cognitive neurosciences are validating what genuine middle schools do best. Kind of weird!

Resources

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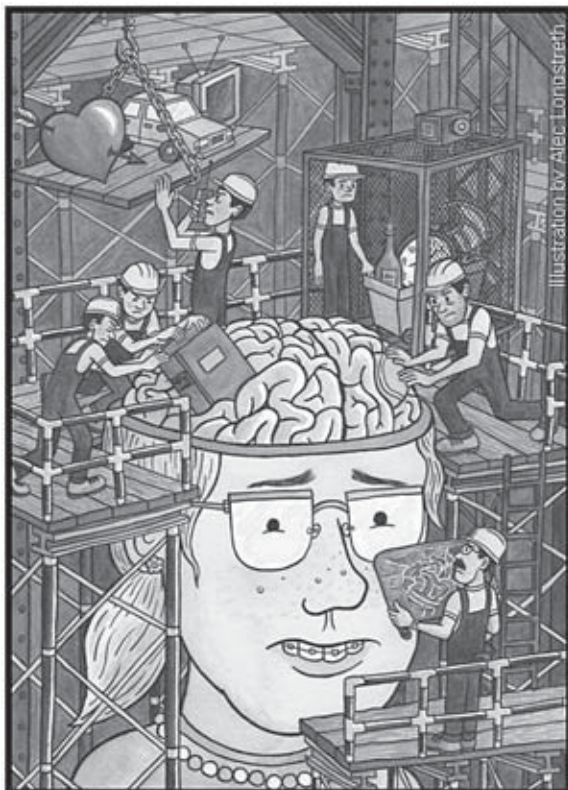
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The Middle School Mind: A Work in Progress

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Reading and Writing at the Middle Level

Donna L. Johnson

The Palmyra-Macedon Middle School located in Palmyra, New York, has developed and successfully implemented an innovative instructional model for teaching reading and writing to seventh and eighth grade students.

Starting the Program

The first step in making any instructional changes is to look at the data related to current program. The administrators, along with a committee of ELA teachers, used test data from the 2002-2004 TONYSS to track student progress from grade six through grade eight. The data showed a 2% drop in scores from grade six to seven and then an even bigger decline, 8%, from grade seven to eight.

With the data showing that students were performing well in sixth grade, the next step to take was to look into the difference between ELA instruction in sixth grade as opposed to seventh and eighth. In grade six, students were receiving sixty minutes of reading on a daily basis and ninety minutes every other day for ELA (writing skills). At grades seven and eight, students received ninety minutes every other day of combined reading and writing.

With the support of the data and the difference in time on task instruction, there posed a need to make a change in how ELA was being taught in grades seven and eight. In realizing this, a proposal was made to increase the amount of staff for the ELA department at the middle school. This would allow for increased reading and writing time for students at these

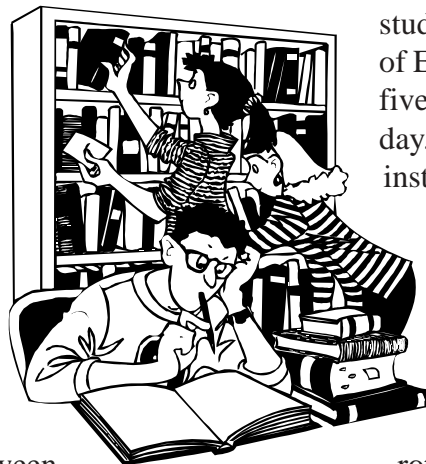
grade levels. The Board of Education supported this request and an additional ELA teacher was approved. If the additional class and teacher proved to be successful, a grade eight ELA teacher would be added the following year.

Instructional Delivery 2004-2005

Sixth grade remained the same, with students receiving sixty minutes of reading on a daily basis and ninety minutes every other day for ELA (writing skills). At grade seven, students received seventy-five minutes of ELA every other day, with seventy-five minutes of reading on the opposite day. This increased ELA and reading instruction by an average of thirty minutes every day. Grade eight did not change its instructional model — ninety minutes of ELA every other day.

With block scheduling in place at the middle school, students rotate on an A and B day schedule. On A days, all seventh graders receive ELA/writing workshop, with reading/reading workshop on B days. Students needing the highest level of teacher intervention were placed in reading classes where one of the two reading specialists would push-in for support.

To focus on current best practices in reading and writing, the Balanced Literacy Framework based on the research of Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, already used in grades kindergarten through six, was now in place for grade seven. Through professional development offered in the district, along with consultants and training outside of the district, the seventh grade teachers modified their instruction to



incorporate this framework. The framework, which incorporates the New York State Learning Standards into a balanced literacy model, follows.

Reading Workshop

- Read Aloud (20 minutes)
- Mini-Lesson (5-10 minutes)
- Guided Reading, Independent Reading, Centers (20 minutes)
- Literature Study (20 minutes)
- Closure (5 minutes)

Writing Workshop

- “Poem Moment” (15 minutes)
- Mini-Lesson/Modeling (15 minutes)
- Sustained Writing/Teacher Conferencing (20-30 minutes)
- Author’s Chair/Closure (15 minutes)

Reflections and Benefits

Teachers

- More time to discuss and read meaningful text
- Time to individualize developmental reading instruction
- More time for individualized teacher feedback
- More time to practice/use reading strategies
- More time to make connections to other content areas

Students

- “Something in ELA that helps me with my writing is the twenty minutes or more of just writing because I can improve my writing skills.”
- “When I do guided reading I have more confidence when I read!”
- “Reading Workshop is good because we read more often and as I read every other day I get better.”
- “Writing workshop has made me a better writer because of the conferences. I have learned a lot from peer and teacher confer-

ences. Also the mini lessons helped make my writing stronger.”

With this new framework in place, the 2004-2005 TONYSS assessments showed an increase of 11% from the prior year. The same class scored 4% lower on the TONYSS in grade six. Additionally, teachers in other content areas also benefited from the third teacher on the team. With the additional class taking place, each content area (math, science and social studies) benefited from smaller class sizes. An additional result would lead to incorporating reading and writing into the content areas and increased scores for all content areas.

The Response

With the success of the program, an additional ELA teacher was hired for the 2005-2006 school year. The format for grade eight would now match what had been done the previous year in grade seven. With a different test than the TONYSS in place for grades 3-8, the data would not be a true comparison. However, the eighth grade had been taking this test for several years now and each year the results were poor. The expectation for this class was that, with three years of reading and ELA every day, the students would perform much higher on this assessment. Each year, since the implementation of this model, state scores have increased at a steady rate.

Goals of a Team

The middle school philosophy advocates teaming and collaboration among grade levels, not departments. Therefore the ownership for the increase in state tests cannot solely be granted to the ELA department. In 2005, the district established Lead Teacher roles. Once a month, the lead teachers in the middle school meet to establish consistency between content areas in relation to reading and writing skills. In addition, in 2005 the district adopted the 6+1 Traits of Writing as a foundation of common language and skills to focus for instruction in

writing. Consequently, every teacher in the middle school received professional development with the 6+1 traits and each new teacher is trained every year.

With the addition of an ELA teacher, all eighth graders participated in an Excellence Academy class dedicated to teaching the strategies and skills needed to be successful on the NYS Assessment. In January 2008, a seventh grade Excellence Academy class was added, incorporating reading and writing skills to forming study and organizational habits.

The vision for the middle school is to create students who can independently read and write and to provide a strong foundation for a success-

ful future. This shared vision will create life-long learners and successful adults.

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NYS Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Program 2008

Schools to Watch

Islip Middle School
Islip, New York
Dr. Timothy Martin, Principal

•

Pioneer Middle School
Yorkshire, New York
Ravo Root, Principal

Rising School to Watch

Glens Falls Middle School
Glens Falls, New York
Christopher Reed, Principal

Congratulations!

New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program (2008-09) (Fourth Cohort)

Do you believe your middle-level school is a model for others? If so, please consider completing the application for the fourth 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 fourth 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 responsive, 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*.

An EE: STW State Leadership Team consisting of representatives from the New York State Education Department, the New York State Middle School Association, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the New York State Association of Teacher Educators, the New York Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Liaisons and Support Schools, and the New York City Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform is directing this initiative. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform developed the project prototype — the nationally recognized Schools-to-Watch Program — in 1999. New York State's Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program is a state-level adaptation of the National Forum's model.

In New York State, selection criteria for the Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program are aligned with the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*, the Education Department's seven *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*, and the National Forum's four tenets of a model middle-level school: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and processes aimed at continuous improvement.

Benefits to participating schools and districts that elect to complete and submit an application include:

- A thorough, research-based review of the middle-level school and its programs consistent with the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*, the State Education Department's *Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs*, and Commissioner's Regulations related to the middle grades.
- Engagement of the educational community in a constructive school-improvement activity.
- Identification of school/program strengths as well as areas in need of improvement.

- Development of a research-based continuous improvement plan for the school.
- Collection of research-based baseline data to substantiate requests to the State Education Department to implement innovative programs and practices (as per Commissioner’s Regulations).
- Complimentary registration for a site team at the New York State Middle School Association’s Annual Conference.

Additional benefits to those schools and districts ultimately selected to be in New York State’s fourth cohort of Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch schools include:

- National and state recognition for the district, school, and staff.
- Membership in a small, select pantheon of nationally recognized middle-level schools.
- Priority recipients of targeted grants for research and special projects.
- Professional development opportunities and networking through complimentary Building Membership to the New York State Middle School Association.
- Coaching towards continued success.

The minimum eligibility criteria are:

- I. Schools making application must have **at least TWO of the following grades:** grade six, grade seven, grade eight **and**
- II. Schools making application may satisfy the minimum student performance eligibility requirements in one of two ways:
 - Possess a 2007-08 Performance Index of 160 or higher OR
 - With a 2007-08 Performance Index of less than 160, have met all Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) growth targets for both the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years.

Eligible schools and districts interested in being considered for the fourth 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). Click on “Schools to Watch” and follow the directions to complete the school self-rating and the formal application. **Note that completed applications must be postmarked no later than Friday, October 3, 2008.**

Questions about New York State’s Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program should be directed to a member of the EE: STW State Leadership Team:

Marybeth Casey
 NYS Education Department
 (518) 474-8892
 Mcasey2@mail.nysed.gov

David Payton
 EE: STW State Director
 (518) 356-3299
 dpayton@nycap.rr.com

OR

Contact the New York State Middle School Association directly at NYSMSA@aol.com

The Hudson River: One Team's Approach to Flowing across the Content Areas

Victoria Leroux



Interdisciplinary projects by definition cannot be achieved by focusing narrowly on one subject area. Instead, interdisciplinary projects seek out the connections between subject areas. These projects are often based around a theme, a time period, a topic, an area of the world, or a problem or issue. (Manning, 2007)

The 2007-2008 school year for the Red 7 team at Oliver W. Winch has been quite rewarding thus far when it comes to making interdisciplinary connections across the curriculum. After many hours of attending workshops and curricula writing, our seventh grade team of teachers has truly come into its own with regard to its interdisciplinary project that deals primarily with the Hudson River. Ultimately, this project has proved to be a platform to maneuver into other areas of cross-curricular approaches while tapping into the *Essential Elements*.

Our team first explored the idea of incorporating the Hudson River into our curriculum when our Science teacher, Cheri Dempsey, wanted to focus on environmental stewardship and general environmental education with our students. Our goal was to dig deeper and strive to engage the students in a variety of ways so that our students and teachers alike can learn to appreciate a river like the Hudson. After all, this river is literally in our backyard.

As participants in this new initiative, our team of teachers, as well as our Media Specialist, developed various learning opportunities that we shared with our school commu-

nity. As a team we incorporated a wide variety of subject areas and disciplines. In turn, each core subject has a very intricate part in its exploration of the Hudson River:

Library Media Specialist – Maureen Borgeest provides a list of all materials our library has and posts Internet links on our school web page to further access information about the Hudson River. She also obtains all necessary print and media resources and provides them to the students.

Social Studies – Craig Scott creates lessons that demonstrate how important the Hudson River was to the human developments in our immediate area. Current events, mostly about Hudson River dredging, are also explored.

Blythe Hubert, Math, develops mathematics lessons using the data obtained in our team research and scientific study gathered on our site visits on the Hudson.

Home and Careers – Karen Cornell leads the students in a career comparison regarding the river and its many uses, as well as its many regulations.

English Language Arts – Victoria Leroux engages students in the writing process in which journal entries and learning logs are compiled based on the students' research on the Hudson River. Various literature pieces such as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, in which the Hudson River is a mentioned setting, are also explored.

Science – CheriLyn Dempsey conducts an in-depth study of the Hudson River using invertebrate organisms to study water quality.

Literacy and differentiated instruction are very widespread initiatives in our school district. This approach to exploring the Hudson River covers all the bases across each core subject. Our team of teachers embrace the notion that there is more than one type of learner; therefore, our in-class time and out-of-class assignments frequently employ the multiple intelligences and Bloom’s Taxonomy. Throughout our course of study, various project/ assignment options are given to the students so that they may make a choice that is workable for them. This differentiated approach enables our students to capitalize on their independent strengths. (See Diagram 1)

To further enhance the learning experience, our team of teachers has organized two distinct “*being there*” field trips that truly

emphasize a hands-on approach. The research compiled here will be brought back into the classroom and later employed by the students throughout the year.

Warrensburg Fish Hatchery Field Trip

At this particular site, the students develop a greater understanding of the Hudson River by comparing various river sites along this area of the Hudson. Since we take this field trip in the late part of September, our students are beginning to develop a greater knowledge base of all the different aspects of a river including:

- quality of life
- affected (altered, polluted) vs. non-affected river

Hudson River Project: Free Choice Grid

<p>Create a 2-D or 3-D map of the river and its landmarks. Highlight and describe at least 6 points of interest along the way. The map should be from end-to-end.</p>	<p>Write and illustrate a children’s book set on the Hudson. Include the setting and two historical points in your book. Also, include at least 4 illustrations.</p>	<p>Write an article for a travel magazine highlighting and describing at least 6 Hudson River sites. Include 6 or more pictures.</p>
<p>Write a song about the Hudson River. Be ready to perform it or show a music video. You must include song sheet with lyrics.</p>	<p>Create a board game using the sights, animals, plants, etc. of the Hudson River. The board itself should be constructed of a sturdy piece of material, such as wood. It should be eye appealing. Include a set of rules and playing pieces.</p>	<p>Write a three-stanza poem based on the Hudson River. Be prepared to read it or show a video of it.</p>
<p>Create four diary entries written by Henry Hudson. Share entries throughout his life, including causes and effects for his exploration of what became the river named after him. What was life like in his day?</p>	<p>What area is the Tech-Valley we keep hearing about? What is nanotechnology? What careers are involved? How does one prepare for these jobs? (There is a College of Nanotechnology at Albany State University.)</p>	<p>What kinds of careers work up and down the Hudson? Describe three careers...How did they prepare for them? What do they do? Create a poster, storyboard, power point, or mobile to present your information.</p>

DIAGRAM 1

Each field trip will scaffold off one another, incorporating parallel lesson plans and assessments for comparison and contrast.

The students also engage in numerous hands on/listening activities:

- tour the Fish Hatchery Facility
- collect data on the types of trees
- estimate the diameter of the trees using DBH (diameter breast height)
- estimate the height of trees
- make leaf and bark rubbings
- sketch a tree profile

Students will develop a greater understanding of watersheds.

- Ecosystems
- Abiotic and biotic relationships
- How these interact with each other
- How the Hudson River changes
- Past, present, future of the Hudson River

Haviland's Cove Field Trip

Students will develop a greater knowledge base of all the different aspects of a river.

The students will engage in numerous listening activities such as an informative piece detailing the historical importance of the Feeder Dam Canal. With this knowledge base, students will respond to a journal prompt regarding the historical significance of the Feeder Dam Canal.

"Sum of all Parts" from the Project Wet Curriculum and Activity Guide

The students will engage in a discussion facilitated by a Lake Champlain Lake George planning board staff member. This oral and artistic demonstration portrays the impact of pollution along the Hudson River. Students will then be instructed to design a mock parcel of land with a given monetary amount to be developed along the river bank. After-

wards, an analysis of the student's property and the pollution impact will be discussed.

Along other station sites the students will:

- collect data on the types of trees
- estimate the diameter of the trees using DBH (diameter breast height)
- estimate of the height of trees
- conduct an invertebrate study
- compare and contrast invertebrates found
- record data of observations found

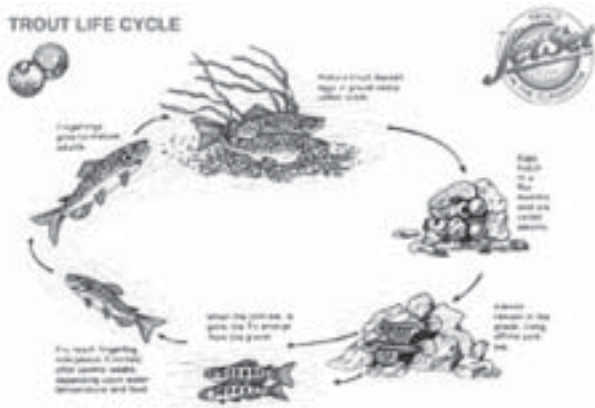
**For further review students will compare and contrast all observations from both sites.

Based on their prior knowledge, students will develop a greater understanding of the influence of the Hudson River and its impact on American history. The two field trips will scaffold off one another, incorporating parallel lesson plans and assessments for comparison and contrast.

To further enhance the hands-on learning that occurs on our field trips, Mrs. Dempsey, our Red 7 Science teacher, attended the annual Trout in the Classroom (TIC) conference in October 2007. The Trout in the Classroom Program is sponsored by Trout Unlimited, an organization dedicated to conserving, protecting, and restoring North America's cold water fisheries and their watersheds.

While at the conference she learned about many educational activities that she has introduced to our students regarding this topic. She also learned more about setting up a tank in the Science classroom and, most importantly, she received 100 Brown Trout eggs. During the 2007-08 school year, our Red 7 students have earned Dempsey Trout Licenses by taking an assessment to prove they understand how to care for the tank and the developing fish. These students care for the fish on a daily basis. In the spring, we will be

re-introducing the fish to a local Hudson River tributary.



In our building, this thematic interdisciplinary approach helps students see connections across the curriculum. Ultimately, this approach helps make the individual parts of the curriculum much more meaningful to our students. The Red 7 Team at Oliver W. Winch

School envisioned and implemented an interdisciplinary project that encompassed this great river. It is a river that has shaped our environment as well as our community in South Glens Falls. We are very grateful to be able to share our enthusiasm about the history, ecology, and the future of the Hudson with our students.

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Nominations must be received by July 16, 2008.

Higher-Performing Middle Schools in New York State Build Teachers' Instructional, Curricular, and Leadership Capacities through Collaboration

Janet Ives Angelis



A recent study of consistently higher- vs. consistently average-performing middle schools in New York State identified some of the characteristics that mark the difference between the two groups of schools. The schools were matched for geography and student demographics; they represent urban, rural, and suburban settings; and at least half serve student bodies whose poverty level (as measured by free and reduced price lunch) meets or exceeds the state average.¹

As my colleagues and I analyzed the data to find the patterns that distinguish the two groups and wrote case studies describing each school, we found that a collaborative environment focused on supporting instruction is a key factor in the higher-performing schools' success. They are *learning organizations* (Senge 1990, 1998) whose personnel have the capacity to act independently and collectively for the greater good. In the higher-performing schools, teachers report working together to make decisions, solve problems, and continually assess and change activities or strategies to better support student learning. They are integral to all the important decisions made in schools – from setting mission and goals to determining curriculum (aligned with state standards, of course) to

strengthening instructional approaches to procuring materials to identifying areas in need of improvement or new approaches. They have the knowledge, capacity, and support to act independently and collectively to support their students' learning.

The collaborative culture of the higher-performing schools is made possible, in part, by formal structures, but it goes beyond formal structures to include managerial and other factors that have built a general ethos of collaboration and constant monitoring, reflection, and action. The schools and districts are organized to actively involve teachers in leadership and decision making about the essentials, including mission, goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development. Their structures are designed to include teachers in meaningful ways, and administrators foster teacher leadership both formally and informally.

For example, in many of the higher-performing schools we studied, the primary structure is the team. Teams are the locus of decision making. The teams, generally made up of the core subject area teachers, are responsible for 100-125 students and often loop with them from grades 7 to 8. The teams meet frequently, usually at least once a day, to discuss both individual and collective student learning as well as other matters important to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. They are aware of or know the standards for which each of their colleagues is responsible and work to reinforce each other; they can integrate subjects and work together on teaching foundational concepts and vocabulary, essential skills such as using graphic organizers,

¹ We studied ten higher- and six average-performing schools. The ten higher performers are: J. Taylor Finley MS, Huntington UFSD; Holland MS, Holland CSD; J. F. Kennedy MS, Utica CSD; Albert Leonard MS, CSD of New Rochelle; Niagara MS, Niagara Falls CSD; Port Chester MS, Port Chester-Rye UFSD; Queensbury MS, Queensbury UFSD; Vernon-Verona-Sherrill MS, Sherrill CSD; West MS, Binghamton CSD; Westbury MS, Westbury UFSD. We promised anonymity to the average performers. The study is part of the national *Just for the Kids* project, whose research protocols we followed.

and important task processes such as explaining, summarizing, and analyzing in written work.

The sixth-grade teams at Albert Leonard Middle School in New Rochelle have a two-hour block together every other day. During that time students are in non-core classes, freeing the team to meet. At others (e.g., Finley Middle School in Huntington), teams meet every day, “discussing students, bringing in parents, meeting with the guidance counselor.”

In some cases, the team can decide how to structure the time within the academic block – for example showing the social studies film to all students at once rather than class by class, and altering the length of the period for the other core subjects; consulting with special educators, ESL teachers, and others; determining with guidance personnel whether to place a student in an alternate setting or try another approach that might enable him or her to remain in the mainstream; calling and meeting with parents.

In Holland, both teachers and administrators identify the teams as a “big part of professional development,” which comes from their common planning and team time. Teams split their time 50-50 to discuss students as well as professional learning – reading and discussing a professional article, learning a new instructional strategy from a colleague, consulting with special educators or ESL teachers about ways to support particular students. “Team in itself is staff development just by its nature,” reports one staff member.

The team leader generally has additional responsibilities; in Holland Middle School, the team leader role rotates (every 8 weeks) so as to share the responsibility. As an indication of the autonomy of the team, one administrator reports that he knows the leadership has changed when he receives notice that the room where the team is meeting changes.

“We are super stars at collaboration. Each team has 48 minutes of team planning every day. Two days a week are for lesson planning. Others

for parent conferences, the special education team, student concerns. The English language arts teacher will lead a discussion of skills (we emphasize 3 or 4 per month).” — Port Chester Middle School administrator

Another formal teacher leadership role we found is that of department head. In many of the middle schools, the department head is the primary instructional leader for his or her subject area, including providing ongoing professional development for colleagues. Sometimes this leader is relieved from some responsibilities (e.g., homeroom, activity period) so that she or he is available to teachers for consultation and coaching. Department heads also play a key role in articulating the curriculum within and across grades. In some schools they also lead the discussions that analyze student performance on department, district, or state assessments and then work with teachers to determine next steps in response to identified needs.

We also found that administrators in the higher-performing schools purposefully provide opportunities for teachers, including new hires, to develop leadership skills through participation in special projects and facilitator roles (e.g., on curriculum projects, textbook selection committees, and shared decision-making teams). Administrators at both the building and district levels look for opportunities in areas where individual teachers have a particular interest. In some districts, for example Niagara Falls, teachers (and administrators) can apply for special assignments that give them release time from teaching for up to one school year. Leaders see this as one way to broaden professional knowledge, which can then be reintegrated into the school. Such opportunities also contribute to fostering an environment in which teachers will grow professionally, want to stay, and become future leaders.

The culture of collaboration also supports working together across schools and with those outside the school – family and community members, local colleges and universities, and

businesses. For example, when administrators in the Vernon-Verona-Sherrill district wanted to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of their middle-level program, they established a grade reorganization study team of parents, teachers, students, and administrators whose charge was to determine whether or not to move the sixth grade from the three elementary schools to the middle school. Since completing that study, which decided to retain grade 6 in the elementary schools, the group has shifted back to the original focus — the quality of the middle-level program across the four schools.

Another example of cross-school collaboration that began as a formal structure also comes from Vernon-Verona-Sherrill. In that district, each discipline meets annually for a full day in a “congruency team” to articulate the curriculum across grades 5 through 8. This involves teachers from the three elementary schools and one middle school; during release time from class they concentrate on the transition from elementary to middle school as well as on defining what is most essential that *every* student needs to know in their subject area. Teachers credit this annual meeting with clarifying what all students should learn, helping special educators know what to focus on, breaking down barriers between the lower- and upper-grade teachers, and fostering a climate of collaboration and cooperation as they work toward the same goal — helping all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to achieve and succeed in the years ahead.

“Conversations that we have now are so totally different than they were 15 years ago. Fifteen years ago, the lower-grade teachers felt that the higher-grade teachers were telling them what to do. That is totally different now. At the all day congruency meeting this year, the 6th grade teachers had written a test on which they had some concerns about how the items were written. They handed it to me and said, ‘Just fix it.’ There was no defensiveness, no protectiveness... Even when the [state] test was just in 8th

grade, we had teachers at other levels involved.”
— Vernon-Verona-Sherrill Middle School teacher

An area of collaboration among teachers and administrators is mapping the curriculum — and then constantly revisiting and revising it. Curriculum mapping is usually initiated and led by the administration, but in the higher-performing schools it involves the active participation of teachers. In some (e.g., Port Chester), the middle school works with the high school. In others (e.g., Binghamton), in some departments every teacher takes part. Overall, no matter how the curriculum has been mapped, it is now a living document that informs teachers’ daily work and is thus constantly assessed and revised by them, as needed.

When the higher-performing schools and districts decide to adopt an approach or program that requires new teacher knowledge, teachers are provided opportunities to gain that knowledge. Teachers are also encouraged to identify their own needs and inform the district’s professional development offerings. In addition, teachers are encouraged to share their effective practices or knowledge gained in conferences or workshops with colleagues, both formally (e.g., superintendents’ days, workshops for peers, team meetings) and informally (e.g., visiting and observing each other’s classrooms). And, as noted earlier, some of the higher-performing schools consider the team structure to *be* professional development in and of itself.

Some Differences between Higher- and Average-Performing Schools

So far I have shared some of what we learned in the higher-performing schools without drawing a contrast with those that get average results. Overall, the differences between the two groups are those of degree: generally the average performers are just not as far along as the higher performers in achieving their own goals for collaboration and capacity building. Specifically, we found that in average-perform-

ing schools collaboration is typically inconsistent and less frequent. Often it is not built into the schedule. Even if it is, teams do not meet regularly nor is the expectation to do so made clear; when meetings do occur, they may not focus on student performance.

Also, in the average-performing schools, teachers and administrators are more likely to point to time constraints to explain why more collaboration does not occur. Although the higher-performing schools acknowledge time constraints, they manage to overcome them through scheduling common team meeting and department meeting times.

Typically, teachers in higher-performing schools articulate a “we do this” rather than an “I do this” position. As described above, a team atmosphere pervades the higher performers and fosters both formal and informal mentoring of newer teachers, who are inspired by more veteran teachers to take on leadership roles. In some average-performing schools a “wait your turn” stance is reported to inhibit teachers’ and administrators’ professional development.

In general, in the higher-performing schools, formal structures have been established to

support the ability of teachers to assume leadership roles and work together to improve teaching and learning. Although such structures are necessary, they are not sufficient; in addition, leaders in the higher performers have set clear expectations about making use of those structures and encourage their use by building a collaborative, collegial atmosphere within which teachers are supported to collectively take ownership of problems and solutions.

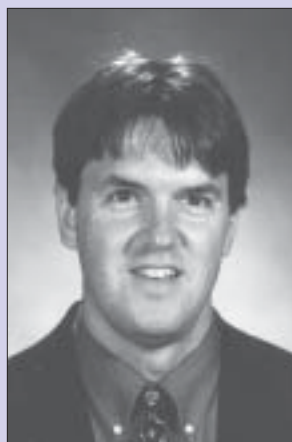
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Congratulations to Jeff Craig, NYSMSA Director of Research & Technology



Jeff has been named
2008 Middle School Principal of the Year
by the School Administrators Association of NYS and
a National Distinguished Principal by
the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Jeff is principal of Jamesville-DeWitt Middle School in Jamesville, New York, where he lives with his wife Lisa and their two children, Grace and Jackson.

Test Time: Bringing Balance and Sanity to Our Schools

Jane Bluestein, Ph.D.



How often do you hear yourself urging a student, “Come on, you have to learn this. It’s going to be on the test!”?

I hear this appeal in classrooms all the time, and am certainly guilty of having uttered it myself. Still, I have to laugh, because after three and a half decades in this business, I’m still waiting for a student to respond, “OK. I wasn’t going to learn this, but as long as it’s on the test...”

There is so much pressure to prepare kids to take the test—and by “test,” I generally mean the “Capital T” kind of standardized test—that we can easily lose sight of our purpose and priorities. In the frantic days after 9/11, I called a friend, a History teacher in a school about two hours north of the city. After talking a bit about how she and her family were faring, I mentioned that this would have to be an amazing time to be a History teacher, with history happening right on her students’ doorsteps, so incredibly relevant and real to their world.

“You’re kidding, right?” she responded. “We have to get through Ancient Egypt for the Regents this week.”

How often do we miss opportunities right under our noses, opportunities for real and meaningful learning to take place, for connecting with kids, for creating an emotionally safe learning environment, or even for inspiring student motivation and self-management (much less success) because we are so busy barreling through the curriculum?

“My department chair told me that I *will* get through the book this year, regardless of where the students are or what they need,” one teacher

told me. And I remember observing another teacher doing a lesson on complex operations with fractions, who had large numbers of learners who could not add or subtract whole numbers. When asked by her supervisor why she was teaching over her students’ heads, she threw up her hands and said, “It’s on the test!” Of course, by test time, her students could neither do the problems on fractions nor much of anything else. Teaching to the test, in this case, served no one.

It’s easy to feel like our options are limited and frankly, the Capital-T tests aren’t likely to go away any time soon (though hopefully the political pressure and lust for scores will ebb over time, as most trends in education ultimately do). Nonetheless, there are things we can do to achieve a certain kind of balance and sanity, and in so doing, improve student achievement.

We all know that anxiety and distress are not good for anyone’s brain, and putting pressure on educators and their students is not going to make scores go up (and in fact, is far more likely to have the exact opposite effect). There are teachers in the field who are managing, some against incredible odds, to not let the pressure get to them. Some brave souls simply refuse to buy into the value or importance of the Tests, close their doors and do their jobs. One told me that she was able to reduce her students’ fears and test-anxiety by telling them, “Yes, it’s a test. It’s like flossing. It’s something we have to do.” And from that point on, she refused to even mention the Test, working with her kids where they were academically, and taking it from there.

Another teacher, in a district where all teachers were required to teach the same page on

the same day (in the ridiculous notion that this practice would assure no student being left behind) started her class by telling her students, “Humor me. I need to teach page 51 to keep my job. When I finish, I will come around and teach *you*.” I saw a remarkable degree of concentration, focus, self-management, and commitment from her students, not just in their academic performance, but in their behavior as well. (There’s not much fun—or much point—in cooperating in a class you’re going to fail anyhow. And it’s just as easy to lose students who are bored or inadequately challenged.)

And let’s face it. We all need to hear, see, or experience certain things more than once before they make sense. In any class with more than one student, we’re likely to encounter such a diverse range of learning styles, modality preferences, intelligences, personalities, and temperaments, that presenting information in one way is only likely to reach a fraction of the kids. The whole notion of teaching all kids the same thing at the same time in the same way—indeed the concept of standardization itself—is a throw-back to our Industrial Era beginnings, when assembly-line priorities demanded uniformity and sameness above all. But the workplace of previous generations no longer exists, and even factory workers in the 21st century need a set of skills that would never have been imagined by—much less required of—their predecessors. (And frankly, the idea that we can walk into any classroom and teach a concept and expect uniform mastery is not based in any reality I’ve ever experienced.)

Good documentation and parent support can buy quite a bit of leeway. When faced with the prospect of having to choose whether to “cover” square roots or teach addition to a group of eighth graders who could not add if regrouping was required, it seemed like a natural choice to teach them to add. And even then, years ago, there was pressure from above, questions about why I was teaching first-grade math to eighth-grade students. Aside from the obvious (“Be-

cause they don’t actually *know* first-grade math.”), and the fact that this notoriously unruly and disruptive class was actually on task and making progress, what bought me a little breathing room was a stack of file folders, one for each student, each with copies of pre-assessments and post-tests, work samples, scope-and-sequence charts checked for mastery. Better still, several files contained notes from parents, excited and grateful to finally see a math book in their homes, not to mention enthusiasm about math from their kids! (Parent support is much easier to come by when their children are successful and excited about learning.)

It’s not surprising that we see so many students acting out their boredom, indifference, anger, or frustration in so many classrooms today. Of all the areas in which we could easily eliminate many discipline and attitude problems, the idea of increasing opportunities for larger numbers of kids to be successful seems to be one of the most difficult to accomplish. Nonetheless, give students access to success and achievement, and the inclination to goof off, disrupt class, or refuse to work makes less and less sense. Although it may take some students a while to actually see that success for them is indeed possible, being able to engage students will be a lot easier when we can wear down the students’ assumption that they aren’t any good in this subject and will probably fail no matter what they do.

Few students can make progress when we teach above their heads. And for any teachers who have ever experienced the high of seeing a student experience a true “aha!” moment, you know that these little miracles happen when we can help kids connect new learning with what they know, value, or have experienced, when we teach in a way that makes sense to their nervous systems, and when we teach in an environment that feels safe and supportive.

So here are a few suggestions for creating some balance in dealing with the pressure that surrounds standardized testing.

- Control what you can control. Although I could devote pages to what's wrong with standardized testing and the way the tests are currently being used, let's just accept, for the moment, that the tests are here, and that they are far more political than educational. Let's focus on what's truly valuable in teaching kids.
- Even if you work in an intensely data-driven environment, you do not have to pass the pressure on to your students. In fact the less fuss you make about the tests, the less stress your students will feel about the test, and the less you come off looking like that's the only thing that matters to you.
- Assess what your students already know. If they can already demonstrate mastery, you can justify moving them ahead. If they lack prerequisite skills, you have something to back up your decision to teach what they need.
- Document like there's no tomorrow. Good documentation is more than a sign of professionalism and accountability. It also helps to protect your administration, whose support can be invaluable when matching your instruction to the needs of your students. Keep track of assessments, dates specific skills were mastered, work samples, and progress.
- Focus on the kids and to whatever degree you can get away with it, start with them where they are academically. Be willing, and prepared, to work with individuals and with small groups. As students make progress, raise the hurdles and continue to challenge them with increasingly difficult concepts and more complex assignments.
- Start thinking of "fair" as "equally appropriately challenged" rather than "same." Our students will be going into an information and service-based economy. We are no longer training a factory workforce.
- Maintain high levels of performance as your criteria for achievement. Continue raising hurdles as kids make progress. You can fend off charges of "lowering the bar" or grade inflation when you keep pushing and refuse to accept inferior or substandard work.
- Move along the lines of district-mandated curriculum. If you have to back up the content you're teaching or choose to include content that is not listed in the mandates for your grade level or subject area, working within what's already established in the system can give you more leverage than arbitrarily choosing skills or content to teach.
- Minimize frustrating, time-wasting power struggles to leave more time for instruction. Strive to create win-win power dynamics in which you are still the authority, but are able to accommodate students' needs for power and autonomy within limits that will accommodate their need for structure. Often, you can achieve this goal simply by offering students choices about which problems or assignments they want to do, or by offering them some input about topics, processes, media, sequence, or other factors involved in the work they do.
- Vary your assignments. There are a lot of ways to demonstrate an understanding of condensation and a lot of topics for kids to explore in their writing, for example.
- Vary your presentations. An overwhelming majority of students are visual and kinesthetic learners. Differentiate your instruction to accommodate a variety of learning preferences and needs. Kids learn (and behave) better when we present information in ways that make sense to their nervous systems.
- Take brain breaks. Middle school kids can sustain concentration for about ten to fifteen minutes at a time on a good day. Move to a different part of the room, invite them to share something they just learned, bring their attention back with a chime or auditory signal, take a stretch break. Even a 15- to 30-second change in the action will help them stay focused. (And movement within the classroom can significantly reduce requests for the

bathroom pass when kids just can't sit still for one more minute.)

- Allow do-overs. Use the time you spend evaluating assignments, especially homework and seatwork, to identify where kids still need instruction and practice. Show students how to “do it right” and encourage them to redo the work and resubmit it for additional credit. They’ll learn more from correcting their mistakes than from getting a grade.
- Focus on the positive. Whether simply recognizing what kids did right on their assignments or emphasizing the positive consequences of their cooperation in expressing contingencies (“When you do what I’ve asked, you can...”), this small act can have a powerful and positive impact on student behavior and commitment.
- Stay in present time. If “next year’s teachers” don’t teach this way, it’s *especially* important that you provide opportunities for kids to learn in a success-oriented, win-win, and brain-friendly environment.
- Think through your priorities and remember what brought you to this profession. (Did you really want to become a teacher to prepare kids for a test?)
- Be willing to take a few hits. Bucking tradition can cost you some conflict or disapproval from colleagues.

Finally, don’t wait for the system to get healthy and functional. It’s not likely to change on its own, though I do believe that any efforts to bring balance and sanity, and to build a sense of community in our schools will help make schools better places to be, work, and learn, regardless of where these efforts initiate. And as far as the Tests go, I’m more and more convinced that if we can connect with kids, provide emotionally safe environments, challenge students at academically appropriate placements, and teach in ways that their bodies and brains can understand, the Tests will take care of themselves.

Dr. Jane Bluestein is an award-winning author and teacher educator. She currently heads Instructional Support Services in Albuquerque, NM. This is an original article and includes some material from her books, *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2001) and *The Win-Win Classroom* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing, 2008). Dr. Bluestein can be reached at (800) 688-1960 or (505) 323-9044. Visit her website: www.janebluestein.com



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Messy Binders, Missing Assignments...

Susan Mulcaire



Can the “Organizationally Challenged” Middle School Student Be Helped?

Any middle-level educator can tell you that poor organizational skills account for a substantial piece of the underachievement puzzle among middle school students. Messy binders, missing assignments, lost worksheets, failure to follow directions, and poor time management can all wreak havoc on a student’s grades. Multiple teachers, each with his/her own homework and test schedules, deadlines and due dates, after-school clubs, activities and sports practices, make for many demands on a student’s time. Many students struggle to stay afloat. Worse yet — many give up.

Even smart kids can underachieve in middle school because of a lack of organizational skills. They’re young and inexperienced and there’s a lot coming at them. Without basic organizational skills, a middle school student can become overwhelmed. In some cases, it begins a downward spiral of underachievement that can last into high school and beyond.

What can be done to help the middle school student who is sinking under the weight of a middle school workload? Here are some tips for helping the organizationally challenged student:

- **Think of a Planner Like a Radar!** Organizationally challenged students are often resistant to using a planner. Encourage these students to imagine their planner as their personal radar screen where all “incoming” assignments,

appointments and obligations can be tracked, targeted and handled on time. A planner should contain homework and class assignments, of course, but it should also contain dates and events from the school’s annual calendar that impact the student’s schedule. Review your school’s annual calendar with

students. Point out dates or events that

are important to them — bell schedule changes, picture day, exam weeks, etc. Finally, a planner should include personal obligations like orthodontist appointments, vacations, and sports practices. Encourage students to share information with adults who need to know: parents, teachers, coaches, tutors and car pool drivers. To make a planner easier to access — and therefore more

likely to be used — secure it to the front of the student’s binder with Velcro.

- **Get Those Binders Organized!** Mundane as it may be, the common binder is key to a middle school student’s organizational peace of mind. An organized binder helps keep papers filed in the right place, so they won’t get lost. It helps students find important papers and information fast, like class schedules, study guides and reading lists. Organize binder contents by class. Store important papers and handouts in sheet protectors at the front of the class section. Binder paper and a two-pocket poly folder complete each subject section. One side of the pocket folder is for worksheets, the



other side is the “send/receive” folder for homework, graded papers and signed forms — anything that must go to and from home to school.

- **Sweat the Small Stuff!** You may have a bright student in your class who studies hard and ace tests and quizzes. But, if he or she is not as diligent with homework, has missing or late assignments, or forgets to make up a missed lab, that student, and his or her parents may be in for a shock when final grades arrive. Most middle school students, particularly those fresh out of elementary school, do not understand that in a middle school grade averaging system, those assignments and labs all count toward a percentage of the final grade. Seemingly minor matters, such as a few missing or late assignments, can quickly wipe out a student's good efforts on tests and quizzes. Because the ins and outs of grade averaging can be difficult for a typical 12 year-old to understand, take time to carefully review *and demonstrate* your grade averaging schedules with students. Help them to recognize that minor oversights, such as a few missing assignments, can have a big impact on their final grade. In middle school, even the small stuff counts!
- **Follow Directions!** Middle school teachers often use “rubrics” for a project or assignment. The trouble is, many students don't take the time to carefully review a rubric before starting a project. As a result, they complete the project incorrectly, having overlooked important details. When a rubric is received, encourage the student to place it in a sheet protector in the class binder section, where it can be easily accessed as the student works on the project or assignment. Have the student read and *reread* the rubric aloud, focusing on details. Suggest students consider the rubric as a working guide and refer to it often as they complete their project, comparing the rubric against the final product when done.

No child should underachieve in middle school because of a lack of organizational skills. Being an organized middle school student requires a comprehensive set of tools, practices and strategies. But, most can easily be mastered by even an “organizationally challenged” student. If your students are underachieving in middle school as a result of organizational or work management errors, set aside some time — in advisory, study skills class, or after school, to help them learn these essential skills.

Susan Mulcaire (info@middleschoolguide.com) is a middle school teacher in Orange County, California, and author of the popular organizational skills workbook, *The Middle School Student's Guide to Ruling the World!* (Tween Publishing, 2006). Visit her website: www.middleschoolguide.com

College Professor Makes Connections with Middle School Classroom

Rick Heckendorn, Ed.D.



Creating a classroom community that is characterized by trust, safety, respect, and collaboration is a worthy goal (Christiansen, 1994). As middle school educators we value students' cooperative and individual work. The same criteria should apply to teachers and college professors. The importance of collaboration has been a major component of the Curriculum and Methods of Social Studies course that I have taught at Mahattanville College in Purchase, New York during the previous five semesters. How can we help college students learn more about teaching and learning by spending time in middle schools before student teaching? My college students and I observed a suburban middle school social studies class for one of the two classes each week for the semester. They collaborated with the middle school teacher, watched me do a demonstration lesson, and finally taught a Do Now and a mini-lesson.

I asked my students to consider six factors to function as effective middle school teachers: writing their plans, knowing the content, varying their strategies, showing they care, demonstrating flexibility, and engaging in formative assessment. They observed how well the teacher and I incorporated these factors before they taught their Do Nows and mini-lessons. After relating the teacher's lessons to these factors, I will review my lesson and the students' mini-lessons.

Planning

Planning is the basis for creating effective lessons or units of work (Kellough and Kellough, 2003). Lesson plans show how the teacher has organized the ideas that will guide the students' understanding of each day's lesson. They should include the objectives, a Do Now,

an outline of activities, a summary, and homework choices. This middle school teacher had clear objectives and activities planned for each lesson. Rather than a Do Now, the teacher would talk with the students as they entered and engage them in personal conversations. This was short, encouraging, and caring, but not subject related. There was a fantastic rapport between the teacher and the students, but the college students and I felt that a Do Now could have focused everyone quickly on the lesson. There were no homework choices to allow for students differences.

Content

College students must know their subject area content extremely well to be effective teachers. This teacher presented the material in a dynamic manner by utilizing the SmartBoard computer technology. He knew the content and presented it in a lively, visual fashion that motivated the students. Since I was not familiar with this technology, the teacher's effective use of it allowed all five of us to learn it quickly. In fact, one student decided to use it for his mini-lesson.

Strategies

Strategies are the methods the teacher utilizes to actively involve students in the lessons. Teachers should vary their student-centered approaches (Singer, 1997). The teacher had a fantastic unit on Ancient Greece, whereby students acted out his original abbreviated play based on *The Odyssey*. They made costumes and scenery and acted. This collaborative and creative activity involved all the classes. Students were involved and excited about this activity.

They were able to explain what the characters were doing and how this story fit into Greek life and culture. The college students used these first two lessons as an opportunity to get to know the students and assist them in their small groups whenever possible.

Caring

Caring shows that the teacher focuses on the students as well as the content being studied (Noddings, 1984). The teacher and the students obviously liked and respected each other. Still, we observed that the students were seated facing the teacher. It was difficult to hear from the back what students in the front of the room said. They appeared mostly to be telling the teacher the answer, but that left out others who could not hear or who were not intrinsically motivated. Also, the teacher often did not use the students' names. We noticed this because we were trying to learn them. The seating arrangement and the use of names are important identifiers to let the students know that the teacher cares about them.

Flexibility

Flexibility allows the teacher to make necessary changes in the lesson plans in order to relate to the needs of the students. It is imperative to value each student's voice even if we have to set aside the plan to keep everyone involved in our lessons (Miller, 1990). The middle school teacher was flexible. During the project, he worked with groups and reacted to their needs constantly. He allowed the college students and me to teach his class the content he wanted taught, but using our own strategies.

Assessment

Formative assessment focuses on whether the students are learning the material as it is being taught, not just during test time when often material is crammed, memorized, and quickly forgotten (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The teacher's traditional method of formative assessment was to ask students questions during the

lesson to check for their understanding. He did not have students repeat students' answers, but he sometimes repeated a soft-spoken student's answer — something that I do not recommend, because I believe this practice undermines the student's voice.

Student Choices

Subsumed under my six essential factors in teaching is my adherence to the policy of providing choices to students. I do this with my college students and recommend that they, in turn, provide choices to their future middle school students. Choices empower students. They get more involved when they can choose. Students learn differently and choices allow them to work towards their strengths (Gardner, 1999). With choices, more possibilities arise that enrich the classroom, all of which no one individual can imagine, even a teacher!

After each student had survived the nervousness of teaching a five-minute Do Now, they were ready to teach a mini-lesson. I gave my students choices for their mini-lessons: teaching from a short video segment, writing a song (or poem) and singing (reciting) it, writing a dialogue and having students act it out, or making a floor map. In addition, I was flexible to add the choice of using the SmartBoard, which was possible only because of this middle school teacher's class. Two students chose writing their own original dialogues that the middle school students acted out. One student chose the floor map that students were able to stand on to kinesthetically see relationships of countries. The fourth utilized the SmartBoard, whereby he incorporated a map and a short video. None of my college students chose to write and sing a song as I had done for my demonstration lesson.

During my demonstration lesson, I sang my original *Song of Rome* for and with the class. They sang so well and so loud that it was exciting. During our last day of class two students stood up (at the teacher's signal) and led the class in singing the song for us before we left. It

was touching and inspirational. After our class had ended I decided to go back to sing my *Song of Greece* for the class. The teacher explained that his other classes had heard about it, so he scheduled the event in the lunchroom where we sang both songs together with about 125 students! Active learning strategies do work effectively to get students involved!

Mini-lessons

The college students were motivated to actively involve the students in their lessons. Students eagerly acted out two dialogues, one about Emperor Constantine and the other about life on a manor. Students acted with feeling and were able to answer my student's high level questions. The student who made a floor map of Europe and the Mediterranean enabled students to stand on Gaul, Rome, and Carthage to see how and why these areas were fought over fiercely. The student whose lesson used a video and map on the SmartBoard showed himself to be so comfortable with this approach that students felt as if their regular teacher were there. Each of my students was well planned, knew their content, had students actively involved in different activities, used the names of at least a few students, were flexible enough to be able to answer their questions, and checked for their understanding through written questions.

Collaboration among college professors, public school teachers, college students, and middle school students offers the potential for benefits to each, as each has the opportunity to listen, learn, practice, and reflect. The middle school students were clearly sad to see us go. The teacher obtained ideas from our lessons to improve his practice. We learned about SmartBoard as a teaching strategy. My students learned a lot of content, and demonstrated they could teach with active learning strategies. Everyone gained from this collaborative experience that I heartily recommend.

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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: Title, Author, Position, School and/or Home Address (please indicate which), School and/or Home Telephone Number (please indicate which), E-Mail Address, and (optional) a brief synopsis of the content of the manuscript.

SUBMIT TO: All documents must be submitted as e-mail attachments to:
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Please note: Only e-mail submissions will be considered; do not send fax or paper copies of manuscripts.

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

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ALL New York City Districts

Region 7 Co-Directors TBA

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Jefferson-Lewis
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