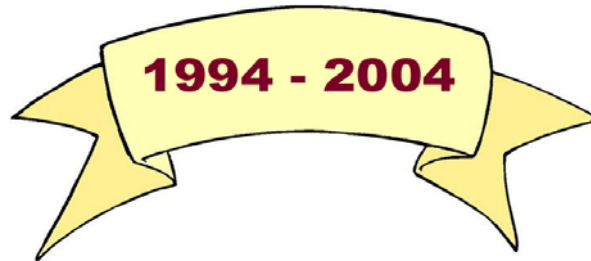


A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A Michigan Middle Start Partner Organization
National Award Winning Professional Development
April 2004 * Volume 6 * Number 9



***Michigan Schools in the Middle
is 10 years old!***

We want to take this opportunity to thank you for your confidence in MSIM. We have enjoyed working and learning with you. We look forward to many more years of "Doing what's best for kids."

Come celebrate with us April 29, 2004 from 10 - 2 in Ronan 678. We will have refreshments and door prizes (see page 11 to register for one of the door prizes if you will not be able to join us on campus).



Our new Website is launched!
Go to www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu to see how we have changed. In early April, we will begin adding new pages regularly.





Leadership Lifeline

What is the work of High-Performing Schools?

Middle-level principals and teacher leaders seeking to identify “positive deviants” would be well-served to take a look at research reported by Douglas Reeves. Reeves studied schools which deviate from the norm in positive ways---they beat the odds and succeed where most other similar schools have not been successful.

Reeves terms these schools “90/90/90” because these schools serve a student population with at least 90% combined minority, at least 90% free and reduced lunch qualified students, and are at least 90% successful on standardized tests. These are Positive Deviants, and we can learn some valuable lessons from their success stories.

The research reports that the 90/90/90 schools share five things in common. They are:

1. There is a strong emphasis and focus on achievement.

This requires effective leaders who share a vision of academic success for ALL students: principals and teacher leaders who guide the entire staff in reviewing data to develop student academic goals. These leaders remain focused on achievement even in the face of new legislation, budget cuts, and a host of other issues which may threaten to distract us from the business of learning.

2. There is a clear curricular focus in all content areas.

Leaders who use student data to identify cross-curricular emphases in one or two areas such as writing or reading help embed these strategies in all content areas. 90/90/90 schools reported increased test scores in all areas, not just in the focus areas. One MSIM school trained Math teachers to use reading strategies to help students comprehend informational text and found both math and reading MEAP scores rose considerably.

3. There are frequent assessments and multiple chances for students to show improvement.

This aspect is aligned with “Failure is not an option” where learning, not grades and one-time assessments, are emphasized. Each student is encouraged to show improvement.

4. There is a strong emphasis on writing in all academic areas.

Students are asked to write in all their classes. Thinking and reflection are integrated into all classrooms. Writing is not solely the responsibility of language arts teachers. All teachers collaboratively develop writing rubrics to use in their classes.

5. There is external scoring of student work.

Leaders and teachers are involved in scoring the work of their own students, as well as student work from other classrooms. Common rubrics are used for student work, and external scoring helps inform teacher practice and create a shared understanding of quality work.

For more information regarding the 90/90/90 Schools research, please call MSIM at 989-774-7678 to request a copy of the summary article.



Coaches Corner



Each month we feature one of our Comprehensive School Reform/MSIM Coaches. We are very proud of our coaching staff and like to share some information about each one with you.

Our featured Coach for the month of April is John Rasmussen. John resides in Battle Creek and is serving as Leadership Coach for Battle Creek Northwestern Middle School. John has also participated in training for Academic Coaches, and several schools have utilized his skills in language arts.

John earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Arts in English degrees from the University of Iowa. He has also completed a Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Western Michigan University. John has served as Instructor at Western Michigan University, Kellogg Community College and the American School of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

During his teaching career, John held several positions in the Battle Creek Public Schools, including serving as Language Arts Lead Teacher and Director of Testing and Assessment. He was also Assistant to the Principal for Instruction, and from 1993-2000 he was Grade Principal at Battle Creek Central High School.

You may often see John wearing his gold and black Iowa school sweater! He is proud of thirty years of teaching and administrative experience in leadership roles that have successfully served a highly diverse socio-economic community.

Thanks, John, for your fine work!



Student Station

It's Your Choice

"Your life is the sum of all the choices you make."

Think about this quote for a minute. What do you think it means? What does it say about the way the choices you make will affect your life?

Let's break the quote down and study it. First, what is a choice? When you decided to wear jeans to school today, instead of shorts, you made a choice. When you order a chocolate milkshake in a restaurant, instead of vanilla or strawberry, you have made a choice. When you try to decide between joining a soccer team for the summer or taking a part-time job, you are faced with a choice. So, making a choice means deciding among two or more options.

Since a *sum* is the total you get when you add things together, then perhaps the quote means that all the decisions you make will add up -- or, to put it another way, the choices you make help to determine what happens in your life. Of course, a decision such as which flavor of milkshake to order probably won't affect your life in the same way that a decision about what subject to study in college will. Some of the choices we make are small ones; some are larger.

Let's think about how our choices add up to shape our lives. Take the example of deciding whether to take a part-time summer job or join a soccer team. If you take the job, you might learn some valuable new skills, and you can use the money you earn to buy something or to start saving for college. If you join the soccer team instead, you will have fun, get good exercise, and perhaps make new friends. There isn't a clear "right" or "wrong" choice, but you will definitely get different results, depending on which choice you make.

Some choices have a much clearer "right" or "wrong." Imagine that a friend decides to skip class, and asks you to tell the teacher that she is sick. You are faced with a choice: to lie to the teacher or to refuse to lie. Will you choose to be honest or to be loyal to your friend?

Maybe you decide that it's okay to tell a small lie, so you tell the teacher that your friend is sick. What happens as a result? First, if the teacher finds out that your friend wasn't really sick, you may get in trouble. Certainly, the teacher will begin to think of you as a person who is not always honest. Second, if the teacher doesn't find out, and you get away with the small lie, you might find it tempting to tell a bigger lie in some other situation. After all, if it didn't hurt to tell one lie, why should it be any different to tell another? Eventually, people will begin to see you as someone who cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Third, how will *you* feel about yourself if you lie? Most of us have been raised to believe that lying is wrong, and we feel guilty when we lie.

Now, what are the consequences of refusing to tell the lie? First, your friend may get angry with you. She may even decide to stop being your friend. On the other hand, she may admire your honesty. You can't control her response -- all you can control is your own decision. Second, if you refuse to lie in this situation, it will become easier for you to refuse to lie in another situation later. People who know you will see that you are a person who can be trusted to tell the truth, even under pressure. Third, *you* will know in your heart that you have the strength to be honest, even when doing so is risky.

Every day, you make many choices, some large and some small. All of the choices you make add up to making you a unique individual. Your choices shape your actions, tell others what you are like as a person, and ultimately help to determine your future. So, is the next choice you make going to be a good one?



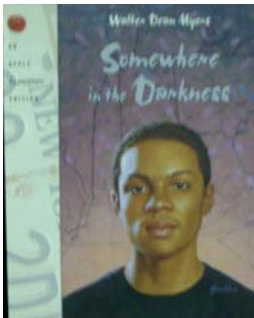
Student Book Review

Somewhere in Darkness

Author: Walter Dean Myers

Jimmy Little is fourteen years old, living in a tough neighborhood in Harlem. His mother is dead; his father hasn't been around for years. Jimmy lives with Mama Jean, his deceased mother's best friend. He has always done well enough in school, he's always had plenty of friends, and he has been content with his life.

Lately, though, Jimmy has started drifting. He skips school without really meaning to -- he starts walking toward school in the morning, and ends up drifting toward the park, instead, and hanging out with his friends all day. Sometimes he just stays home, lying on the couch and watching TV. Other times, he daydreams about far-away fantasy kingdoms and knights in shining

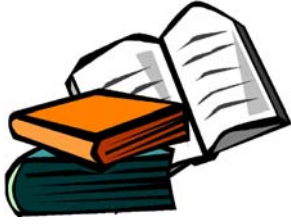


armor riding to the rescue. When friends or teachers ask him why he misses so much school, he tells them he's sick. He doesn't really feel sick, but he does feel tired; not the kind of tiredness that comes from exercise or hard work, but tiredness that seems to come from deep inside him. That tiredness makes it hard for him to get motivated to do anything.

One afternoon, Jimmy returns home to find a man waiting for him at the apartment he shares with Mama Jean. The man says that his name is Crab. He is Jimmy's father, and he wants to be part of Jimmy's life again. Crab and Jimmy set off from Harlem on a trip across the country to visit places and people that have been important parts of Crab's life. Along the way, Jimmy learns about his father, about his own heritage, and about himself; and he realizes that part of growing up is learning how to take responsibility for himself and for his own actions.

The book's bittersweet end finds Jimmy back in Harlem, saddened by his experience, but strengthened by it, too; ready to face his past and his future without drifting, running away, or making excuses.

Be sure to pick up a good book today!

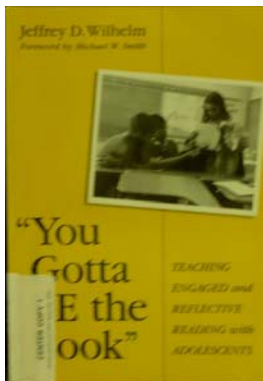


Resource Review

You Gotta BE the Book

Author: Jeffrey D. Wilhelm

In this ground-breaking book, Jeffrey Wilhelm draws on nearly two decades of experience teaching reading and language arts at the middle school and high school levels to create a portrait of a literacy program which engages young adolescents in active and reflective reading. Wilhelm combines his own experience and observations as a classroom teacher with a review of research and scholarship in the fields of reading and literacy to develop a convincing argument for the efficacy of his program.



The seeds of change germinated in Wilhelm’s mind during his early years as a reading teacher, as he watched many of his students struggle with traditional methods of reading instruction. He began to watch -- really watch -- his students as they read, and he noticed that those who were most engaged in the process approached reading differently from the way less-engaged students did. Highly engaged readers thought of reading as “a relay race” or as “a safari, in which the author was the guide” or as similar to “reading a map” which the author had created. These readers viewed themselves as taking such an active role in the reading experience that they became, really, a *part* of the experience. Less-engaged students, Wilhelm observed, were often astonished to hear their peers talk about the extent to which they visualized settings and scenes, identified with characters, and placed themselves within the fictional worlds about which they were reading.

Wilhelm hypothesized that helping less-engaged readers to immerse themselves in the experience of reading would pique their interest and engagement. Based on his classroom observations, in-depth interviews with highly engaged readers, and a thorough review of research on engagement of readers, he began to introduce dramatization, visualization, and artistic expression into students’ reading experiences. As less-engaged readers became more facile with active-reading strategies -- visualization, connection, identification, extrapolation -- their interest in, and engagement with, reading blossomed.

You Gotta BE the Book offers teachers a perfect blend of theory, practical observation, and specific strategies for increasing readers’ engagement. Check out this excellent resource today! Call the Center at (989) 774-7678 and ask for resource # CALA-49.



Teacher Topics

Exclusion Brainstorming: Activating Students' Prior Knowledge

An excellent pre-reading strategy for activating students' prior knowledge about a topic in science or social studies is *exclusion brainstorming*. Before the class reads a piece of fiction or nonfiction, the teacher prepares a list of words relevant to the topic, and adds several words which are not relevant. Students, in small groups or as a whole class, read the words aloud one by one, discussing each word and determining whether it is related to the specified topic. Students circle any words which they think are not relevant.

During their reading, they check their brainstorming work, seeking to identify which words from the list are, indeed, not relevant to the topic. Following the reading, they cross out any words on the list which they deem irrelevant, and place check marks next to words which they had originally circled, but which turned out to be relevant.

This strategy activates students' prior knowledge about a topic, allows them to pool their knowledge prior to reading, and encourages them to read the assignment carefully, noticing whether the words in the brainstorming list are mentioned in the text. The strategy can be used with social studies or science content, and it is also quite helpful for introducing historical or scientific concepts which underlie a piece of fiction.

To learn more about exclusion brainstorming, or to access a variety of other literacy strategies, call the Center at (989) 774-7678 and ask to check out *50 Literacy Strategies*, by Gail E. Tompkins.



Family Focus

Keep Your Young Adolescent Active!

Spring in Michigan is a time when many of us begin looking forward to sunshine, fresh air, and outdoor activities. Spending time outside and getting regular exercise are especially important for young adolescents, because they are going through so many physical and emotional changes.

Middle-schoolers need regular physical activity. Have you ever noticed that your young adolescent seems to be full of energy and in constant motion? This is a natural result of the physical growth taking place in your child at this time. For many young adolescents, it is very difficult to sit still for extended periods of time, partly because they are experiencing the physical discomfort of rapid growth, and partly because they movement and activity to help them get accustomed to the changes taking place in their bodies. So, as spring approaches, encourage your young adolescent to get regular exercise. Exercise does not have to be strenuous. It can take many forms, from practicing tai chi, to walking around the block, to playing on a summer softball team.

Getting fresh air and sunshine is also important for middle schoolers. It is important for all of us, actually, since sunshine activates certain hormones that help us to avoid depression, chronic exhaustion, and a variety of other medical problems. Young adolescents, who are experiencing rapid changes in hormone levels as well as all the anxieties and social pressures of the middle school years, are especially vulnerable to depression and fatigue. Being certain that your child gets at least an hour of fresh air and sunshine on most days can help to keep those hormones in better balance, and can give your child another tool for fending off stress and depression.

Remember, the example *you* set will influence your child -- so, while you're encouraging your middle schooler to get outside and exercise, it wouldn't hurt for you to set a good example. Why not find some form of outdoor activity that you and your child both enjoy, and spend some quality time together doing it?



Resource Highlights



- | | |
|---------|---|
| D-55 | The Children Are Watching: How the Media Teach about Diversity
Cortes, C. E. |
| G-19 | The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School
in Harlem Meier, D. |
| LSD-47 | Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement Schmoker, M. |
| LSDV-19 | Cognitive Coaching Video Journal of Education |
| MS-51 | Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21 st Century
Jackson, A. & Davis, G. |

Do you need the resources you checked out longer than you anticipated? Just give us a call and, if no one is waiting for them, we will renew them for you. Our phone number is 989-774-7678 - ask for Bryan.

“Powerful Quote”

**“Education’s purpose is to replace an empty
mind with an open one.”**

Malcolm Forbes



**Win one of the MSIM door prizes:
A bag full of "Goodies"**

*Please fax or email your name, school, phone, address and email to
us no later than April 27, 2004 to be entered in the drawing.*

Fax: 989-774-7684 Email: duvallp@cmich.edu

Contact us:

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CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION

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