



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A Michigan Middle Start Partner Organization

National Award Winning Professional Development

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Looking to the Future: MSIM Establishes New Vision and Goals

In October, MSIM staffers spent time reflecting on our past and looking to the future. We revisited MSIM's vision and goals, which were established in 1994 by founder Peggy Gaskill, under the auspices of W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant funding. We are pleased to report that, after a decade of hard work, MSIM's original goals have been successfully achieved.

Goals One and Two focused on the development of Michigan's first undergraduate and graduate programs in Middle-Level Education. It was the intention that, eventually, these courses would enroll enough students to become regular offerings of CMU's Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development. Both undergraduate and graduate programs have met this goal, and enrollment continues to increase.

Goals Three and Four focused on providing educational resources and professional development to middle-grades schools

throughout the state. MSIM has established a Resource Library containing over 2,000 print and video titles which members may borrow. We have also provided results-oriented professional development to over one hundred Michigan schools, and we have won national recognition for our high-quality professional development and coaching.

Given these accomplishments, it is time to look ahead at the focus of MSIM's work in the coming years. Therefore, the first task of the staff at the October planning meeting was to amend ***our vision***, which now states:

Michigan Schools in the Middle will make a powerful, positive impact on the lives of young adolescents by providing ongoing, results-oriented professional development to Middle Level Education stakeholders; by developing and disseminating high-quality integrated curriculum; and by

building leadership capacity in middle-grades schools.

Next, MSIM staff identified ***five goals*** to help us achieve our vision:

- Continue to provide high-quality, results-oriented professional development
- Develop standards-based, integrated middle-grades curriculum
- Collaborate with other state and national organizations to achieve our vision
- Achieve national recognition for middle-grades education through publications and conference presentations
- Support undergraduate and graduate Middle Level Education at Central Michigan University

We are delighted that you have chosen to be a part of MSIM's success, and we look forward to continuing to serve you in the years to come!



Leadership

Lifeline Leadership: The Heart of it!

Those who explore the topic of leadership will soon find a consistent theme: Leaders must focus on, and accept responsibility for, results. Yet, contends leadership guru Rick DuFour, data is not what drives us as educators to change or improve.

Monitoring student achievement on valid tests that assess students' mastery of essential learning skills can be a powerful tool in school improvement. Carefully analyzing timely assessment data can give individual teachers, teams of teachers, and entire schools greater insights regarding students' strengths and weaknesses. Such analysis can help teachers identify results-oriented goals that can enhance the school's effectiveness.

However, appeals to improve test scores are unlikely to generate the enthusiasm and commitment needed to sustain a school improvement effort. Most educators will not be inspired to expend greater effort or explore new strategies in the hope of raising test scores by 5%.

Leaders who are most effective in generating results will appeal not only to the bottom line, but also to the *heart*. In fact, one of the best strategies for improving results is connecting with people's deepest, heartfelt hopes.

What are those hopes? Humans have a fundamental longing to *believe we are successful in what we do – our need to achieve*. Educators typically are denied this sense of success. Bombarded with too many state, national, and district standards for students to master in the allotted time, teachers often are unclear as to what they are supposed to accomplish. Without a way to determine how well their students are learning compared with similar students, teachers operate in a vacuum that makes it difficult for them to identify their strengths. The media and public figures assail public education in general as a failure.

Another basic need of the human heart is to feel a *sense of belonging or connectedness*. But most educators work in isolation, facing the myriad challenges of the

professional without a support system.

Finally, humans have an innate desire *to feel we are making a difference*, to feel a sense of significance and purpose.

Perhaps more than ever, schools need leaders who purposefully address these matters of the heart. We need leaders who can help create a culture of success by establishing processes to help all teachers clarify a reasonable number of essential learning outcomes and provide each with timely, relevant information on how their students' mastery of those outcomes compares with the achievement of similar students. We need leaders who plan for (rather than hope for) small wins and who celebrate the successes of individual teachers, teams of teachers, and the entire school in very public ways. We need leaders who tear down the walls of isolation and build a collaborative culture based on teams whose members work together interdependently to achieve common goals.

Above all, we need leaders who remind us of the moral purpose of our profession. The very

nature of our profession calls on us to devote ourselves to making a difference in the lives of others. The success or failure of our efforts will affect the aspirations, opportunities, and quality of life of all our students.

Leaders who reject the idea of appeals to the heart as too “soft” for the data-driven, results-oriented schools they hope to create need to re-think their assumptions. In their landmark study of leadership, James Kouzes and Barry Posner (1991) found that one distinguishing characteristic of leaders who were most effective in producing desirable

results was their attention to “encouraging the heart.” These leaders realize that the best way to get results is to engage in an ongoing process of reminding people that their work is important, that they are successful, and that their continued success will depend in large part on their willingness to work together to share their knowledge, skills, and insights.

Data can inform, but unless data are translated into powerful stories that speak to the emotions, facts are unlikely to inspire. Leaders make a mistake when they appeal only to the head. The best

leaders realize that, ultimately, they must appeal to the heart.

Adapted from National Staff Development Council, Winter 2004.

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Call the Center at 989-774-7678 for a copy of the complete article.

COACHES



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Each month we will be featuring one of our Comprehensive School Reform/MSIM Coaches. We are very proud of our coaching staff and would like to share some information about each one with you over the next few months.

Dave Nizinski is now serving as a Leadership Coach in three Comprehensive Reform Schools: Mt. Morris Central Elementary, Bendle Middle School in Burton, and AuGres-Sims Middle School. Dave recently retired as principal of White Pine Middle School in Saginaw Township, a position he had held since 1992.

Dave has a real passion for middle level students, and has been very active in professional organizations and in professional development presentations. His Bachelor's degree is in Special Education and he has a Master's degree in Public School Administration. He has also earned the title, “Certified Reality Therapist” from the William Glasser Institute in Chatsworth, California.

Of course, Dave has another passion, and that is for the Beach Boys! He reports that he listens to their music every day and has attended several of their concerts. He even has a personal connection, as his brother is a friend of one of the band members. So Dave enjoys going backstage to chat with “the Boys”! When you see Dave, ask him to play “Surfin’ USA” on his special music box!

Thanks, Dave, for your fine work!

Student Station

Write It Down!

For centuries, people have kept diaries to record their thoughts, chronicle their daily activities, and leave a written record for the rest of the world to read. From simple notes jotted on scrap paper, to pages of philosophical ramblings, journals and diaries can be a great way for people to express themselves.

One famous diary was written by Anne Frank, a teenager living in the Netherlands during the Holocaust. She recorded her thoughts about the war going on around her, as she and her family hid in an attic. Other teens also kept war diaries: in *We Are Witnesses*, Jacob Boas compiles the writings of three boys and two girls living in Germany during the early 1940's; and *The Diary of David Sierakowiak* tells about the Nazi occupation of Poland in the words of a teenage boy. In 1992, 11-year-old Zlata Filipovic kept a diary recording her experiences when war broke out in her hometown of Sarajevo, in the country of Bosnia. *Zlata's Diary* describes how this typical middle-class girl's life changed as a result of the war.

Of course, not all diaries and journals focus on war. Throughout history, adventurers and explorers have kept diaries describing what they did, saw, and heard. *The Voyage of Christopher Columbus* and *The Travels of Marco Polo* chronicle the experiences of two early explorers. Later, Lewis and Clark included detailed notes, observations, and maps in their diaries as they explored the Western Frontier of the United States. And, in the 20th century, adventurers Steven Callahan (*Adrift: Seventy-six Days Lost at Sea*) and Lute Jerstad (*Everest Diary*) kept journals describing their experiences.

Other people keep diaries to record their efforts to find their own unique places in the world. *New Kids in Town*, by Janet Bode; *My Name is Seepeetza*, by Shirley Sterling; *The Diary of Latoya Hunter: My First Year in Junior High*; and *Real Teens: Diary of a Junior Year* all feature entries by teenagers writing about their daily lives.

So, what do you have to say to the world? Your journal doesn't have to be profound or life-changing -- it just has to be **you!** All you need is a pen and a piece of paper; pick them up and get started today!

***Be sure to pick up
a good book today!***



Resource Review



Zlata's Diary by Zlata Filipovic

In the fall of 1991, Zlata Filipovic was a typical girl living a normal life in the city of Sarajevo in Bosnia, and looking forward to the start of another school year. That fall, she decided to begin keeping a diary. She wrote about her home, her friends, her family vacations, her piano and tennis lessons, and her grades.

Eight months after Zlata wrote her first diary entry, war broke out in Bosnia, and Zlata's life changed forever. She began writing about what it was like to live in a war zone, with bombs dropping on her neighborhood, snipers shooting at anyone who went outside, and families living for days or weeks at a time with no electricity, heat, or running water. Zlata wrote of cowering in fear with her parents in the basement of their house, listening helplessly as the windows of their apartment were blown out by shells landing nearby, and of losing friends and family members to the violence. She also wrote about the power of the new friendships her family formed with their neighbors, as they all banded together to celebrate birthdays and holidays, to take care of each other during the hardest times, and to share food, water, and other resources that they needed to survive.



Zlata and her parents remained in the Sarajevo war zone for nearly two years, and the entries in her diary chronicle her life during that time. When you read the book, you may be surprised to find that many parts of Zlata's life went on in spite of the war raging around her. She continued to go to school much of the time, and many of the adults she knew continued to work at their jobs. Zlata played the piano when she could, read books, visited with friends, and got letters and packages from friends and family members who had fled Sarajevo. Although they were in constant danger, Zlata and her family were determined to persevere.

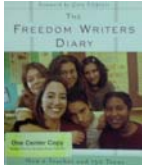
Pick up *Zlata's Diary*, and read about one courageous girl's struggle to survive and to maintain her humanity while war raged all around her.

The Freedom Writers Diary by The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell

In 1994, an idealistic twenty-three-year-old, Erin Gruwell, began her teaching career at Wilson High School in Long Beach, California, a community deeply divided along race and class lines. The students in Gruwell's four classes of "at-risk" freshmen included gang members, teenage parents, drug addicts, homeless kids, and truants; and Gruwell, a self-described "preppy" from an upper-middle-class background, struggled to connect with them. One day, she intercepted a note which was being passed around the class, and upon seeing the ugly racial caricature drawn on it, she erupted, shouting at her students that the picture reminded her of propaganda used by the Nazis during the Holocaust. She was stunned to receive only blank looks in response, and to learn

that not a single one of her students knew what the Holocaust was. She then asked her students how many of them had ever been shot at, and nearly the whole class raised their hands. At that point, writes Gruwell, "I decided to throw out my meticulously planned lessons and make tolerance the core of my curriculum."

The results were nothing short of amazing. As they read the diaries of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic, Gruwell's students began making connections between the Holocaust, the war in Bosnia, and their own lives. They raised funds to bring Miep Gies, the Dutch woman who sheltered the Frank family, to visit them in Long Beach; later, they arranged for Zlata Filipovic to spend four days with them, as well. Inspired by these real-life heroes, the students themselves began to change and to believe in their own potential. Eventually, they dubbed themselves "Freedom Writers" in honor of the Freedom Riders who sought to integrate the South during the Civil Rights Movement, and they set out on a mission to bring tolerance and compassion to their community, their nation, and their world.



The *Freedom Writers Diary* is composed entirely of diary entries written by Gruwell and her students during their four years together. It is a stunning and moving portrait of a group of adolescents overcoming nearly insurmountable odds and changing their own lives, one decision at a time.



Teacher Topics

Independent Reading: Growing Lifelong Readers

In recent FYI's, we have devoted the Teacher Topics section to a discussion of three crucial strategies for the creation of a scaffolded reading experience for middle schoolers: **read-alouds**, in which students listen as their teacher reads aloud a book, poem, or short story; **shared reading**, in which students build their reading abilities by following along in the text as the teacher reads; and **guided reading**, in which students read silently and are prompted by carefully designed questions to create meaning from what they have read. This month, we will explore the fourth strategy in this series: **independent reading**.

Janet Allen (*There's Room for Me Here; Yellow Brick Roads*) describes independent reading time as a regular period during which everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, engages in sustained silent reading. Allen argues that students should be given a great deal of freedom during independent reading time to select texts which interest them, and that teachers should resist the temptation to limit independent reading selections to those which supplement subject matter that is being taught in the rest of the curriculum. She advocates filling classroom libraries with a wide variety of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, newspapers, magazines, and even comic books. Independent reading, Allen argues, should be a time for students to build a love for reading, which will increase the likelihood that they will turn to text for entertainment and/or information in the future.

At first glance, the concept of independent reading time may seem fraught with the potential for chaos; however, Allen in *Yellow Brick Roads* describes her own time-tested strategies for helping kids to locate reading material which satisfies them, for modeling silent sustained reading, and for keeping track of students' reading progress. A well-structured independent reading class keeps even the most reluctant readers motivated, engaged, and eager for more time to read.



Family Focus

Writing: A Key to School Success

Most parents know that good reading skills are vital to their children's success in school, but many do not realize that writing is equally important. Good writing means more than just excellent penmanship and more than just putting words down on paper without making mistakes in spelling or grammar. While it is certainly important for a writer to know the rules of grammar in order to clearly express ideas, it is much more important to actually *have* ideas worth expressing!

Writing, even more than reading, requires students to think clearly and to organize their thoughts in a logical manner. Many young writers become so caught up in trying to spell every word correctly that they lose sight of the bigger picture -- the *meaning* of what they are trying to say -- which is, after all, the reason for writing. It takes practice to learn to write well, and one way to encourage young adolescents to hone their skills is to give them opportunities to engage in forms of writing that do not require them to pay strict attention to rules of grammar, spelling, and syntax. Rough drafts of school papers, for example, should focus more on arranging ideas in a logical order than on achieving technical perfection. Fixing grammar and spelling can wait until the final draft.

A popular form of writing among young adolescents -- both girls and boys -- is journaling. This informal chronicling allows writers to record their reactions to everyday events, focusing on organizing and clearly expressing their thoughts without regard to sentence structure, spelling, and vocabulary. Most journals are kept private, allowing the writer to express feelings honestly, without worrying about what other people might think. Journaling is particularly important for young adolescents as they make the transition from childhood into adolescence.

Encourage your children to keep journals; reassure them that you will respect their right to keep journal contents private. Perhaps you would even enjoy keeping your own journal, and spending a little time each evening writing with your kids! You'll all be building your skills in thinking and communicating clearly.

Resource Highlights



- G-27** *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education*
J.S. Kendall and R.J. Marzano
- IS-3** *Teaching for Achievement in Urban Middle Schools*
B. Bimes-Michalak
- IS-83** *Socratic Seminars and Literature Circles for Middle and High School English*
V.J. Moeller and M.V. Moeller
- IS-86** *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools*
A.L. Costa and R.J. Garmston
- IS-88** *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*
A.L. Costa

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.



M - Movement, nutritious snacks and water can help students perform better

E - Educators can communicate the importance of MEAP to parents & students

A - Attitudes are contagious - think positively about MEAP, and your students will, too

P - Preparation is the key, and your curriculum is aligned with MEAP

“Powerful Quote”

“The truth is that people always act according to what they believe. It may not be what they say they believe, but deep down it’s what they really believe. And false beliefs lead to false actions.”

E. Chris Curvin

Contact us:

Michigan Schools in the Middle

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