



*National Award Winning Professional Development*

A Michigan Middle Start Partner Organization  
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## *Best Practices in Our Schools*

Pat Benson, MSIM Director, spent the past month traveling from the shores of Lake Huron to the Cereal City, from large urban areas of Michigan to small, rural towns in the state. Benson's visits to middle schools to meet with Leadership Teams and Coaches reaffirmed MSIM's belief that great things are happening in Michigan Middle Level Schools.

Across the state, teachers and administrators are working hard to make a difference for some of our most needy middle school students. There is much evidence of a spirit of collaboration and reflection---practices which help teachers to be thoughtful regarding teacher practice and student learning.

The following is a snapshot of some of the best practices which were observed in Comprehensive School Reform Middle Start Schools:

- Leadership Teams are meeting regularly with agendas and norms for

operation to dialogue and discuss student data as it relates to the school's SMART goals. In particular, many schools are analyzing student report card data and asking powerful questions concerning interventions to help all students achieve at high levels.

"Great things are happening for kids in MSIM schools."

- Teachers are engaging in a good deal of job-embedded professional development—they are learning together and from each other. Some of the professional development is in the form of study groups in which

teachers are reading a book by Ruby Payne entitled ***Understanding Poverty***. These teachers are finding new ways to address the needs of their changing student populations.

- Teams, together with their Coaches, are also implementing Walk-throughs to help them determine the degree of implementation of literacy strategies which have been the focus of their professional development. Coaches are sharing this data with Leadership Teams in a non-evaluative format, and this is helping teams make progress toward achieving their SMART goals.

- Teachers are developing and/or using common writing rubrics to evaluate student writing and to help all students become proficient writers.

- Some schools have engaged in highly successful Parent-Teacher-Student Book Clubs and writing projects. Schools are changing their culture to reflect that “it is now cool to be a reader.” These activities have strengthened teacher/parent relationships and literacy has become a shared focus.

- Data collection and analysis is a vital part of the work of many Leadership Teams. Teams are regularly reviewing STAR reading results and seeking ways to support struggling readers. One school is piloting a Vision Therapy for below-grade-level readers.

- Several teams have identified multiple strategies to help students who are falling behind. Through this process, teachers have critically reviewed their own homework/classroom assignments have given students multiple opportunities to succeed. One school has implemented the ABCI policy and is braving this process with wisdom and with sensitivity to the needs of young adolescents. Another school has used a study hall/skills class to significantly reduce the number of Ds and Es on report cards.

- Leadership Teams are also networking with each other---hosting meetings to gain glimpses of each other’s schools and to engage in dialogue around common issues. These teachers are applying the primary communication skills of pausing, paraphrasing, and questioning.

These MSIM schools are right on target, and we are committed to continuing to support their work in the future as we all work together to improve outcomes for KIDS! In the next couple of weeks, FYI readers will be able to “visit” each of these schools through MSIM’s website: [schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu](http://schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu)



# ***Leadership Lifeline***

## ***Enhancing Leadership Qualities***

Believing that a teacher's decision to stay at a school largely depends upon the principal and his or her leadership in the school, the Charlotte (NC) Advocates for Education, a local education fund, recently studied local principals, particularly those in high needs schools, who have been more successful in retaining teachers while also increasing student achievement.

The Charlotte study found that relying only on principal development and training is not the entire answer.

- Districts must recruit and hire individuals who have not only excellent education backgrounds, but also specific innate qualities – self-motivation, tenacity, willingness to take risks, ability to conceptualize goals and operationalize plans, skill at solving problems, and commitment to their profession. “We then must continue to support and foster the growth of these individuals,” the group said.
- Districts must re-examine the traditional leadership structure to determine if it is the most effective and efficient structure to meet teacher and student needs. One individual may not be able to provide the leadership in as many areas as are required.
- Principals must have professional development that assists them in understanding strategies that strengthen relationships, help teachers grow, and enable teachers to be successful in improving student achievement. Principals then should be held accountable for using these strategies.
- To be successful, principals must have received appropriate and effective adult education concerning the operations of leading a school (e.g. creating a budget and developing master schedules).

Source: *Role of Principal Leadership in Increasing Teacher Retention: Creating a Supportive Environment* by the Charlotte Advocates for Education, [www.advocatesfored.org/principalstudy.htm](http://www.advocatesfored.org/principalstudy.htm). Taken from Results, May 2004



# ***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 May is Tracy Nofs. Tracy resides in Battle Creek and is serving as the Leadership Coach for Hesperia Middle School.

Tracy earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech Pathology from Central Michigan University and received a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University. She is certified by the State of Michigan as an elementary principal.

Most recently, Tracy was Principal of W.K. Kellogg Middle School in Battle Creek. In addition, she has been principal of several elementary schools in that area. She has also served as an Instructor at Kellogg Community College.

Tracy is passionate about participating in the professional development of middle school staff! She is experienced in the instructional, operational and administrative leadership needed for middle school success.

Thanks, Tracy, for your fine work.



# Student Station

## Reading -- A Great Summer Activity!

The sun is shining, the grass is growing, the flowers are blooming, and soon it will be time for summer vacation! So, how are you going to fill those long, lazy days? After mowing the lawn, playing a game of soccer, or swimming in the local pool, take a break with a cold glass of lemonade and a good book.

Do you like mysteries? Pick up a classic young adult mystery series, like Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, or the Three Investigators. Or you could read *Shades of Simon Gray*, by Joyce McDonald; *The House of Dies Drear*, by Virginia Hamilton; or the Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle.

Are you interested in history? There are a lot of great young adult novels out there that are set in other places and times. If you like reading about Ancient Egypt, try *His Majesty, Queen Hatshepsut*, by Joyce Carter; *The Golden Goblet*, by Eloise Jarvis McGraw; or *The Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt*, by Elizabeth Payne. If you're interested in what life was like for the earliest humans, read *Maroo of the Winter Caves*, by Wendy Turnbull; *Life in the Great Ice Age*, by Michael J. Oard; or *Malu's Wolf*, by Ruth Craig. You can read some great books about the history of the United States, too. A couple of great Revolutionary War stories are *My Brother Sam is Dead* and *War Comes to Willy Freeman*, both written by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier. The frontier life of the westward expansion is chronicled in *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*, by Karen Cushman; Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series; and *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, by Margaret Craven.

Maybe you want to get out of this world altogether! Try a fantasy novel, like the *Earthsea* Trilogy by Ursula LeGuin; *Ella Enchanted*, by Gail Carson Levine; or *Dealing with Dragons*, by Patricia Wrede. Or pick up some futuristic fiction: Lois Lowry's *The Giver* is always popular with young

adolescents; so is *The Green Book*, by Jill Paton Walsh. *The House of the Scorpion*, by Nancy Farmer, is a brand new book which young adolescents across the country are loving.

Adventure fiction is also a good choice for summer reading. If you haven't read *Beardance*, by Will Hobbs, give it a try -- it's a great story! *Winter Camp*, by Kirkpatrick Hill, is another good read, and so are *My Side of the Mountain*, by Jean Craighead George and *Homecoming*, by Cynthia Voigt.

When you're ready to really stretch your brain, pick up *The Pearl*, by John Steinbeck; *Fallen Angels*, by Walter Dean Myers; *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry; or *I Am the Cheese*, by Robert Cormier. These books will pull you into their interesting plots, and challenge your reading and thinking skills at the same time.

You've got a whole summer's worth of reading ahead of you -- so, grab a book and get started!

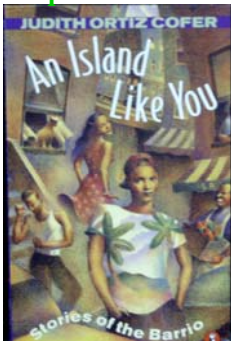


## ***Student Book Review***

### **An Island Like You**

**Author: Judith Ortiz Cofer**

Open this book and find yourself transported to another world: the world of a Puerto Rican *barrio*, described by teenagers in twelve short stories. There is Rita, who is spending the summer with her grandparents, Mama Ana and Papa Juan. At first, Rita thinks she will have a miserable time watching soap operas with Mama Ana, following Papa Juan around on his bizarre quests to rid his neighbors' houses of evil spirits, and caring for her grandparents' crazy rooster, Ramon. But, as the summer wears on, Rita makes an interesting new friend who helps her to see that her grandparents aren't as crazy as they seem.



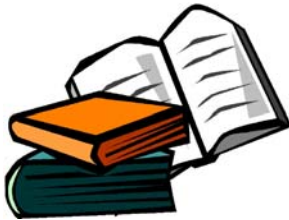
Arturo, another of the teens who lives in the *barrio*, sees crime, violence, and drugs all around him, but he tries to resist the pressure to join a gang like all the other boys. He wants to do well in school so that he can move out of the *barrio* and make a good life for himself, but he is afraid that his friends will scorn him if doesn't act the way they do.

Yolanda, whose family lives in an apartment down the hall from Arturo's family, doesn't seem to care what anyone thinks of her. Lately, she has been getting in all kinds of trouble -- shoplifting, skipping school, stealing from her friends. Even her best friend Doris doesn't want to be around her anymore. Why has Yolanda started acting this way? Her friends and family don't know why; but, in her own story, Yolanda explains how it all started.

While Yolanda is just beginning to make choices that will get her in trouble, Luis has been doing it for years. He was the founder of the Tiburones (Sharks), a neighborhood gang that has gotten in many scrapes with the police. Luis has spent time in jail, and now he is on probation and working in his father's auto salvage yard. One lonely night, something happens to make Luis re-think his tough-guy image, and he takes a small step toward turning his life around.

These four teens and others who live in their neighborhood will come alive to you as you read about their loves, their heartaches, their families and friends, and the choices they make. Pick up *An Island Like You*, and take a peek into their world!

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



## ***Resource Review***

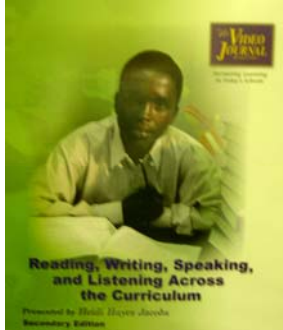
### **Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening Across the Curriculum**

#### **Video Journal of Education**

In this excellent video, Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs argues that all teachers should be teachers of literacy and should engage in professional development which helps them to build their students' skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Such skills, Jacobs says, are best built within the context of subject-area learning, and they contribute immeasurably to the development of students' content knowledge.

Jacobs points out that more and more students are coming to school -- even to middle school -- without having gained even basic proficiency in reading and writing. Often, their skills at speaking and listening are even less developed. The burden of guiding students toward developing these abilities is falling heavily on schools; and the only way to carry the load, Jacobs argues, is for every teacher to become a language teacher.

The video defines and explores the concepts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Reading, Jacobs says, is fundamental to all education, and must be emphasized at all grade levels. The middle grades are a crucial time for implementing reading interventions for students who lack basic skills in this area. Writing, which is



interdependent with reading, must also be taught, and correct writing and editing practiced, in all subjects and at all grade levels. Jacobs calls for a formal teaching of speaking skills to begin in the elementary grades and continue through high school; and for listening, and the corollary skill of note-taking, to be practiced and assessed throughout the curriculum.

Curriculum mapping, Jacobs contends, can be useful in guiding teachers as they plan collaboratively to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening across the curriculum. Teachers should communicate across grade levels, among subject areas, and between buildings in order to ensure the seamless teaching of these vital skills.

In addition to making the theoretical case for coordinated instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the video demonstrates specific strategies and tactics for improving students' language skills. Several examples of classrooms in action demonstrate the implementation of literacy strategies across content areas and at multiple grade levels.

An instructional guide is included with this outstanding two-part video. Call the Center at (989) 774-7678 today, and ask to check out resource number CV-26.



## ***Teacher Topics***

### **Developing Independent Learners**

As the world moves beyond the Industrial Age of factories and assembly lines and into a high-tech world in which vast amounts of information must be rapidly sifted and processed, the roles of people -- as citizens, as producers and consumers, as members of families and communities -- are changing, as well. The knowledge, skills, and habits of mind which served the average U.S. citizen well during the mid- to late- 20<sup>th</sup> century are rapidly becoming obsolete, and so are the ways in which we used to educate our children.

Gone are the days when packing kids' minds full of disconnected "facts" passed for effective education. Perhaps this old style of pedagogy served well to instill

addition and multiplication tables into kids' brains, or to mold them into dutiful automatons ready to spend more than a third of their adult lives standing on an assembly line performing the same mindless task over and over again. . . but, in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this factory mentality will not serve our children well.

So, what skills, knowledge, and habits of mind do our kids need to be developing in order to be effective members of the global community? Perhaps most important will be their ability to think and learn independently. Instead of relying on a teacher to tell them what they should know, on a boss to tell them what they should do, or on a politician to tell them what they should think, the adults of the future will need to be intrinsically motivated in their learning, self-directed in their work, and capable of thinking critically about the barrage of information and misinformation hurled at them from all directions.

How can middle-grades teachers help the young adolescents in their care to develop the independent thinking abilities they will need to thrive and to make positive contributions to the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Teachers can create classroom environments in which each student's unique skills and abilities are valued, and in which each student's voice is heard. They can intentionally foster students' abilities to communicate, to collaborate, and to build a caring community within the classroom. They can assist students in establishing learning goals and in determining how best to work toward meeting those goals. They can challenge students to define problems or issues and then to work toward finding solutions. They can provide feedback and reinforcement to students, combined with guidance toward "next steps" for students to take. They can raise questions which lead students toward further investigation of problems or issues.

The typical middle school classroom of 2004 looks very different from the typical junior high classroom of 1954, or even of 1974. Instead of rows of students sitting quietly at their desks, memorizing multiplication tables or parts of speech or the Periodic Table of Elements in order to regurgitate them on a test before moving on to the next topic, the successful classrooms of today feature students working - - sometimes independently, sometimes in groups -- to connect their prior knowledge with new learning in order to find answers to questions or problems that are important and relevant to them. In short, the 21<sup>st</sup> century model middle school classroom is an incubator for the citizens of tomorrow -- self-directed, intrinsically motivated lifelong learners, productive and prosocial members of the global society.



## ***Family Focus***

### **Preventing the “Summer Blahs”**

You’ve seen it happen before -- school lets out for the summer, and for the first couple of weeks, your kids are full of energy and excitement. They go to the park, play basketball with their friends, maybe spend some time at a summer camp. But the routine quickly gets old, and before you know it, your kids are complaining of being bored and having nothing to do. They start spending more time indoors, watching TV, playing video games, or just sitting around doing nothing. They get cranky and restless, and they can’t seem to snap themselves out of it -- so they watch more TV, play more video games, eat more junk food snacks, and get crankier and more restless. It’s a vicious cycle.

So, what can you, as a parent or caregiver, do to help your kids make constructive use of their free time in the summer? Here are a few simple suggestions:

- **Spend a little time each evening helping your kids decide what they’ll do the next day.** Remember, your young adolescents may find it hard to go from the rigid structure of the school day to the freedom of summer vacation. Help them plan ahead so that they have interesting and productive things to do at specific times each day. Kids with lots of unstructured, unsupervised time on their hands often make choices that end up harming them later.
- **Make sure your kids spend time outdoors and get some exercise every day.** Your young adolescents are growing and developing, and they need regular outlets for physical activity. They also need fresh air and sunshine, as we all do. Even if they just take a short walk every day, you will notice that their moods improve and they are less restless.
- **Set specific limits on TV watching and video game playing, and stick to your limits.** We all know by now that spending too much time watching television and playing video games is bad for kids and adults alike. Set

some limits for your kids, and stick with them. It helps if you set a good example for your young adolescents by limiting your own TV and computer time, as well.

- **Provide options for your kids.** Try to have other things around your home for your kids to do. It certainly doesn't hurt to assign them some household chores. Also, if you can, keep a basket of art supplies -- paper, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, and the like -- around for kids to use. Books of crossword puzzles, word searches, or maze games can be lots of fun, too, and they're cheap. You don't have to spend a lot of money or time to provide some things for your kids to do on rainy days. Perhaps you could take a trip to the local library once a week or so, and let your young adolescents check out books to read.

- **Limit junk food snacks.** It's tempting to have a lot of sugary or salty snacks around, especially during the summer; but remember that your kids will tend to snack more when they are around the house all day. Young adolescents particularly need good nutrition, since their bodies and brains are growing and changing so rapidly. If you allow your kids to snack between meals, try to replace junk food snacks with healthful choices such as carrots, celery, cheese, and fruits. Get them to drink water or milk instead of soda.

- **Monitor, monitor, monitor!** Although it's often hard to keep track of where your kids are and who they're hanging out with, especially if you're a single parent or a working couple, remember that young adolescents still need guidance in making choices that are positive and healthy. If, like many parents, you can't be home with your kids during the day, make sure that they are in the care of someone you know and trust. Get to know your kids' friends, and the families of those friends. Insist on knowing where your kids are, and with whom, at all times. It is your right as a parent to know these things -- and it is also your responsibility!

- **Schedule some time for fun.** Set aside some time at least once a week to just relax with your kids and do something that all of you enjoy. It doesn't have to cost money; it doesn't have to take lots of time, energy, or other resources; it can be as simple as sitting down to a meal together, reading a book together, playing catch in the back yard, or just sitting and talking. When your kids see that you care enough to spend time with them, their self-esteem will soar.

## Resource Highlights



<b>YANCV-5</b>	Self-Esteem	Video Journal of Education
<b>LSD-54</b>	Becoming a Better Teacher	Giselle O. Martin-Kniep
<b>LSD-56</b>	Student Achievement through Staff Development	Bruce Joyce & Beverly Showers
<b>C-10</b>	Integrated Studies in the Middle Grades	Chris Stevenson & Judy Carr
<b>AS-13</b>	One Size Fits Few	Susan Ohanian

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”***

**“The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts.”**

**C.S. Lewis**



*Thank you to all of you who helped us celebrate our 10<sup>th</sup> birthday.....stopping by to say hi, sending cards and emails, flowers and good wishes.*



**This is your last FYI for the year.  
We hope that you have a wonderful, relaxing**



***To keep the FYI coming next year,  
remember to renew your MSIM membership.***

*Contact us:*

***Michigan Schools in the Middle***  
***KIDS ARE AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING WE DO!***

***678 Ronan Hall***  
***Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859***

***Phone: 989-774-7678***

***Fax: 989-774-7684***

***E-mail:***

***msim678@cmich.edu***

***Web:***

***[www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu](http://www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu)***

