



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

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Teach Them Thinking Skills

In the past 30 years, policy makers and educators have debated whether schooling should emphasize facts or critical thinking skills. Proponents of the first view argue that students need to know when the Civil War happened before they can accurately interpret its causes. Proponents of the second view counter that students will soon forget the exact dates of the Battle of Chancellorsville, but they will probably remember the insights that they gain from studying this battle's causes, leadership, military reasoning, and human costs.

For the most part, however, this debate has not been informed by actual empirical data. Fortunately, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) offers relevant information. Administered every year or two since 1996 in various subjects - including mathematics, science, reading, and civics the NAEP assessments are taken by representative samples of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders throughout

the United States.

When we examine various analyses, some published and some unpublished, a clear pattern emerges from the data: Across subjects, teaching for

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meaning is associated with higher NAEP test scores. Although students must learn basic skills and facts at some point, these results suggest that instruction emphasizing advanced reasoning skills promotes high student performance.

Math: In mathematics, some educators advocate teaching students basic skills, such as multiplication tables, and reinforcing those skills through drill and practice. Others advocate teaching students mathematical rea-

soning, such as the principles behind algorithms for multiplication and division, and emphasizing such complex topics as data analysis and probability early in the curriculum. The NAEP data support the latter approach. Among U.S. 4th and 8th graders, teaching that emphasizes higher-order thinking skills, project-based learning, opportunities to solve problems that have multiple solutions, and such hands-on techniques as using manipulatives are all associated with higher performance on the mathematics NAEP. Such methods reflect the idea that learning mathematics is an interactive process, rather than a linear process in which students progress from simple facts to more complicated ones.

Science: The curricular debate has been between those who advocate teaching students the facts of science and those who emphasize hands-on activities that allow students to explore theory.

Basic skills advocates do not necessarily object to the use of hands-on activities, but they assign them a different role, in which the teacher defines laboratory procedures and students carry them out to demonstrate, for example, what happens when heat is placed under a balloon.

The NAEP data again suggest the benefits of teaching for meaning. Students tend to score higher on the 4th grade and 8th grade NAEP science tests when they have experienced science instruction centered on projects in which they took a high degree of initiative.

Reading Comprehension:

Some scholars have simply staked out positions on reading comprehension analogous to their positions on work identification and fluency. Yet here, NAEP scores do offer some guidance - and they strongly suggest that when it comes to comprehension, basic

skills approaches are inappropriate.

In both 4th and 8th grades, NAEP scores in comprehension favor teaching for meaning. Students tend to perform better on NAEP comprehension questions when they have experienced instruction in metacognitive skills (drawing meaning from text by asking questions, summarizing the work, identifying key themes, and thinking critically about the author's purpose and whether that purpose was achieved). In addition, students' comprehension is higher when they had been exposed to "real" texts - books and stories rather than short passages in basal readers. Finally, students improve their comprehension skills by reading literature and then writing about the literature, which gives them the opportunity to apply their metacognitive skills.

Civics: Eighth graders, on the other hand, benefit both from reading

textbooks and from such hands-on activities as service learning. Thus, in the case of civics, students will likely do best with a developmental model in which they begin by learning the content and then go on to make sense of it through civic practice.

In summary, young adolescents learn more and perform better on standardized tests when we teach them to use their minds well---to engage in critical thinking. Whether you are teaching social studies or science, students need to be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. See the Teacher Topics section in this issue of FYI for ideas on Teaching middle school students to analyze.

Article adapted from "Facts or Critical Thinking Skills?", by Harold Wenglinsky, Educational Leadership, September 2004. For a complete copy of the article, call MSIM at 989-774-7678.





Teacher Topics

Analyze This !!!!!

“Analyze This!”, in addition to being the title of a recent movie, is a critical thinking skill which young adolescents must be proficient in using. As one of the higher-order thinking skills, analysis is necessary in every content area and is heavily tested on standardized tests such as the MEAP.

“Analysis” refers to the ability to break down material into its component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. This may mean finding relationships between parts, and recognizing the organizational principles involved. Learning outcomes here represent a higher intellectual level than comprehension and application because they require an understanding of both the content and the structural form of the materials.

What are middle-grades students asked to do which requires analysis? Listed below are some sample "analysis" assignments from each of the core subject areas:

Language Arts

- * Compare and contrast verbs and adverbs and their uses.
- * Read "letters to the editor" and select one to either agree or disagree with and justify your position.
- * Classify the items on a given standardized test in as many ways as you can.
- * Select an article and assess the quality of the editing work, using your own list of "rules for editing."
- * Write a book review for a local paper.
- * Objectively pinpoint both strengths and weaknesses of a work.

Science

- * Compare and contrast a telescope, a microscope, and a periscope.

- * Using a given data table, explain what the data is reporting and how one might account for the given data.

- * Explain the heart's contribution to the functioning of the human body. Compare the contribution of the heart to the contribution of the lungs.

- * Collect leaves, stems, flowers, fruits, and/or seeds from a tree near where you live. Analyze each product to determine its role in the tree's growth and propagation.

- * Compare the wind speeds that precede a hurricane with the wind speeds that precede a tornado. Write a word problem based on this comparison.

Math

- * Use advertisements from a local newspaper to locate products similar to those in a mail-order catalog. Compare the prices of products sold in your local stores to prices of products in catalogs. Taking into account shipping and handling charges for the catalog and transportation costs for local shopping, determine which is the most economical way to buy the selected products.

- * Distinguish between a bar graph and double bar graph. Give an example of a good use of each.

- * Determine what makes fractions easier or harder for students to comprehend than other math topics such as geometry, decimals, and whole numbers.

- * Study the world's time zones and try to find out why particular boundaries were established.

- * Given a list of measurement tools (units) decide which you would select if you could choose only ten to measure your life's events (school, home, recreational), and explain why you choose the ones you chose.



Teacher Topics - continued

Social Studies

* Decide if you agree or disagree with this statement: "A community is only as strong as its leadership." Justify your position.

* Analyze a globe to identify a country you would like to visit; a country whose climate might be similar to that of the USA; and a country whose culture is probably very different from your own.

* Compare and contrast the economies of Asia and Africa.

* Review several sources of information on the Great Depression (text, articles, interviews with elderly persons, etc.) and analyze these to create a list of the

causes of the Great Depression.

* Given the data table provided, take a stand on the issue of censorship and defend your position using research.

Analysis requires students to think deeply and to take apart concepts and ideas in order to explain data, make comparisons, and make decisions---all life skills which our students will use every day for the rest of their lives. For more information on Analysis, please call:

MSIM at 989-774-7678.

Coaching Instructional Thought

Offered again....Because it works.

5 days of training will be held in the southeastern corner of Michigan. The *exact* location has yet to be determined.

Dates are:

Nov 9 & 10, 2004 - Dec 14, 2004 -

Jan 11, 2005 - Feb 8, 2005

Cost: \$495 per person. Includes materials, breakfast & lunch

Registration deadline is October 28, 2004

Minimum registration is required.

Call 989-774-7678 for a registration form.



Leadership Lifeline

A CULTURE COMMITTED TO LEARNING

Rick DuFour reports on four schools which have successfully responded to student learning needs and formed professional learning communities. One of the important findings from these schools is the culture within the school which is created through having a shared vision, norms, and values. DuFour states, "A critical element in creating these powerful school cultures is the principal's leadership."

Each is clearly committed to empowering staff, delegating authority, and developing collaborative decision-making processes, but none is unwilling to confront a staff member who violates the fundamental concepts of the school's culture. Leadership is widely distributed in each school, with clearly delineated guiding coalitions overseeing the improvement process. The collaborative team structures in place in each school also encourage fluid situational leadership throughout the school. When a team discovers that one of its members has special expertise in a particular content area, in teaching a concept, in developing effective assessments, or in meeting the needs of a particular kind of learner, that member naturally assumes temporary leadership based on that expertise when the

team focuses on that topic. The principals delegate authority and serve as leaders of leaders rather than as the central problem solvers of their schools.

Nevertheless, in the early stages of implementing the changes that helped the school become a professional learning community, each principal faced challenges from one or more staff members who either aggressively or passively resisted the school's new direction. The consistent way in which the principals dealt with staff challenges offers important insights into leading the professional learning community process. In every case, the principal met with the teacher privately, stated concerns very directly, and identified the specific steps the teacher needed to take to remedy the situation. Finally, the principal asked how he or she might help the teacher make the necessary changes.

The teachers did not always respond positively to these discussions. Some became quite emotional and defensive. The principals, however, did not hedge. They made it clear that the teachers' behaviors were unacceptable and that the need for change was imperative. They did so without rancor, but

they left no doubt about their expectations.

Perhaps there are schools that have made the transition to professional learning communities without conflict or anxiety, but this is highly unlikely. Disagreements and tension are to be expected. The question schools must face is not, "How can we eliminate all potential for conflict as we go through this process?" but rather, "How will we react when we are immersed in the conflict that accompanies significant change?"

In *Crucial Conversations* (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002), the authors contrast teams' responses when faced with conflict. Ineffective teams will ignore the problem, letting it fester and build until resentment and frustration lead to an explosion of accusations and recrimination. Good teams will take the matter to the boss and ask that he or she deal with the problem and find a satisfactory solution. Great teams will deal with the issue themselves, engaging in open dialogue and applying positive peer pressure to bring about the desired change.

The problem in schools is that teams almost never start out as great teams.



Leadership Lifeline - continued

Before they get to the point at which team members can work together to resolve the matter, they likely will need the principal to help remedy the situation. A critical factor in creating the learning-centered culture of these four schools was the principals' willingness to confront obvious violations of the concepts upon which those cultures were built.

Culture has been defined as "the way we do things around here." Leaders shape the norms of behavior

(and thus the cultures) of their organizations in a number of ways. When principals work with staff to build processes to monitor each student's learning and to develop systems of intervention that give students additional time and support when they experience difficulty, they create the structures that support the concept of learning for all. When they give staff clear parameters to guide their work, but considerable autonomy in implementation, they increase the

likelihood that staff members will embrace that concept. But when principals are unwilling to tolerate actions that violate the underlying values of the culture, they use a powerful strategy for shaping the norms of behavior within their schools.

Adopted from: DuFour, Rick,
"Culture shift doesn't occur overnight or without conflict"
Journal of Staff Development,
Fall 2004.

Pontiac Middle School Teachers come together to learn!

On September 16 & 17, nearly 150 middle school teachers from all four Pontiac middle schools spent their days with Carolyn McKanders and Pat Benson learning what it means to be a Professional Learning Community. Teachers were eager to learn dozens of classroom management and instructional strategies which are effective in middle grades classrooms. Teachers also practiced communication skills to help them dialogue and build trust with their teacher teammates. One teacher commented that she learned that "who we are with other teachers is as important as who we are with students."

Pontiac middle school teachers will continue to work this year to develop strong professional learning communities with shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, collaboration, reflective dialogue, and public practice. Carolyn and Pat want to thank all of the participants for their enthusiasm for learning and for their willingness to implement new strategies.

WAY TO GO, PONTIAC MIDDLE SCHOOLS!





Student Station

So, Just What IS a Young Adolescent, Anyway?

Perhaps you've heard the news: the National Middle School Association has declared October to be the Month of the Young Adolescent -- a time to learn more about kids between the ages of eleven and fourteen. It's a month in which we ask adults to spend time learning about you and celebrating... YOU!

You may be wondering, "What does the term 'young adolescent' mean? What is a young adolescent, anyway?" Well, to put it simply, a young adolescent is a person who is moving out of childhood and toward adulthood. In our culture, young adolescents are kids who are in the eleven- to fourteen-year-old range -- in other words, you! If you think carefully about yourself, you will realize that you have changed and grown in many different ways over the past few years. Your body has grown bigger and stronger, you have started to make friends in new ways, you may have become more aware of the way you look or the clothes you wear, and your brain has become able to learn more complicated

things. You are beginning to develop the skills and qualities that you will need to become a fully fledged adult a few years from now.

That is what being a young adolescent is all about -- it's about making the transition from childhood to adulthood. It can be a scary time, as your body grows and changes, as you begin to feel more pressure to get good grades, and as you navigate the ups and downs of friendship and family relations. It can also be a very exciting time, though, as you take on more adult responsibilities and begin to earn more adult privileges, as you gain the freedom and intellectual skills to learn about things that have always intrigued you, and as you develop close and supportive friendships.

As a young adolescent, you are going through a life stage in which you are changing rapidly in many ways. Your body is growing, changing and maturing, which may cause you to feel restless, awkward, clumsy, or self-conscious about the way you look. This is normal. It is

also normal for young adolescents to feel worried about "fitting in" with their peers, about wearing the "right" clothes or having the right hairstyle, and about finding their unique place in the world. If you have any of these concerns, you are not alone! Your peers feel the same way.

Remember that being a young adolescent means being in a time of transition. It is natural and good to be a little bit uncomfortable as you seek to grow into your own place in the world. It can really help if you can find a trusted adult or friend with whom you can talk about your feelings. And, while you're hurrying down the road toward adulthood, don't forget to stop and smell the roses -- enjoy the new strength, smarts, and social skills that young adolescence has brought out in you!





Student Book Review

A Time Apart

Author: Diane Stanley

Ginny is a typical 13-year-old who likes typical things -- school, sports, surfing the Net, spending time with her friends. She lives with her mother in a comfortable home in Houston, and she is perfectly happy with her life... until her mother is diagnosed with breast cancer. Ginny is sent away to live with her father, Hugh, whom she hasn't seen in over a year, while her Mom undergoes chemotherapy and surgery.

Living with her Dad means more than just moving to a new house, though. Hugh is part of a group of researchers who are living in England and trying to re-create an Iron Age community. They live in the wilderness, in houses made of poles and thatch, and they grow all their own food, using tools that they make from sticks, stones, and other resources that they

find in nature. Ginny is shocked to learn that she must use a twig for a toothbrush and trade her designer jeans for homemade trousers of rough cotton.

At first, Ginny is surprised that the other people in the community accept her, because she feels very different from them. After all, she is the only person in the whole community who would rather not be living there -- the others, even the kids, all chose to join the project before it started. But after she has spent a few days there, she finds that she has much in common with them, and she finds herself curiously attracted to Corey, a mysterious and good-looking older boy. She begins to think that the summer won't be so bad, after all.

Then, Ginny is given a job that she doesn't want -- babysitting Daisy, the youngest

member of the community, so that Daisy's parents can spend more time working in the fields. Ginny is furious, and her Dad doesn't seem to understand why. He also doesn't want to talk with her about her mother's cancer treatment, or about when Ginny might be able to go home. She feels more alone than she ever has before. The only person with whom she can talk about her feelings is Corey. Together, the two of them hatch a plan to free Ginny from her Iron Age prison and get her back to civilization.

Pick up *A Time Apart* today, and find out what happens when Ginny makes her escape!





Family Focus

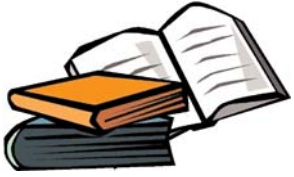
Celebrate Your Young Adolescent!

The National Middle School Association has named October the Month of the Young Adolescent -- a time to learn more about the special needs and characteristics of eleven- to fourteen-year-old kids, and a time to celebrate their potential. As parents of middle-schoolers, you probably know first-hand that the road from childhood to healthy teenage years can be scary and difficult, as kids push boundaries, experience mood swings, and become restless and easily distracted. But, have you also noticed that their sense of humor blossoms, their strength increases, they develop a sense of caring and compassion, and they become able to understand increasingly complex issues and subjects? Growth and potential are at least as much a part of early adolescence as are angst and distraction. Our culture tends to focus on the risky behaviors and poor decisions made by young adolescents -- but, in doing that, we forget that middle-schoolers are also making good decisions and playing constructive roles in their schools, families, and communities.

So, this month, try to catch

your children doing something **RIGHT**, and let them know that you noticed! When your daughter does her chores without being asked, acknowledge that. When your son earns a good grade, compliment him. Give your young adolescent a smile, a pat on the back, or a hug, "just because." Pack him a special lunch of his favorite nutritious foods. Go to her soccer game and cheer her on. Notice how your young adolescent's sense of humor is developing, and share some jokes with him. Listen when she wants to talk with you. Share some memories from your own time as a young adolescent. Shoot hoops or toss a baseball around with your kids. Let your young adolescent pick a movie or two to rent, and hang out together for an evening with pizza and popcorn.

Most importantly, take time to tell your young adolescents that you love them, and to thank them for being such an important part of your life. They may or may not be able to show you that they "hear" what you've said, but your words will make an impact.



Resource Review

Our Last Best Shot: Guiding Our Children Through Early Adolescence

Author: Laura Sessions Stepp

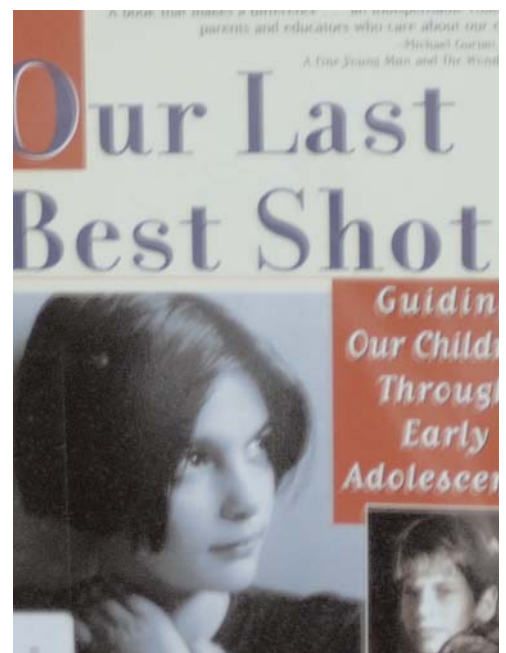
In this Month of the Young Adolescent, it seems appropriate that we take a step back from our often intense study of instructional strategies, curriculum alignment, school leadership, and professional development, and remind ourselves why, and for whom, we put forth all this extra effort. The middle school philosophy and the Middle School Movement which has sprung from that philosophy are grounded in a deep understanding of, and empathy with, the unique developmental needs of children between the ages of ten and fourteen. Without fully comprehending the challenges and promise of the developmental stage of early adolescence, we as educators can hardly expect to build school communities which appropriately educate young adoles-

cents intellectually, socially, emotionally, morally, and physically.

Our Last Best Shot provides an engaging and insightful reminder of the issues with which young adolescents wrestle on a daily basis. Using case studies to highlight such typical young adolescent concerns as fitting in, feeling competent, expressing affection, making friends, establishing boundaries, growing intellectually, maturing physically, and developing values, Stepp paints a vivid and balanced picture of early adolescence in the contexts of family, school, community, and peers. The twelve young people profiled in the book provide glimpses of the uncertainty, stressors, and dangers facing young adolescents as they move from childhood to more nearly adult roles; they

also demonstrate the burgeoning compassion, sensitivity, intelligence, humor, and pure potential characteristic of children at this critical phase in their development.

Pick up *Our Last Best Shot*, and remind yourself again of the important role you can play in helping your students to grow and succeed! Call the Center at (989)774-7678, and ask for Resource # YANC-21.





CELEBRATING OUR CSR SCHOOLS



Au Gres-Sims Middle School Au Gres, Michigan

Principal: Heather Ballien
Coach: Dave Nizinski

Grade configuration: 6-8
Students: 150

Au Gres-Sims Middle School is off to an exciting start this year!

Some of their ongoing activities are as follows:

- Strategies in Action with Toby Kahn Loftus.
- School Improvement plan with SMART goals and Action Plan, with a timeline of activities for 2004-2005.
- Developed a 6 point "Writing Rubric" to be used across the curriculum in grades 6-12.
- Used the needs and characteristics of young adolescents to develop an individualized discipline plan, with student discipline meetings now involving the entire staff.
- Block schedule implemented.
- No Child Left Behind academic support for struggling students during the school day.



Bendle Middle School Burton, Michigan

Principal: Sue Kenkel **Grade Configuration:** 6-8
Coach: Dave Nizinski **Students:** 330

Bendle Middle School is now in the second year of implementation of Failure is Not an Option (FINAO). This plan is designed to increase student learning and raise student achievement. While FINAO happens to be their chosen name, other schools refer to the program as an A, B, C, Incomplete program. The process is designed to assist students in mastering the middle school curriculum, allowing them to be more successful and better prepared for high school. The goal of the program is for all students to reach curriculum mastery at a minimum of a C level. After one year of implementation, the following results were achieved:

- MEAP scores went up on three of the four test areas.
- Student attendance increased.
- The level of suspensions was down by 5%.
- Students began realizing the importance of turning in quality work on time.
- In 2002/03, 29% of student's final grades were D's and E's. In 2003/04, only 2% of all final grades were incompletes.

Bendle Middle School has also implemented this year a Vision Therapy component to identify and support students who may have difficulties as a result of a specific visual perception problem.

Powerful Quote

"The world connects not by molecules. It connects through ideas, hopes, faces, dreams, actions, stories, and memories."

--Barrie Sanford Greif

Contact us:



989-774-7684



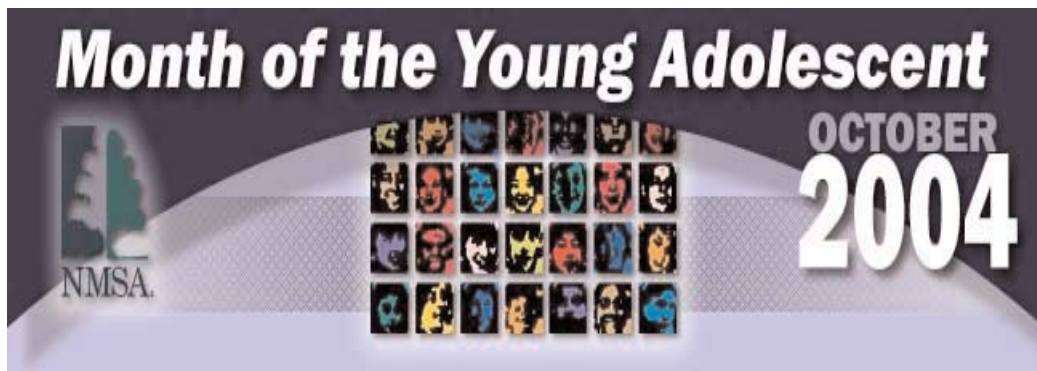
www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu



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OVERVIEW

October is the Month of the Young Adolescent, an annual national collaborative effort of education, health, and youth-oriented organizations. Initiated by National Middle School Association (NMSA), Month of the Young Adolescent brings together a wide range of organizations to focus on the needs of this important age range, ages 10- 15.

Four key messages will be promoted throughout the month of October. They are:

- * The importance of parents being knowledgeable about young adolescents and being actively involved in their lives;
- * The understanding that healthy bodies plus healthy minds equal healthy young adolescents;
- * The realization that the education young adolescents experience during this formative period of life will, in large measure, determine the future for all citizens; and
- * The knowledge that every young adolescent should have the opportunity to pursue his or her dreams and aspirations, and post-secondary education should be a possibility for all. Why should we focus on a collaborative national campaign regarding young

adolescents? The general public has lacked an adequate understanding of youth in the transition period between childhood and adolescence. As a result, young adolescents often have been “growing up forgotten.”

Unfortunately the English language contains no single word for this life stage, having only the terms infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to designate periods of life. Yet it is during the period of early adolescence, generally between the ages of 10 and 15, when young people leave childhood and move toward full adolescence that they make major decisions about their values, standards, attitudes, and personal beliefs. Many of these decisions direct their behavior throughout their lives

This is reprint from the NMSA website. To read the rest of the article and for other MOYA ideas, go the www.nmsa.org

