



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

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Leadership: It Takes a Whole School

There are literally volumes of research from the past five or six decades on what makes an effective educational leader. A summary of the research results in a list barely short of requiring educational leaders to walk on water and simultaneously heal the sick. What has become clear is that the "principal cannot act alone" (Irvin, 2004). The research has emerged with the clear message that it takes an entire community of instructional leaders to support the growing needs of today's students.

Blasé and Blasé (2002) concluded in their study that the employment of peer coaching, collegial study groups, collective inquiry, reflective discussions, and collaboration are critical to building a culture of effective instructional leaders. This research is congruent with building a Professional Learning Community built around the elements of Shared Norms and Values, Focus on Student Learning, Reflective Dialogue,

Public Practice, and Collaboration.

Given the need for collaboration and shared leadership, what is the role of the Instructional Leader (Principal), and what is the role of Teacher-Leaders? A review of the literature describes some strategies which principals and teachers employ to become effective instructional leaders.

Instructional Leadership: The Role of the Principal

- * Collaboratively define with school staff what instructional leadership means at your school.
- * Collaboratively define what a school climate conducive to learning for all members of your school community would look like.
- * Share openly your own learning goals and processes for obtaining those goals, as well as your own professional



and personal learning.

- * Use a collaborative process to conduct classroom evaluations/assessment to inform the type and nature of assistance to promote improved practices.
- * Create the time for staff to engage in professional conversations about teaching and learning.
- * Share the responsibilities of leading your school.

Instructional Leadership: The Role of Teachers

- * Find out what supports need to be in place to allow teachers to engage in instructional leadership.
- * Help all teachers recognize that they have potential as instructional leaders.
- * Encourage and support staff sharing their content and pedagogy expertise.
- * Encourage and support staff sharing about their learning process.

Taken from *Middle School Journal*,
September, 2004



Leadership Lifeline

Meaningful Meetings

Middle level administrators all agree that staff meetings should be opportunities for professional growth. The question is, how can leadership be distributed and meetings be transformed into times for effective, powerful staff learning? Robby Champion (Classroom Leadership) suggests that learning meetings must have specific goals. Once again, it becomes critical that we plan meetings with very clear outcomes in mind---what are the specific goals which we wish to accomplish during a one- or two-hour meeting?

In addition to establishing clear outcomes for the learning meeting, administrators and leadership teams should share responsibility for leading the meeting. Teacher-leaders should be at the center of the meeting, engaging their colleagues in dialogue, demonstration, practice, and discussion regarding student learning and teacher practice. The following are some ideas for organizing meaningful meetings:

- * Organize a meeting in which teacher-leaders demonstrate one or two literacy strategies which the staff has agreed to implement in all classrooms. For example, a teacher-leader might model how "Think-Write-RoundTable" might be used in all content areas to help students improve their writing skills. The

entire staff should have the opportunity to ask questions and engage in dialogue regarding the strategy. The staff might then provide opportunities for their peers to observe their use of the particular strategy in the classroom.

- * Plan to use the meeting time to study student work. Teacher-leaders can use one of several protocols to help colleagues look deeply at student work to determine the level of thinking in which students are engaged. This process also helps teachers reflect on their practice. This process requires facilitation, an essential skill in building leadership capacity.

- * Use staff meeting times to hold a dialogue around a book or an article. Teacher-leaders can use Text-based Discussions, Save the Last Word, Say Something or another reading strategy to help guide the dialogue.

Say good-bye to meetings filled with administrivia and gripe sessions! You can plan meaningful meetings with a focus on learning. AND you are creating distributed leadership by building the capacity of teacher-leaders.

Remember to start with clear outcomes for the session, norms for the meeting, an agenda, and processes to help you accomplish your outcomes.



Student Station

So, What's Your Life Story?

Do you ever think about your life -- where you've been, what you've done, what you hope to do in the future, what kind of person you want to be? Imagine yourself as an old man or woman, looking back on your life. Would you be looking back at a life of adventure and excitement? a life of quiet reflection? a life lived mostly alone, or one full of family and friends? What would you have done for a living? Would you have been a scientist, a writer, a teacher, a homemaker, a farmer, a violinist, a philosopher? What would other people say about you -- that you were kind? smart? cruel? generous? gentle? loving? selfish? What kind of mark do you hope to leave on the world?

Many people do look back on their own lives and reflect on who they have become, what they have done, and what impact they have had on the world around them. Some of these people even write about their lives, picking out important events and reflecting on their meanings, and writing them down for others to read about. Books which people write about themselves and their own lives are called autobiographies.

Autobiographies serve many important purposes. They can give readers an in-depth look at a particular period in time, through the eyes of someone who lived during that time. If you have ever read Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series, you probably learned a great deal about prairie life in the 1800's. An autobiography can also inspire its readers: many people are uplifted when they read about

the lives and struggles of courageous people like Martin Luther King or Mother Teresa. Sometimes, an autobiography teaches us about a particular field of study, as seen through the eyes of an expert. Jane Goodall, a famous scientist, wrote a great deal in her autobiography about her years of work with chimpanzees.

If you were to write your own autobiography, what would it include? What are some of the important events that have occurred, both in your own life and in the world around you, during your lifetime? How have these events affected you, or changed the way you look at the world? What are some of the not-so-spectacular things that you do every day? Remember, each individual person spends the majority of his or her life doing things that aren't particularly exciting or memorable -- but the small decisions that people make each day form a pattern which can describe a whole life!

Next time you're bored, why don't you try writing your own autobiography? Pick up a notebook and a pencil, and make some notes about your own life -- when and where you were born, where you grew up, who your parents are, whether you have brothers and sisters, who your best friends are, what important things have happened to you and to the world during your lifetime, and how you responded... the list goes on and on. Just answer one question at a time, and pretty soon you'll find that you have a lot to write about! Your life story will be interesting to read, and lots of fun to write!



Student Book Review

Sky: A True Story of Courage During World War II

If you go to your local bookstore or library and look through the Autobiography section, you will likely find many books that detail the lives and accomplishments of famous people. These people may be historical figures, like Benjamin Franklin or Booker T. Washington; they may be sports stars, like Mia Hamm or Michael Jordan; they may be military or political leaders, like Colin Powell or Bill Clinton; or they may be humanitarians such as Mother Teresa, Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.

Not all autobiographies are about the lives of famous people, though. Some are written by ordinary people who were thrust into special circumstances, and who did extraordinary things. Others are written by ordinary people who haven't done anything extraordinary, but whose life stories can teach us something important or help us to make sense of the world around us.

Sky: A True Story of Courage During World War II is an autobiography written by Hanneke Ippisch, a seventy-year-old woman who, looking back at her life, realized that she had been involved in an important movement which she wanted to tell the world about. Hanneke was fifteen years old in 1940, when her native country of Holland was invaded by Adolf Hitler's German Nazi army. At that time, the Nazis were invading many countries in Western Europe and killing everyone they could find who was of Jewish descent. Hanneke's autobiography tells how, gradually, she was drawn into the Dutch Resistance, a

group of people who were secretly helping Jews to escape from the Nazis. It also tells how Hanneke was captured by Nazi soldiers and thrown into prison, and how she survived her ordeal there. *Sky* combines all the features of an excellent autobiography: it gives readers a close look at one person's life; it illuminates an important time and place in history; and it is a great read!

If you'd like to check out some more autobiographies, here's a list of some good ones:

- * *My Life with the Chimpanzees*, by Jane Goodall, tells the story of a scientist who spent years living in the wilderness, observing groups of chimps.
- * *The Invisible Thread*, by Yoshiko Uchida, tells about the experiences of a young Japanese-American girl and her family during World War II.
- * *Of Beetles and Angels* is the story of Mawi Asgedom, a boy whose family fled war-torn Ethiopia and came to live in the United States.
- * *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass* relates the life story of a man who grew up as a slave and worked his way to freedom.
- * *A Girl from Yamhill*, by Beverly Cleary, tells about the childhood of the girl who grew up to write the Henry Huggins and Ramona Quimby books.
- * *Breaking Through* is the life story of Francisco Jimenez, who grew up as a migrant worker in California and is now a well-known author.
- * *No Pretty Pictures*, by Anita Lobel, describes the author's life as a child growing up during wartime.





Resource Review

Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn

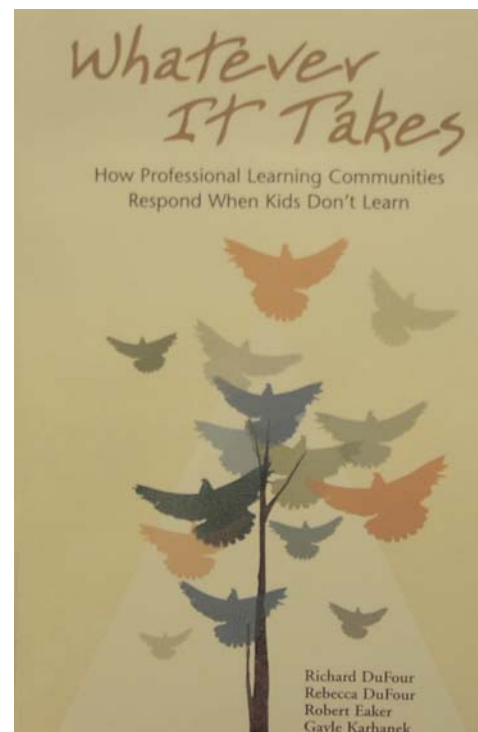
Richard DuFour, the former principal of award-winning Adlai Stevenson High School in suburban Illinois, has parlayed his administrative experience into several highly regarded books on teaching, administration, and the building of professional learning communities. His latest book, *Whatever It Takes*, will only enhance DuFour's reputation as a preeminent purveyor of wisdom related to school leadership and professional development. His co-authors -- Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek -- are each highly respected educational leaders in their own right, having served as university faculty, leaders of professional development organizations, and administrators of award-winning schools.

Whatever It Takes closely examines the question, "What happens when, despite our best efforts in the classroom, a student does not learn?" The book provides an in-depth look at a school-wide system of interventions (called "Pyramid of Intervention" by the authors) designed to catch students before they slip through the cracks. The authors describe what this Pyramid looks like in a high school, in a middle school, and in two elementary schools, and they also discuss the logistical barriers these schools faced and their strategies for overcoming them.

In addition to its thorough discussion of the challenges inherent in shifting a school's focus from "Education for the Few," through "All Kids Can Learn," and to "All Kids WILL Learn," *Whatever It Takes* provides in-depth case studies, detailed lists of resources, and examples of letters, parent brochures, and other documents produced by these schools in their quest to help all children to succeed.

This important book should be required reading for teachers and administrators. Call MSIM at (989) 774-7678, and ask to borrow it today!!

Ask for LSD66





Teacher Topics

Understanding Constructivism

Learning is a complex process through which students are constantly changing their understanding of how the world around them functions. Each new fact helps change or reinforce what they know. In the constructivist view, learning is not a linear process, but rather one that starts, hits bumps, backs up, and finally moves forward to an accepted result. Think about students *constructing their own knowledge and understanding* rather than simply receiving information from others.

Constructivist teaching allows students to hear an idea, synthesize it into a context that makes sense to them, and then expand the idea based on what they may have learned in the past. The challenge for teachers is to create opportunities for students to build their own knowledge by investigating, considering, and discussing new information, then integrating it with what they already know. During this constructive process students attach personal meaning to newly acquired skills and information, making the new knowledge their own. In a constructivist classroom, students work as investigators and teachers work as facilitator-guides to students seeking solutions to thought-provoking questions and problems. Curriculum addresses *what* students learn, while constructivism addresses *how* they learn. A constructivist teacher is a mediator who blends the *what* with the *how*, placing the demand on students to venture further afield to discover the *why*. Brooks and Brooks have identified five things that constructivist teachers do to bring out the best in their students:

1. They seek and value their students' points of view, to help formulate lessons that differentiate instruction based on student needs and interests. *Example:* In a history lesson on the Civil War, students are provided opportunities to share and reflect on the varying attitudes prevalent during the period.

2. They structure lessons and activities that challenge student views and conceptions about how the world around them works. *Example:* In a chemistry lesson, students combine two equal volumes of different liquids, such as alcohol and water. When the total volume is not equal to the sum of the two lesser volumes, the lesson can challenge students' expectations and lead to new lines of inquiry into intermolecular forces.

3. They recognize that learners must attach relevance to what is being taught in order for learning to take place. *Example:* After reading a novel, students are asked to identify the main theme of the story and explain why they felt that the theme was the most important one. They must support their choices with pertinent examples and describe how the theme can be seen in their own lives.

4. They teach overall concepts or big ideas, rather than isolated facts. *Example:* Exploration from Europe to the "New" World is presented as an overall issue: why it was important, and its impact, both good, and bad. Individual students may do research and develop Power Point projects to present their findings.

5. They assess student learning within the context of daily classroom activities, not just as a separate event. *Example:* After studying the concepts related to time and distance in math class, students work together in teams to perform an experiment with Matchbox cars, exploring the speed and distance they travel on various surfaces.

(Brooks & Brooks, 1999; McBrien & Brandt, 1997; Ornstein, Behar-Horenstein & Pajak, 2003)

Taken from Teacher Today, February, 2004



Family Focus

Your Child's Autobiography

If your children are like most young adolescents, you have probably noticed that they are intensely curious about themselves and their own roles in the world. As young adolescents mature, they are constantly questioning themselves, their peers, and their elders, attempting to learn as much about their world as they can. For many kids, it can be really helpful to spend some time and energy focusing on themselves -- their own heritage and upbringing, important events in their pasts, and the ways in which these events have shaped them.

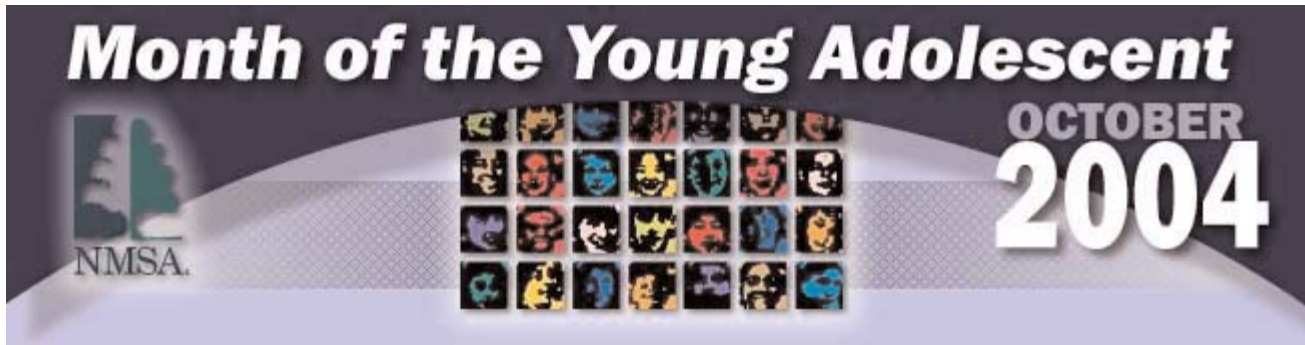
Many students will be asked, as part of a Social Studies class in middle school, to create their own autobiographies. And, for most kids, this is an exciting and eye-opening assignment, which leads to a lot of thinking about themselves and their own lives.

Even if your kids haven't yet been asked to create autobiographies, you can help them do this at home! This project is a great way to spend "quality time" with your kids, talking about the past, the present, and the future, looking at photographs, and sharing stories. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- * Help your kids to draw timelines of their lives, with important events noted
- * Use old photographs as conversation starters -- you'll be surprised how

many vivid memories can be jiggled loose from looking at a picture!

- * Ask your kids questions to start them thinking -- "Who was your favorite teacher, and why?" ; "What was the happiest day of your life, and why?"; "What things have happened in your life that are sad, or scary, or that made you angry?" ; "What's the one thing you've accomplished so far in life that you are the most proud of?"
- * Encourage your kids to illustrate their autobiographies with drawings, poems, songs, and skits
- * Don't judge -- let your kids choose what is important enough to them to belong in their autobiographies
- * Keep encouraging your kids to think deeply about their futures, about how their past decisions have affected them, and about how the decisions they make today will affect what they might write in an autobiography many years from now
- * HAVE FUN!!! Helping your children to think about their past, their present, and their future should be a challenging but enjoyable experience. Both you and your kids will have a great time!



“October is the Month of the Young Adolescent, an annual national collaborative effort of education, health, and youth-oriented organizations. Initiated by the National Middle School Association (NMSA), the 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.” (from the NMSA website)

For more information about “MOYA” go to www.nmsa.org/moya/moya_2004/overview.htm
You will find an overview, resources, press kits, shadow day, what others have done, call for artwork and writing and other related articles.

NMSA is endorsing **The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards**. This award honors middle level and high school students for exemplary volunteer activities. The top middle level and high school candidate in each state win \$1,000 awards, an engraved silver medallion and a trip to Washington, D.C., for four days of national recognition events, including a gala dinner celebration and Senate office visits.

For more information and an application go to:
www.prudential.com/spirit



"Powerful Quote"

"You've got to think about "big things" while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction."

--Alvin Toffler

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