



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

DECEMBER, 2005 \* VOLUME 8 \* NUMBER 5

## Sustaining The Gain

Michigan Schools in the Middle is working with a number of schools for which funding for school reform will soon be running out. The question on the minds of the teachers and administrators in these schools is, "How will we sustain the gains we have made?" This is a very important question for all of us involved in school reform--we all want to keep the momentum moving forward for young adolescents.

We know one critical aspect of sustaining the gain is leadership capacity within the building--not just the principal, but all teacher leaders, as well. Lambert has conducted some research to identify the factors which contribute to high leadership capacity in a school. Lambert defines schools with high leadership capacity as learning communities that amplify leadership for all, learning for all, success for all. These schools have developed a fabric of structures (e.g., teams, communities, study groups) and processes (reflection, inquiry, dialogue) that form a lasting and buoyant web of interrelated actions. The principal is only one of the leaders in the school community and models collaboration, listening, and engagement. Each participant shares the vision and understands how he or she contributes to the journey. The quality of the school is a function of the quality of the conversations within the school. Student success is revealed by multiple measures of contribution, products, and performances, including the vivid presence of student voice. High leadership capacity schools hold great promise-- but no guarantees of sustainability. In other words, schools that include everyone within collaborative patterns of participation are able to develop greater levels of leadership

skillfulness. This achievement can move a school closer to lasting school improvement than would otherwise be possible.

**Six Critical Factors** - If high leadership capacity schools are good, why are they not always able to sustain improvement? That question usually leads to issues of values, authority, dependence, and identity within schools and districts. Lambert's study found several critical factors which must be addressed to fully realize leadership capacity's promise:

**1. The school community's core values must focus its priorities.**

Democratization and equity must be foremost among these values and are interdependent. Democratization is the means through which staff experience and honor equity. Members of high leadership capacity schools accept responsibility for all students' learning and include all voices.

**2. As teacher leadership grows, principals must let go of some authority and responsibility.**

When principals lead for sustainability, teachers and principals become more alike than different. They share similar concerns, blend roles, and ask tough questions. They find leadership and credibility within each other through frequent conversations, shared goals, and, ultimately, collective responsibility.

**3. Educators must define themselves as learners, teachers, and leaders.**

How we define leadership determines who will participate. This broad perspective encompasses sharing and distributing leadership. Leadership becomes a form of learning -- reciprocal, purposeful learning in community. To learn is to be able to lead. Like children, all adults can learn; all adults can lead.

**4. We must invest in each other's**

**learning to create reciprocity.** When principals engage teachers in problem solving rather than render them helpless through directives and granting or withholding permission, natural capacities for reciprocity come to life. Dependencies cause us to ask permission, to abdicate responsibilities, and to blame. Learning communities require reciprocity.

**5. The first tenet of leadership capacity is "broad-based participation."**

Schools must create the structures through which participation occurs. Structures for broad-based participation include teams, study groups, vertical communities, and action research teams. These are the settings in which people deepen relationships, alter beliefs, and become more skillful in the work of leadership. Without these structures, reculturing is unlikely.

**6. Districts must negotiate the political landscape to provide professional time and development, a conceptual framework for improvement, and tailored succession practices (fitting the principal to the school).**

This work requires engaging the board and the community in conversations that build an understanding of lasting school improvement. Without this groundwork, schools continually fight the same battles for time, for professional development, and for selecting principals who can take a school from where it is to where it ought to be without losing momentum or denying the worthy experiences of teacher-leaders.

Taken from: **Journal of Staff Development**  
Spring 2005

Lambert, L (2004) Lasting Leadership: A Study of High Capacity Leadership Schools, Oakland, CA



# Leadership Lifeline

## Instructional Leaders: Teachers' Views

What does effective instructional leadership look like? How can a principal improve teaching? How do teachers' views of leaders affect what they do in the classroom?

There has been little research into what teachers think makes an effective leader. And there have been few practical guides for leaders to become more effective. This article describes the everyday strategies of principals practicing exemplary instructional leadership and how these principals influenced teachers.

In our study of 809 teachers from public elementary, middle, and high schools in diverse regions of the United States, teachers used open-ended questionnaires to describe the characteristics of their principals (strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and goals) that influence their classroom instruction. Teachers also described their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. All retained their anonymity.

In our study, teachers defined the characteristics of effective leaders, paving the way for professional development to help leaders become more effective. They said that effective leaders :

- Avoid restrictive and intimidating approaches to teachers, as well as approaches that elicit “dog and pony shows” based on narrow definitions of teaching. Administrative control gives

way to collegiality.

- Believe in teacher choice and discretion. Teachers are not criticized or forced to teach in limited ways.
- Integrate collaboration, peer coaching, inquiry, collegial study groups, and reflective discussion to promote professional dialogue.
- Embrace growth and change. These leaders believe change is a journey of learning and risk taking.
- Respect teachers' knowledge and abilities, seeing the teacher as an intellectual rather than as technician.
- Are committed not only to enacting school improvement and reform, but also to enhancing professional community in schools.

In addition, instructional leadership is embedded in school culture; it is expected and routinely delivered.

We found that in effective principal-teacher interaction about instruction, the result is inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation. Teachers build repertoires of flexible alternatives rather than rigid teaching procedures and methods.

Taken from: *The Learning Principal*,  
December/January 2006



# Teacher Topics

## Problem-based Learning

Want to equip your students with the thinking necessary to apply knowledge in a meaningful way? Try problem-based learning! Inherently constructivist in its approach, problem-based learning provides student with practice in using the critical judgments necessary to explore the often conflicting demands of real-world issues.

The following problem statements, used as the focal points for separate problem-based inquires at four different levels, reflect the multi-disciplinary potential of this strategy:

- How can we, as members of the Fifth Grade Flower Club, develop and propose a plan for stopping the Japanese beetle invasion?
- How can we, the Middle School Excellence Group, provide the Mayor and City Council with information on electronic waste that will convince them to consider developing an e-waste recycling program?
- How can we, Eighth Graders appeal to our school board about the current proposal to restrict cell phone usage in such a way that it doesn't infringe upon our rights as students?
- How can we, as a neutral international tribunal, aid in the resolution of the conflict between India and Pakistan over the right to test nuclear weapons in such a way that precedents of fairness, protection of cultural heritage, and legal issues of ownership are established for the international resolution of this and similar disputes?

The statements above display the hallmarks of problem-based inquiry. Each assignment:

- Reflects an authentic, age-appropriate, clearly defined learning objective;
- Empowers the learner with ownership of all the requirements necessary to develop a solution;
- Integrates essential school learning within the context of a larger, real-life problem.

From even this limited view of the strategies involved, it is easy to see why problem-based learning is an effective means of engaging students and stimulating learning. Students use the theoretical knowledge learned in school to consider and propose solutions to problems encountered in the real world. One of the chief side-effects is that students learn that knowledge is not applied in carefully sequenced packages when it comes to solving real world problems. This, of course, is consistent with the nature of the problems themselves, which are, more often than not, ambiguous and inherently messy, which tend to appear in multiples and are usually tied in some way to other problems. Such experiences not only serve to promote active learning on the part of the students but also afford them the opportunity to become more self-directed learners as well.

Taken from: Teacher Topics October, 2005



# Student Station

## *What's Your Purpose?*

Has anyone ever asked you, "What do you plan to do with your life?" or "What do you hope to do after high school?" Do you have a ready answer to these questions, or do you have to take some time to think before you reply?

When you think about your hopes and plans for the future, you are really pondering your "purpose" -- who and what you want to be, what special interests or talents you want to develop, and what unique contribution you can make to the world. Your purpose doesn't have to be earth-shaking: it can be great or small, simple or complex, personal or global in scope. . . it doesn't matter, as long as it's YOUR purpose.

It may be that you know exactly what you want to do in the future. Some people know from an early age what their purpose is, and pursue it single-mindedly; for most of us, however, finding our place in the universe is not so easy! Here are some questions that you might ask yourself as you ponder your own purpose:

- What do I really enjoy doing? What do I NOT like to do?
- What are some of my skills and talents? What are some things I'm not so great at?
- What kinds of things do I choose to do in my spare time?
- What could I do to help other people, or to help make the world a better place?
- What do I feel passionately about? What's really important to me?
- Who are some of my heroes? What is it about them that I admire?
- What character traits do I believe are important for people to have?
- What would I like the future of my family, my community, my country, or my world to be like?

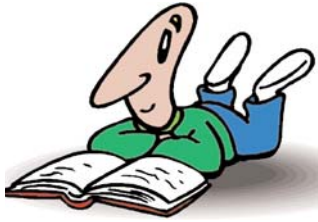
The more you think about your answers to these questions, the more likely it is that your sense of your own unique purpose will become clear to you.

It might help to write out your answers in a notebook, and keep them tucked away somewhere. Then, in a few weeks or months, after you've thought more about them, you can take out the notebook and re-read what you wrote.

Some people choose careers that reflect their purposes. For example, many doctors say that their "purpose" is to save lives; social workers and psychologists often have strong desires to help people in need; writers and artists are often driven to express themselves through their work; and many of the best auto mechanics are motivated by a life-long fascination with cars. In general, people who are able to choose work that reflects their purposes will find their jobs to be fulfilling and motivating.

For other people, purpose is not necessarily connected with career. We've all heard stories of musicians or actors who took jobs waiting tables so that they could follow their muses in their spare time, or of parents who hold jobs in order to support their true purpose of adopting children from the foster care system. Other people might take jobs that support them while they follow any number of other passions, such as birdwatching, studying advanced mathematics, rescuing abandoned cats, competing in championship Scrabble tournaments, or creating topiary mazes in their back yards! All of these people have found their individual purposes and arranged their lives accordingly.

Once you have discovered your purpose -- or, at least, once you have a general idea about what your purpose might be -- it's time to set some goals! In next month's Student Station, we'll talk about how to set long-term and short-term goals to help you achieve your purpose. In the meantime, look over the questions above, think about what's really important to you, and dream about what you'd like your life to be like in five years... in ten years... in twenty years! You may find your life's purpose becoming clearer every day!



# Student Book Review

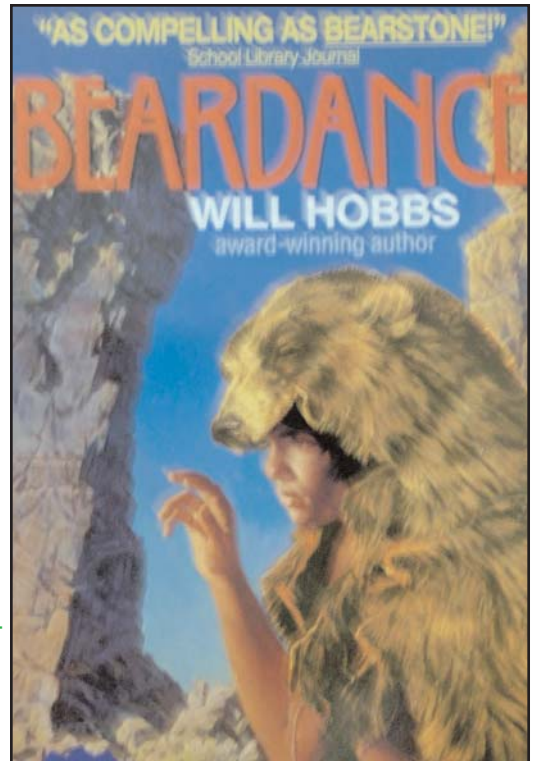
**Beardance, by Will Hobbs**

When fourteen-year-old Cloyd Atcitty joins his friend Walter in searching for an ancient gold mine in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, he expects the trip to be uneventful. Cloyd doesn't really believe the stories Walter tells about large caches of gold hidden in the mountains by Spanish miners two hundred years ago, any more than he believes the stories his grandmother used to tell of people turning into animals and animals morphing into humans.

Cloyd isn't really interested in finding gold in the mountains; he's hoping, instead, to find grizzly bears. A year ago, he saw a huge grizzly in a meadow halfway up the mountain, and he bragged about it to a local wilderness guide. To his dismay, the man tracked the bear and shot it, as a trophy. Since then, Cloyd has lived with the guilt of having betrayed the beautiful animal, and with the fear that he might have caused the death of the last grizzly in the Colorado Rockies.

But, as he and Walter begin their trip up the mountain, they encounter someone who claims to have seen a mother grizzly and three cubs up in the high peaks. Cloyd, excited, searches eagerly for signs of the bears. And while he looks for grizzlies, and Walter searches for the lost gold mine, they move higher and higher, and deeper into the mountains . . . and both Cloyd and Walter find what they are looking for, in ways that even they wouldn't have expected.

If you like wilderness adventure stories, you will love *Beardance*! Will Hobbs has written several other exciting adventure books as well, including *Bearstone*, *Far North*, and *Ghost Canoe*. Additional great adventure/survival stories that you may enjoy are *My Side of the Mountain* and *Julie of the Wolves*, by Jean Craighead George; *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, by Jack London; and *Hatchet*, by Gary Paulsen.





# Family Focus

## Reading to Succeed!

Read, read, read. It seems that everyone is saying that reading with your kids can help them to do better in school -- but **WHAT** should you read, **WHEN** does your family have time, and **HOW** do you get your kids to turn off the TV and get engaged in a book? The Parent Institute has come up with a great list of twenty-five suggestions for encouraging your kids to read. Over the next several issues of FYI, we'll look at these suggestions, a few at a time.

**1. Reading is a skill, and it gets better with practice.** Encourage your kids to read a book, magazine article, or newspaper for at least 30 minutes each day. Even if your child struggles with reading, half an hour of practice each day will help him become a much better reader, more quickly than you (or he!) might expect. It will really help your kids if you set a good example for them by reading, too, during that 30-minute period. If reading isn't easy for you, start with something simple. You'll be amazed at how quickly your own reading skills increase, too!

**2. Help your child get the library habit. Plan in advance to visit the local library at least once a week.** Checking out books from the library is free, and most towns and city neighborhoods have public libraries within walking distance. If you live in a city and can't walk or drive to the library, try taking the bus. For most people who live in rural areas, it should be possible to schedule a family trip to the library on the same days

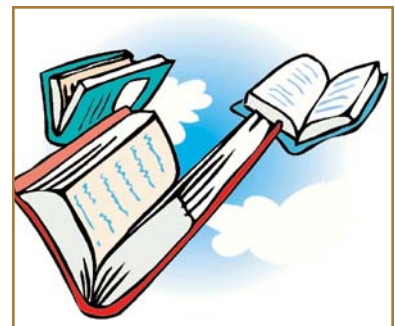
that you'd go into town to buy groceries or run errands. Make library time a priority, and you'll be amazed at the many ways you can find the time and energy to get there!

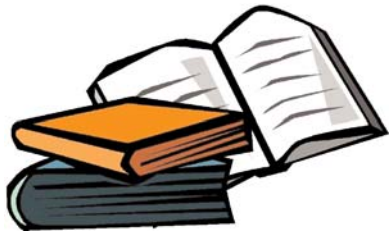
**HINT:** If losing library books is a problem in your family, designate one spot for library books to go -- a shelf next to the door, for example. The books should be returned to that spot every night before bedtime.

**3. Make reading easy. Keep a shelf of books in a place that is easy for your child to access.** If she has books that interest her and a comfortable place to read them, she will be more likely to pick up a book. Try to limit distractions by turning off the TV at a certain time each evening and joining your child in silent reading. When she sees you reading, too, it will encourage her to follow your example.

These three ideas can start your kids on the road to success in school. The more kids read, the more

they learn... and, usually, the more they read, the more they grow to love books! As a parent, you can encourage them, support them, and set a good example by reading every day, making time to get to the library, and making books a visible part of your household.





# Resource Review

## Endangered Minds:

### Why Children Don't Think, and What We Can Do About It

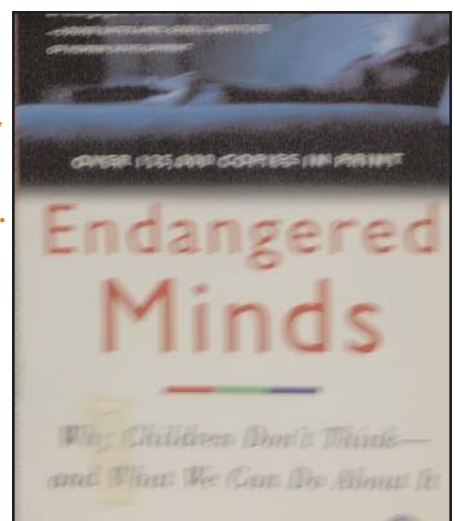
Jane Healy was among the first scholars to utilize cutting-edge brain research to draw connections between our fast-paced, media-saturated culture and the declining academic and higher-order-thinking skills of children and adolescents in the United States. In 1990, when it was originally published, *Endangered Minds* engendered a surge of interest in examining the implications of current brain research for child-rearing and classroom instruction. Since then, axioms such as "Kids should read more books and watch less TV"; "Families should slow down and talk to each other more"; and "Playing too many video games is shortening kids' attention spans" have become so commonplace as to sound trite.

Ironically, widespread acceptance of these watered-down versions of Healy's conclusions threatens to undermine the real message of *Endangered Minds* -- that the erosion of higher-level verbal and language skills is at the root of students' inability to think critically, to reason out solutions to problems, and to express complex ideas. Healy traces this erosion to a variety of sources which undermine kids' verbal and linguistic abilities: our culture's increasingly pictorial representation of ideas; the dearth of real conversation in kids' interactions with adults; the scarcity of opportunities for kids to read and be read to; and the watered-down syntax found in most textbooks.

*Endangered Minds* also traces the neurological roots of the decline in children's attention spans, arguing that the alarming increase in the incidence of attention deficit and related disorders is directly attributable to the frenetic pace of contemporary life. Healy demonstrates how even supposedly "educational" television shows like Sesame Street contribute to the shortening of attention spans and the development of hyperactivity.

Healy does not stop at defining the problem and fingering the cultural culprits; she also enumerates research-proven strategies for preventing these learning problems in young children, and for remediating them in older children. This outstanding piece of scholarship is a must-read for any teacher or parent seeking to raise children who can pay attention, think critically, and express complex ideas.

Call the Center, and ask to borrow resource number G-52.



# Overview of Comprehensive School Reform

## ***The premise:***

Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) emerged in the 1990's as an alternative to the piecemeal reform strategies of decades past. To pursue CSR is to adopt a coherent, thoughtfully designed plan by which to improve the whole school at once, from top to bottom. Each CSR model provides a complete blueprint for change, so that all parts of the school--curriculum, instruction, assessment, leadership, etc.--work together smoothly and effectively. Further, CSR was one of the first two federal education programs to require the use of scientifically-based models of school improvement.

## ***CSR's reach:***

To date, more than 5400 schools, located in every state, have implemented CSR models, and thousands more have requested CSR funding. More than three million students attend schools that are now participating in CSR projects.

## ***Is it effective?***

Yes--according to a 2003 Johns Hopkins University meta-analysis of more than 800 research studies conducted to date, "The overall effects of CSR are...greater in magnitude than the effects of other interventions." Similarly, a 2004 Department of Education study finds that CSR is effective when schools make a real effort to implement those models faithfully over a period of several years.

## ***Solid research:***

Never has a school reform effort been studied so closely, so rigorously, and by so many independent evaluators. Further, the knowledge base on CSR will soon expand dramatically; some 45 large-scale evaluations of CSR are now in progress, directed by some of the nation's leading research firms, and results are due over the next few years.

## ***Eleven Components of CSR (as described in the NCLB Act):***

- Effective, research-based methods and strategies
- Comprehensive design with aligned components
- High quality professional development and training
- Measurable goals and benchmarks
- Support within the school
- Parental and community involvement
- External technical support and assistance
- Evaluation strategies
- Coordination of resources
- Support for teachers, administrators, and staff
- Evidence of improved academic achievement





## What people are saying about **Improving Instruction Through Collegial Dialogue**

“More than just a dialogue - it's a revitalization of communication that gives empowerment and worth to both speaker and listener. I am so thankful that I attended the Improving Instruction Through Collegial Dialogue conference.”

“Using these dialogues has changed the climate of my team and my classroom.”

“Thanks Carolyn for your spirit, commitment, knowledge and training to help others in all walks of life to become better communicators. Collegial Dialogues have improved my communication skills with my students because I listen more intently and force them to develop and keep eye contact with me.”

“I've been married for 7 ½ years... Collegial dialoging has enabled my ability to clearly discuss family issues with my husband that we weren't able to tackle because of our different styles of communicating.”

“Collegial Dialogue has helped me become more focused, more in-tune, and more reflective. It has been therapeutic and extremely rewarding in my spiritual, professional, and personal development. One of the many ways collegial dialogue has helped me is that it has made me much more of an engaged listener. I'm a happier teacher and having a happier time with my peers.”

“The conversations helped me to become consciously competent in cognitive conflict with my team vs. affective conflict, and thus being a better team for our students by continually moving forward. Paraphrasing is both an art and skill that allows one to truly listen and be there for another person.”

*These are a few of the exit comments by participants in the last IITCD workshop.*

A new 5 day IITCD workshop with Carolyn McKanders is starting in January.  
**Register early** to ensure your chance to learn how to communicate more effectively with everyone in your life.

For more information call **Michigan Schools in the Middle**  
at **989-774-7678** or visit our website at **[www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu](http://www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu)**.

There is a brochure and a registration form on the web.

# Visitors to Michigan Middle Schools



On November 8 and 9, two MSIM schools were privileged to host visitors from Senegal, Africa. National education leaders wanted to see middle level education in practice in the United States. The five educational administrators and their interpreters visited Mt. Morris Central Elementary (4-6 building) and Bendle Middle School (6-8 building).

The students in these buildings served as ambassadors for the guests. Students asked the Senegalese many questions to compare and contrast this small country in Western Africa with their own lives. Students learned that people in Senegal speak French, dress much as we do, have fewer resources in their schools, eat fast food (just not McDonald's), drive foreign cars --a Ford-- and have a different monetary system. The students were riveted to the messages from their visitors and when they learned that Senegal has very few computers in their classrooms they wanted to send them some of their computers!

It was a great experience for these MSIM schools and we want to especially thank their coach, Dave Nizinski, for his work in organizing this visit.

*The  
MSIM staff  
wishes you  
a wonderful  
Holiday Season  
&  
A Great 2006!*



The MSIM offices will close at noon on Wednesday December 21st for the Holidays. We will reopen on Tuesday January 3rd.

## **Freebie**

The freebie for December is this new MSIM bag.

The first 10 people who call or email will receive this great bag.

Call 989-774-1198 or email [duvallp@cmich.edu](mailto:duvallp@cmich.edu)

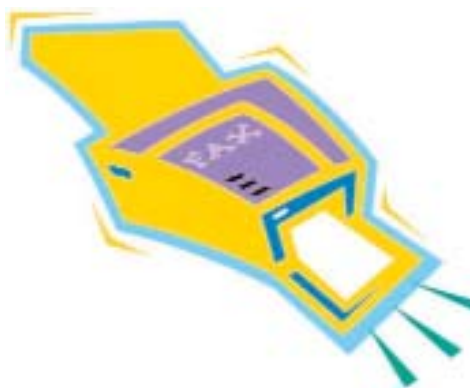


# Powerful Quote

"One of the greatest gifts you can give another is the purity of your attention, not your advice."

---Susan Scott

Contact us:



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