



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

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“Collaborative Inquiry”

Why do the majority of school improvement efforts fail to develop true learning communities? Because they don't adequately engage teachers in collaborative inquiry where it matters most: In the daily learning-teaching interactions between students and teachers. Our experiences studying teachers' development over the last 17 years have culminated in what we refer to as collaborative analysis of student learning (CASL), a particular form of learning community in which teachers discover the relationship between their instruction and student performances on classroom assessments and other samples of student work. Langer, Colton, & Goff, define student work as any data or evidence collected by teachers that reveals information about student learning. Such evidence can come from teacher observations, student performances, writing samples, classroom assessments, and standardized test. These data provide windows into students' understanding of key ideas and skills. The idea of analyzing student work is not new. However,

the approach has little potential to transform teaching or improve schools unless educators conceive it more broadly as collaborative inquiry, which places the student at the heart of the endeavor. Collaborative inquiry is most powerful when teachers look at an individual learner's progress over time; when teachers learn and follow collaborative norms; and when leadership and structures support the inquiry. As a result, teachers discover how specific students' understanding evolves and how they, as teachers, can promote this understanding.

Promoting Collaborative Inquiry

Transforming school cultures for collaborative inquiry is a slow process that requires a clear vision and a passion for this kind of change. School administrators and teacher leaders need to engage in their own collaborative inquiry to develop a shared vision for their organization. Without this vision, it becomes more difficult to explain, model, and promote collaborative inquiry.

Administrators who hold this vision often ask us, "How can I introduce collaborative inquiry to my staff?" A group session should begin with establishing a preliminary set of norms, such as starting and ending on time, building on others' ideas, and withholding judgment. Following an explanation of the inquiry cycle, teachers use the cycle to discuss written or videotaped cases of classroom dilemmas. When asked to reflect on this experience, teachers typically mention that in the hectic pace of their work, they rarely slow down enough to analyze why things happen, and they would like to do more of this.

Another way to introduce the inquiry cycle is by asking teachers to observe patterns in test data. They can then analyze why these patterns—low scores on science writing, for example—might exist. To test their hunches, teachers can design and administer an assessment similar to the one on the test and then analyze their students' patterns of performance.

“Collaborative Inquiry” continued

For example, some 5th grade teachers assessed their student's writing on science concepts. Even though many students earned the same score—a 2—on the rubric, the teachers observed that one cluster of students could express the ideas orally but could not write them down, whereas another cluster could write down their thoughts but could not organize them orally. As the teachers analyzed various reasons for these patterns, they discovered that they might need to implement different strategies for these two clusters of students.

If a school has already established its professional learning agenda for the year, teachers might engage in the inquiry cycle with student work samples to determine

whether the strategies or programs as having the desired effect on student learning.

When teachers are empowered by their experience with inquiry, they are more willing to influence school policies and work toward school improvement. For example, an entire staff met in study groups during a certain time block for a year while substitute teachers covered their classes. On the basis of the teachers' positive reports, the principal rearranged the following year's schedule to allow grade-level teams to meeting during the day. This structural shift reflected the school's commitment to the vision of collaborative inquiry.

We believe that every teacher's passion is to see his

or her students succeed. Yet too many teachers attribute student failure to external forces—a mind-set that is due, in part, to cultures of isolation and failed professional development. Schools that engage in collaborative inquiry develop a sense of collective efficacy that helps educators reconnect with their original point of passion: ensuring student success.

Taken from *Looking at Student Work* by Langer & Colton, Educational Leadership/February 2005—Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Freebie



Last month the following people received a free copy of *Classbuilding and Teambuilding Smart Cards* by being among the first 10 people to contact us:

Ann Anderson - Howell, Bev Skinner - Standish Sterling, Cheri Meyer - Ionia, Wayne Stitt - Cassopolis, Maureen Phillips - Newaygo, Wendy Williams - Croswell-Lexington, Sandra Ritter - Burton, Monica Healy- Hancock.



This month the first 10 people to email will receive a copy of the book, *Outside/Inside, Inside/Outside Developing and Implementing the School Quality Review* by Jacqueline Ancess. This resource relates to the above article and will be helpful to schools engaging in internal accountability and reflection.

Send your email to duval1p@cmich.edu with your name and address to receive your free copy.



Leadership Lifeline

Passing the Hat

Meetings are becoming teachers' work, at least an important part of it, as evidence mounts that student improvement is higher and more sustainable in collaborative schools. In collaborative cultures, leaders wear four hats that they easily can pass to teachers—consultant, presenter, coach, and facilitator. When principals loan the facilitator hat to faculty members, they discover they have more influence and face less resistance on school decisions.

The facilitator efficiently coordinates staff energies by making meetings more successful. The principal frames the meeting and agenda items, including stating outcomes, giving a rationale for an item's importance, clarifying the group's function (to inform, recommend, or decide), linking an item to other school initiatives, or naming the givens, such as money, time, or other resources available to the group. A facilitator works within this framework to make easier the process of planning, problem solving, and decision making, or in the case of dialogue, conversing to understand.

An effective facilitator is neutral, keeping personal opinions about meeting topics unsaid and concentrating instead on guiding group processes. If the principal wears this neutral hat, the group is robbed of the principal's knowledge, values, and expertise. In many situations, the principal's knowledge is an important resource to a group as it makes decisions affecting students' learning. If the principal is facilitating the meetings, he or she may not be able to adequately communicate that knowledge and may send mixed messages. Teachers may conclude that the real agenda is to get buy-in to the principal's ideas.

When to facilitate is a dilemma not only for principals, but for all those in positions of power. Bruce Wellman and Robert Garmston distinguish two types of positional authority: role authority, such as a principal or the vice principal when the principal is not present, department heads in department meetings, committee chairpersons, and superintendents or assistant superintendents when the superintendent is not present; and knowledge authority, such as science specialists in meetings on science curriculum or methodology or

a special education specialist in meetings on science curriculum or methodology or a special education specialist in a meeting about a student.

When the individual with role or knowledge authority participates in a meeting without a designated facilitator, this leader typically manages group processes. This person sets the agenda, decides when to move to the next topic, recognizes people to speak, writes meeting notes to assist remembering, and summarizes actions to be taken. Managing these many tasks limits or diffuses the leader's attention to content and limits the group's access to the leader's specialized knowledge and points of view.

In the most successful meetings, leadership roles are shared, and all parties understand and agree to those roles.

Principals may need to examine their own issues about power and control: What does being in charge mean when you are not running the meeting? Leaders can begin to address the challenge of sharing leadership by asking other principals about how they let go and benefits they perceive. As a principal, Garmston discovered he had more influence when staff members became skilled in running meetings. Let go of the reins in stages. Think about positively influencing the thinking of group members in ways that keep the focus on your ideas and information, not on the role of the person who is speaking. A shift in meeting roles means teachers take on new responsibilities and relationships with colleagues. The change can be unsettling for some. Collaborative work requires acquiring new skills. Teachers first should isolate and learn some facilitation skills together that also are used in teaching: questioning, paraphrasing, probing for specificity. Faculty members develop confidence and competence by learning about the facilitation role, then taking turns facilitating and debriefing with colleagues. All of these changes affect the sociology of the group. Yet sharing the facilitator's role empowers the group and makes a stronger team.

Taken from *Group Wise* by Robert J Garmston, National Staff Development Council, Winter 2005



Teacher Topics

Questioning Strategies

Educator John Dewey commented that the process of thinking is really the process of questioning. Research has shown that during a typical teacher's career, one and a half million questions are asked. In fact, a teacher may ask 30 to 120 questions during an hour of instruction! With so much time devoted to questioning it's important to give attention both to the types of questions being asked and way in which they are asked.



The basic principle of constructivism is that students construct learning through their own exploration and through active, hand-on experiences. Encouraging students to examine themes and connections across disciplines and to think through and explain their reasoning creates opportunities for deep learning. Rather than just memorizing information for the next test, student will begin to develop habits that enable them to become life-long learners, eager to uncover and understand new knowledge.

Types of Questions

Bloom's Taxonomy provides one basis for developing question categories ranging from knowledge through comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Another model classifies questions a four major types:



- 1. Managerial Questions.** These are the questions every teacher asks to keep the classroom and lesson operating smoothly. "Who needs more time?" and "Will you please take out your laboratory materials?" are examples of managerial questions.
- 2. Rhetorical Questions.** These questions are used to offer emphasis or clarification. "We all know the four seasons of the year are fall, winter, spring and summer, correct?"
- 3. Closed Questions.** Think of these as the *right answer* types of questions meant to assess the amount of knowledge the students have attained regarding a specific topic. For example, "What are the parts of a flower?" These questions may also include comparative or applicative properties, such as "Which object has the greatest velocity?" or "How will you use this formula to compute the correct answer?"
- 4. Open Questions.** These are the *power* questions that invite students to draw on previous knowledge, infer possibilities, formulate hypotheses, and develop their own opinions. Questions such as, "what is your opinion?" and "What do you suppose might happen if..." are examples of open-ended questions.



While managerial, rhetorical, and closed questions have value and are often necessary, *open questions* provide students with opportunities to develop skills in decision-making and evaluative thinking as they consider and respond to them.



Student Station

Respecting Our Differences A World of Differences

By the time you finish school, the world will be a much different place than it is today. You know that technology is changing fast, and you will recognize the need to learn computer skills so you can keep up. But the world is also changing *culturally*.

Already one in four Americans has African, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American ancestry. By the year 2050, that number will be one in three. More and more people of color--from South America, India, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, and other places around the world--are making the United States their home. This increasing diversity is most obvious in the schools.

Not many years from now, you'll be working with all kinds of men and women--young and old; conservative, moderate, and liberal; of various races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations; and with different mental and physical abilities, problem solving styles, and ways of responding to stress. Many of these people will have conflicting ideas about how and when it's appropriate for people to touch each other. They may disagree about when eye contact signals interest and assertiveness and when it's perceived as rude or threatening. Their privacy needs may vary depending on their ethnic heritage and family background, and they may not agree about how to behave in a work environment.

With so many confusing differences, how will we work together in the future? How can we work together today? How can we keep cultural differences from leading us to the wrong conclusions? How can we understand one another when we don't all speak the same language?

When people are different, misunderstandings happen. If they're not resolved, misunderstandings can create resentment, and resentment can lead to *stereotyping*--judging people without really knowing them. Stereotyping causes prejudice, irrational dislike, and suspicion. All of this can make it more difficult to attend school together, work together, and live together in communities.

That's why we need to learn to respect our differences. It's the only way we can get along in a changing world.

The key is learning more about the people around you. The more you know about them, the harder

it is to stereotype them and feel prejudice toward them. The less prejudice you feel, the less likely you are to treat other people unkindly or unfairly.

All of this goes both ways, of course. The more kindly and fairly you treat other people, the more likely they will treat you that way, the less prejudice they will feel toward you, and the harder it will be for them to stereotype you.

Getting along with all kinds of people takes tolerance--the capacity to recognize and respect the beliefs and practices of others, even when they are not exactly like you.

If that sounds like a big job, remember that it's okay to start small. Everyone can learn to be more tolerant of *one* person or *one* group of people.

You may be thinking, "Why should I be more tolerant? What's in it for me?" Being more tolerant allows you to really get to know and enjoy the people around you and savor the rich variety of America's changing culture. The more tolerant you become, the more you'll get along with your classmates, coworkers, neighbors, and other people you see every day. You'll get better at communicating, thinking for yourself, understanding other people, and resolving conflict.

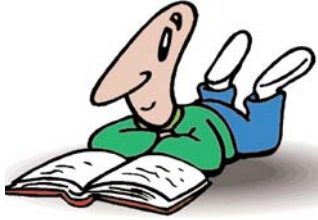
Conflict is a part of everyone's life regardless of gender, race, religion, or political beliefs. Unresolved conflict can lead to hurt feelings, resentment, even violence. It can keep you from doing and being your best at school, on the job, and other places and times in your life.

Where do you start? Perhaps there is a person in your classes who is in some way different than you; you might begin by finding out about this person's favorite activities and interests. You may find you have more in common than you thought!

Taken from *Respecting our Differences, a Guide to Getting Along in a Changing World* by Lynn Duvall.

Interesting fact: The human body has 40,000 genes. The difference between an African American and a Caucasian is only 6 genes!





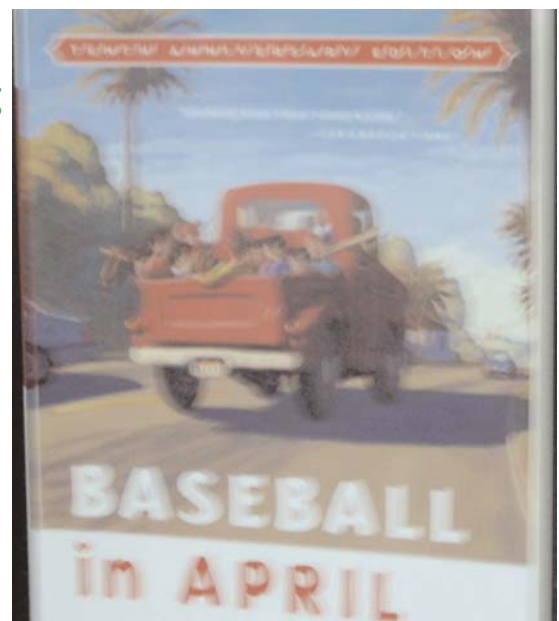
Student Book Review

Baseball in April and other stories
by Gary Soto

- **Victor shows off in French class to impress Teresa.....**
- **Alfonso runs into trouble when he tries to look cool on his first date.....**
- **Hector and his grandfather dream of buying a house....**
- **Fausto really wants a guitar, will he lie to get one.....**
- **Michael and Jesse try out - again - for the Little League team.....**
- **Veronica finally gets a “real” Barbie....what happens next....**
- **Maria thinks she’s old enough to stay home alone while her family goes on vacation....**

In this unique collection of short stories, the small events of daily life reveal big themes--love and friendship, youth and growing up, success and failure. Calling on his own experiences of growing up in California’s Central Valley, poet Gary Soto brings to life the joy and pain of young people everywhere.

The smart, tough, vulnerable kids in these stories are Latino, but their dreams and desires belong to all of us.





Family Focus

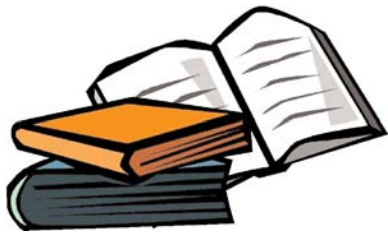
Respecting Differences to Find Common Ground

Despite your best efforts to be role models for your children, children learn prejudice through living in and observing a society where prejudice exists. They may observe that some people will not associate with certain groups. They may overhear jokes that show disrespect toward races, cultures, people with disabilities, genders, family configurations, and sexual orientations. It's important to address the issue of prejudice and discrimination in all forms against all people with your children. Children can be taught that differences make people special, and they can learn from those who are different than they are.

Tips for Parents

To help your children understand and respect differences:

- Accept each of your children as unique and special. Children who feel good about themselves are less likely to be prejudiced.
- Be a good role model. Maintain and encourage friendships with people of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.
- If others use bigoted language, don't ignore it. Ask them not to talk that way around you and your children.
- Teach your children to be sensitive to other people's feelings. Ask children to imagine themselves in the position of others.
- Tell your children that prejudice and discrimination are unfair and unacceptable behavior. Make it a firm rule that no one should be excluded or teased on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, accent, gender, ability, sexual orientation, or appearance.
- Help your children recognize instances of stereotyping and discrimination. Teach them to never tolerate racial or ethnic slurs or jokes.
- Provide opportunities for your children to learn about people of different cultures. Through books, museum visits, and TV programs, children can appreciate and respect people's differences.
- Encourage your child's school to offer educational programs that show positive insights into other cultures. Books, TV programs, and trips to museums are all good tools to help children learn about different cultures.
- Teach your children to view television, movies, Internet sites, video games, and the news with a critical eye, and to listen to music critically, too. Inform them that the media often promote intolerance and violence against those who are different.



Resource Review

Video - Maximizing Learning for English Language Learners

Featured Educator: Virginia Rojas

Here's a professional development tool that helps teachers and administrators address the needs of English language learners (ELL). Use the three videotapes and Facilitator's Guide to create workshops and presentations that inform teachers and other audiences of proven approaches.

Use Tape 1, *Models of Teaching*, to give your school a common point of understanding for ELL students and the various models currently used. Visit four successful schools to explore how each model works in practice and hear experienced ELL educators explain the strengths of each.

Use Tape 2, *Teaching Strategies*, to showcase teaching strategies that work well with ELL students. Throughout the video, teachers use their favorite ELL teaching strategies, discuss their approaches, and explain how these strategies work best in social studies, math, and science.

Tape 3, *Ensuring Success in All Classrooms*, helps educators at all levels explore the tough issues of assessing ELL students, including learning disabilities and practices for determining giftedness. Plus, experts explain how to encourage teachers to adopt ELL strategies and how ELL teachers can help content teachers who have ELL students in their classroom.

The accompanying Facilitator's Guide has agendas for two different workshops for each video in the series, plus all the handouts and overheads you need, and a selection of articles you can duplicate and distribute to workshop participants.

(ASCD video, 2003) Three 35-minute videos with a Facilitator's Guide.





CELEBRATING OUR CSR SCHOOLS



Pinconning Middle School

Pinconning, Michigan

Principal: Dan Byrne Grade Configuration 7 - 8

Coach: Carol Powell

Students: 338

Academic Coach: Sharon Bowen

With 2.5 years of CSR/Middle Start work in place, there is much to celebrate about Pinconning Area Middle School's efforts!

Some of the highlights include:

- *Positive results in progress toward improved student achievement
- ***Concrete steps by staff to make the work public resulting in a central office decision to retain team planning time**
- *Staff retreats to begin each year focused on student achievement
- *Leadership Team leading professional development
- *School-wide novel project
- *Completed professional development on literacy strategies and have a monthly literacy strategy in place
- *Collected data around SMART goals to determine future teacher practice



Richardson Middle School

Oscoda, MI

Principal: Charlie Negro

Grade Configuration: 6 - 8

Asst. Principal: Neil Brady

Students: 410

Coach: Carol Powell

Academic Coach: John Rasmussen

Richardson has been focused on improving student achievement in literacy through supporting teachers in their efforts to improve their classroom practice.

Some of their accomplishments are:

- *The implementation of the SMART goal format District-wide including the Board of Education
- *Academic coach focusing professional development on writing/literacy strategies which included grades 3-12
- *After one grade level team demonstrated student led conferences, all teams held them
- *Studying Student Work protocols were introduced
- *A school-wide rubric was developed and implemented, collecting and analyzing data from student grades, attendance and discipline
- *Initiated extended learning both before and after school
- *Created an exploratory with built-in "work room" for students needing additional support
- *7th grade changed to block scheduling, created MEAP prototype language across curriculum for unit tests/activities

Connected Mathematics At MSU this summer

Upcoming Getting to Know CMP Workshops

There are still available workshops for Getting to Know CMP.

Each workshop will be at the **MSU Union Building** on the MSU campus and will have limited enrollment.

Connected Mathematics Phase II will have a 2006 publication date. Sample materials will be available in the late spring of 2005.

This workshop is an opportunity to preview the curriculum!

2005: June 20-24 and June 27-July 1

Workshop 1 6th Grade
Workshop 2 6th Grade
Workshop 3 7th Grade
Workshop 4 7th Grade
Workshop 5 8th Grade
Workshop 6 8th Grade

**For more information and registration forms, go to the
MSU CMP webpage:**

www.math.cmu.edu/cmp

- on the left click - conferences - national



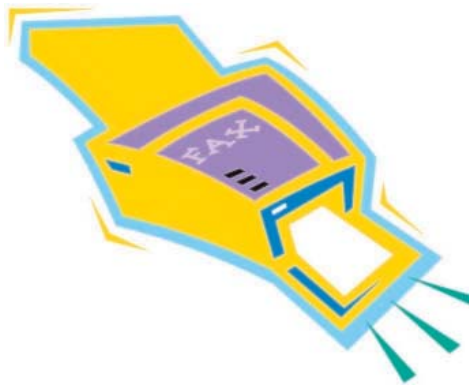
Taken from Connected Math webpage

Powerful Quote

"We are continually faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insolvable problems"

John W. Gardner

Contact us:



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