



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

APRIL, 2006 * VOLUME 8 * NUMBER 9

What's Your Policy on Late Work?

It's Friday. Your arms are fully extended, carting heavy crates full of projects to grade over the weekend that in all likelihood will be carted back to school on Monday untouched—but a teacher can dream. It's been a long week of multiple distractions from the intended lesson plans, but you've finally come out the other end of it ready to be with your family and catch up on sleep and the larger world.

Just as you're about to step into the fading afternoon sun outside the school's front doors, your principal appears in the main office doorway and calls, "Hey, how about that paperwork that was due today? Any chance that I could get you to do it before you leave? It should only take 20 minutes or so."

You grind to a halt, heart sinking, and turn to face your administrator. "Oh, wow," you begin. "I'm really sorry I didn't finish that. We had the field trip this week and testing meetings the last couple of afternoons. I completely forgot, but I really need to get home to my family. Is there any way I can work on it over the weekend and get it to you first thing Monday morning?"

If the principal is worth her salt she'll respond with, "I understand. There's plenty for me to work with over the weekend, and if I get your information on Monday, I will still be able to use it. Thanks for working on it. Have a good weekend."

A Compassionate Response

The principal's compassionate response is easy for her because you have been diligent in the past about completing paperwork on time. Your request for a

deadline extension is occasional, not chronic.

Matters would be different if you were chronically late, however. The principal would be within her rights to remind you of your professional duties, express disappointment and frustration, and even put a letter of reprimand in your file. She might also take time to investigate and help you re-prioritize your time.

Many middle school teachers fear that a compassionate response to late student work will teach students that it's okay for them to be late or miss deadlines. The ensuing anarchy would engulf us all, they fear. "In the real world," they tell their students, "you would never get away with such behaviors."

They are wrong on all counts. In the real world, airplanes take off minutes and hours late every day. Dentists run late, people request time extensions for filing tax forms, new building construction takes longer than we think, and car repairs are not finished by the designated time. This is not to disparage any of these industries; it recognizes that humans are organic and messy, subject to more than the dictates of the clock.

We teach self-discipline and the importance of punctuality in more effective ways than through blind punishment. For instance, we share stories of individuals who were and were not on time with their tasks and the consequences in each case. We provide students with individual feedback regarding their punctuality, we emphasize formative assessment and feedback over

summative versions so students stay on course, and we structure our lessons so students want to keep up with work so they can participate in compelling experiences and not be overwhelmed by playing catch-up with too many tasks at one time.

We also must realize that we are not teaching adults with adult-level competencies. We are teaching young adolescents who are learning those competencies for the first time.

Successful middle level teachers don't see teaching as a "gotcha" enterprise, thinking their job is done when they catch young adolescents doing wrong and pointing it out to them. They know that students don't learn purely by being punished. It takes concentrated investigation and constructive action to get them to the point where punctuality matters. It's tougher to do, and automatically lowering grades when papers and projects are late is a cop-out. In most interactions on this planet, we're here to look out for one another, not document each other's fall.

Young adolescents are watching us, hoping the world really is compassionate, and that they are not alone. We can show them that the world is demanding yet compassionate, and more importantly, that they have tools to deal with it.

What is your late policy teaching students about life?

Taken from **Middle Ground**, April 2006, *Late Work: A Constructive Response*, Rick Wormeli.



Leadership Lifeline

What groups talk about matters--
and *how* they talk matters, too.

A common assumption found in education literature is that developing professional communities will result in increased student learning. While there is much truth to this, there is more to the story. Certain topics and specific methods of communication are essential to improving teaching and learning. Professional development leaders working with groups can build the group's capacity by improving *what* teachers talk about and *how* they talk.

Collaborative groups encounter three challenges. One is a tendency, typical when groups first form, to talk not about instruction, but instead about the logistics of working together. The second challenge is to overcome the tendency to have conversations that lack inquiry, reflection, analysis, challenge, and invention. Some groups face a third challenge: letting interpersonal dynamics detract from the group's work. Many professional development activities rightfully address these areas in order to build professional communities in which student learning improves.

Two combined approaches to these challenges can result in sustainable change. First, leaders focus groups and set expectations that teachers *will* skillfully talk about student work and apply accountability data to inform their instruction. Such leaders provide professional development on, among other topics, data analysis, ways of talking, and intellectually challenging ideas related to student learning. The second approach is to develop the capacity in groups to create internal sources of excellence.

Teachers' behaviors are manifestations of excellence -- the things of performance -- not the roots or origins. From Charles Garfield's study (1986) of peak performers, to Margaret Wheatley's (1999) insightful applica-

tion of quantum physics to leadership, to current research in learning and organizational development, we find that invisible factors (energy) drive peak-performing individuals and groups.

Effective leaders sense this and work to develop five energy sources that fuel sustained high performance: efficacy, flexibility, consciousness, craftsmanship, and interdependence (Costa & Garmston, 1989, 2002).



ENERGY SOURCES FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

Efficacy: belief that one can make a difference and determination to do so.

Flexibility: viewing through multiple perspectives with empathy and analysis.

Consciousness: basing self-directed action on awareness of self and others.

Craftsmanship: the drive for precision, elaboration, and improvement.

Interdependence: using webs of connections with others to learn and produce work.

Taken from: NSDC Journal of Staff Development, Group Wise by Robert Garmston, Winter 2006



Teacher Topics

A New Type of Learner

In order to customize instructional technology to meet their needs we must better understand the context of our students' lives outside the classroom, particularly in regard to their knowledge and use of technology. A 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation survey involving more than 2,000 students ranging in age from 8 to 18 years revealed a number of emerging trends for today's generation of "media Multitaskers." Some of the more remarkable findings included these:

- * Student's routinely devote over six hours a day to using some form of digital media for recreation.
- * Almost 73% of homes have Internet connections, and 39% of students have access to two or more computers.
- * Nearly 35% say that they "regularly" do their homework while speaking on the phone, surfing or chatting on the web, listening to music, or watching TV.

The classroom implications are obvious: the context within which students learn, collect information, and solve problems means that teachers must learn to work smarter, not harder, in order to accommodate learning styles attuned to and nurtured by an increasingly digital world.

Teachers must become proficient at harnessing all forms of technology to empower their students to learn and critically think via the pathways that they are currently embracing. Not surprisingly, at every grade level more educators are turning to project-based learning to transform their curricula by allowing students to take greater responsibility for constructing and communicating their own real-world connections and understandings. With this in mind, you may wish to consider integrating technology into your lessons to help students make meaningful connections.

Younger students might explore ways in which **mathematics** are involved in hobbies, sports, weather predictions, politics, and business. Students enjoy displaying their interest in calculating batting averages for baseball or in collecting data to determine the sales price of things they would like to purchase. They could use calculators, enter data into spreadsheets, construct graphs, combine and compare data within or across classes, or connect with students in another location who are working on a similar data-collection project. For somewhat older mathematics learners, there are finance and accounting calculators for every equation and area of expertise. Students can actually conference call or video conference with scientists and mathematicians around

the world. They can attend online conventions and even chart Olympic events as they happen. This goes far beyond accessing and using data; it enables the student to experience the real world of a mathematician.

Opportunities abound in **social studies**. Students can experience history through simulations, world travel videos, and interactive time lines and maps. Real historical documents exist on the Internet in their original form. Recent history is documented with audio, video, and transcripts of speeches, debates, and international conventions. Students can actually watch and listen to meetings held at the United Nations or attend the G-8 Summit online. Museums offer visual histories now, based on photo albums and journals. Elementary students can make real-world connections by assembling their own family histories in light of immigration patterns. Those born in other countries may offer a firsthand view of the immigration experience both for themselves and family members by developing a portfolio or a PowerPoint program.

In the area of **language arts**, students can publish their own poetry, prose, biographies, artwork, experiments, and just about anything they want on their own website for free. With proper guidance, students can start their own blogs and wiki's to discuss issues among themselves or with students across the world. E-magazines, news feeds, and other e-publications provide current events within moments. E-books and e-journals provide fiction and research much sooner than the print world can produce. Beyond the world of the Web, students in general, and high school students in particular, enjoy assembling portfolios of their work. While those can be constructed in hard copy, portfolios may also be assembled and maintained electronically. A variety of software programs are available to facilitate doing so, or a home-grown method can be used. Creating such a portfolio can both demonstrate progress in a tangible form and boost self-esteem.

Science offers a treasure chest of online opportunities to students. Scientists offer more information online than any other professionals. Students can trace the progress of a theory from original hypothesis, through testing, to final adoption by international organizations. Simulations and models in 3-D make chemical and physical interactions come alive. Students can even GIS their own towns and neighborhoods.

Taken from...Teacher Today, Volume 21, Number 6 - February, 2006



Student Station

Like a Tree in a Windstorm

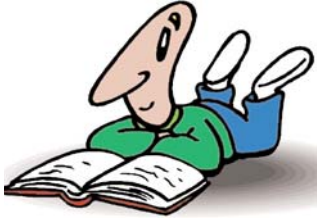
Have you ever watched a large tree bend and sway in high winds? The branches, and even the trunk, may bend, but when the wind dies down, the tree stands tall again. This ability to bend, but not break, under pressure is called resilience (pronounced "ree ZILL yenss"). Now, imagine what would happen to a tree that could not bend -- under pressure from heavy winds, it would snap apart and collapse.

Trees have resilience; and, in a different way, people have it, too! Do you know anyone who has gone through many hard times but still keeps pushing on? "Bouncing back" from misfortune is a kind of resilience; so is learning from one's mistakes. For example, if you earn a bad grade on a test, you could say, "Oh, well, I can't learn that stuff, anyway," or you could resolve to study harder before the next test. Which is the more resilient way to respond?

In the book *Child of the Owl*, by Laurence Yep, twelve-year-old Casey thinks that old Mr. Jeh looks like a tree as he practices Tai Chi in the park. His gnarled trunk and limbs bend as he does the flowing Tai Chi forms, but he seems to be rooted strongly to the earth, as well. Casey later learns that

Mr. Jeh has lived through many hardships, including losing his fortune and his family in China's Communist Revolution. Although he has lived a hard and lonely life for many years, Mr. Jeh has not allowed his bad luck to change him. He is still honest, loyal, courageous, and compassionate. Mr. Jeh is resilient.

Would you like to read more books about people whose resilience has helped them to get through hard times? Try *The Miracle Worker*, by William Gibson, the true story of a girl named Helen Keller who was left blind, deaf, and mute by a childhood illness; or pick up *The Barn*, by Avi; or read Cynthia Voigt's book *Homecoming*, in which four children who have been abandoned by their parents struggle to make their way home. All of these are books about people who have made it through hard times by hanging on to the values that are important to them. As you read, think about your own life. What tough things have you gone through? How did you respond to them? Did you let them defeat you, or did you use them as opportunities to learn and grow? Most likely, as you think back, you will realize that, like a mighty oak tree, you have a great deal of resilience, too!



Student Book Review

Memoirs of a Bookbat Author: Kathryn Lasky

In the beginning, Harper Jessup didn't think her life was all that bad. It was actually pretty exciting for the first few years after her parents decided to sell their house and start moving from town to town in the family's big, old Roadmaster RV. Harper went to a different school every month or so, and spent lots of time on the road with her parents and her sister Weesie. Even though new friends were hard to make, Harper loved to read, and she could count on her books to keep her company.

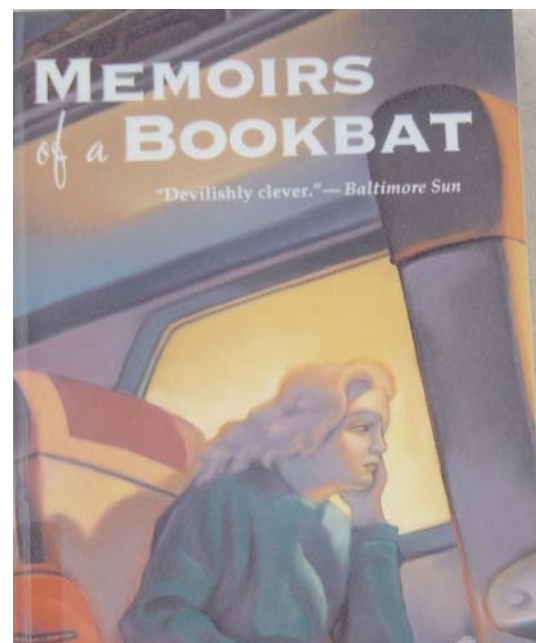
True, she wasn't sure she understood her parents' worries about what she was reading or what she was learning in school. But Harper knew deep down that her parents wanted only the best for her -- and for all the families and communities in America. Why else would they have become migrants for God?

Then she met an older boy, Gray, who gave voice to all the questions that were beginning to stir inside her. And suddenly, she found herself alone on a bus in the middle of nowhere, a backpack beside her and a knot in her stomach. Her family was miles away, and so was the best friend she'd ever had, and to go back would mean lots of trouble. Miles ahead of her stretched the future. How did she end up here, anyway?

Like all of Kathryn Lasky's books, *Memoirs of a Bookbat* will grab your attention on the first page and hold you until the end. Once you've finished this one, why not try another of this author's excellent novels? *Beyond the Burning Time* is a chilling story set during the

Salem Witch Trials. *True North* is a gripping tale of two girls, a runaway slave and a wealthy Boston socialite, who make a dash for Canada and freedom, becoming lifelong friends in the process. A lesser-known but equally interesting novel is *Blood Secret*, in which the disappearance of her mother leads 14-year-old Jerry Luna on a quest to understand her family's heritage of suffering and persecution. While most of Lasky's books are historical novels, she has also produced some wonderful picture books designed for young adult readers -- the best is *First Painter*, a speculation about how ancient cave painting got started. She is also the author of a captivating fantasy series, *The Guardians of Ga'hoole*.

Pick up one of these excellent books today!





Family Focus

D.E.A.R. Time!

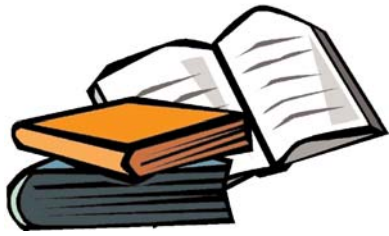
In this month's FYI, we continue to look at ways in which parents can encourage their kids to get in the habit of reading. In addition to read-aloud time, some families schedule a time when everyone says, "Oh, DEAR!" No, that doesn't mean something has gone wrong -- instead, it's a time when the family has agreed to **Drop Everything And Read!**

During DEAR time, the television set goes off. The telephone goes unanswered. Everyone sits down for some uninterrupted reading time. Here are some suggestions for making DEAR time a success at your house:

- Make sure everyone has something to read. You might want to plan a trip to the library before DEAR day.
- Schedule DEAR in advance. If you have a family calendar, write DEAR time in it. This lets your children see that reading time is just as important as basketball practice!
- Start small. Some families schedule a half-hour of DEAR time, once a week. When everyone has the reading habit, DEAR time can be more frequent.
- Join in! DEAR can be a success only if everyone takes part. So pop a big bowl of popcorn, grab that best-seller you've been dying to read, and settle down for a few minutes of quiet reading yourself.

One great way to get your kids reading, both during DEAR time and in other spare moments, is to start a family library. Of course, few families can afford to buy every book their children like, but with a little planning, you can build a library that will include books that spark the interest of everyone in the family. Here are some simple tips for getting started:

- Buy paperback books. They're cheaper than hardcovers. If you're worried about them getting damaged, protect the covers with clear contact paper.
- Encourage your kids to swap books with friends. Host a neighborhood "read-in," with everyone bringing favorite books to your house. Afterward, they can exchange or borrow books.
- Shop at used-book stores. You can often buy books for a very reasonable price -- usually half or less what the same book would cost new.
- Look for book sales. Most public libraries hold used-book sales once a year or more. Yard sales are also a fantastic place to get good, gently used books at a great price.
- Give books as gifts. Establish a family tradition of giving books for the holidays. If you're not sure which book to choose, give a gift certificate to a book store.



Resource Review

Summarization in Any Subject: 50 Techniques to Improve Student Learning

Author: Rick Wormeli

Educators agree that the ability to summarize -- to identify salient information and structure it for meaning, long-term retention, and successful application -- is an essential academic skill. Robert Marzano, in his highly regarded meta-analysis of research on education, listed summarizing as one of nine "classroom strategies that work" for students of all ages and all levels of ability. Research affirms summarization's reputation as a highly effective way to boost comprehension and achievement. We know summarization works... But isn't it... well... just a little *dull*?

It doesn't have to be! Rick Wormeli, a teacher certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, makes the case that summarization is not only one of the most effective ways to improve student learning, but also that it is one of the most flexible, responsive, and engaging teaching strategies. In this book, you'll find a classroom-tested collection of written, spoken, artistic, and kinesthetic summarization techniques for both individual assignments and group activities across the content areas. Suitable for students in grades 3 - 12, these tech-

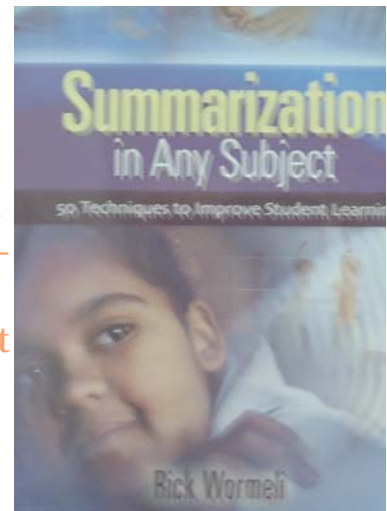
niques are easily adjustable to any curriculum. Wormeli presents them with ample directions and vivid, multidisciplinary examples. In addition to the "basic sequence" for each strategy, he suggests variations and extended applications, and provides a variety of opportunities for teachers to tailor the strategies to suit their own needs.

Wormeli also clarifies the process of teaching students how to summarize and includes a special section on the key skill of paraphrasing.

The book concludes with an assortment of original text excerpts and activity prompts -- a

great starting place for teachers ready to use summarization in their own classrooms!

To borrow this excellent new resource, please call MSIM at (989) 774-7678 and ask to borrow Resource Number IS-95.



Looking Beyond Configuration

The large urban school districts at the center of the move toward K-8 schools are complicated systems. Their sheer size may well work against creating the smaller school communities that the middle school concept promotes. Moreover, diminishing state and federal resources make school success more difficult for urban students, many of whom already suffer the injustice of having to live in poverty (Kozol, 2005). And the moves to punish struggling schools and students, sterilize the curriculum, and demand unattainable test results come down especially hard on large urban districts.

It is misleading for middle school critics to suggest that poor achievement and difficult conditions in our urban schools result from a particular school configuration. This sleight-of-hand rhetoric does a disservice to young adolescents and their schools by diverting attention from the powerful effects of poverty and the unsavory resegregation of our nation's communities and schools. (Kozol, 2005).

Rather than debate which grade configuration is best for the middle grades, we would be better off expending our energy creating a curriculum that intellectually engages and inspires young adolescents, pushing for organizing structures that support high-quality relationships, and finding better ways to reach out to families and communities. If we really want to do something worthwhile for young adolescents, we should work to overcome the poverty and prejudice that relentlessly work against many of these students' chances for success inside school and for a decent life outside it.

"Guess Again: Will Changing the Grades Save Middle-Level Education?" by James Beane and Richard Lipka, is available in **Educational Leadership**, April 2006.

April's "Freebie"

This month we have the book *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* by Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour. The first two readers to contact us at 989-774-1198 or duval1p@cmich.edu will receive this book.



Welcome Andrea Abke

We are pleased to welcome Andrea as a professional development specialist. Andrea has jumped right into MSIM work and has participated in several Schools to Watch site visits and Collegial Peer Reviews.

Andrea graduated from Central Michigan University and has worked with both Middle and High school students. She is trained in Developmental Assets and specializes in counseling and student advocacy.

She is anxious to help "spread good instructional strategies throughout the state." Contact her at Michigan Schools in the Middle.





Sue Swaim, NMSA Executive Director,
and John Swaim visit CMU's
CMLACMU students.

Sue presented the topic "Middle Level Advocacy: Ideas to Maximize the Support of Middle Schools," sharing many ideas of how we can be advocates, at all levels, for the young adolescents we care about so much.



Standish Sterling teacher engages all students in learning

Thank you
Standish Sterling Middle School
&
White Pine Middle School



Support staff welcomes CMU students to White Pine

MLE 382 students enjoyed a great visit with both schools on April 7, 2006. We saw teachers studying student work, use of great instructional strategies, and outstanding support for students.



Administration and MLE students pose for a picture at White Pine

Free knowledge dispensed
daily...bring your own
Container!



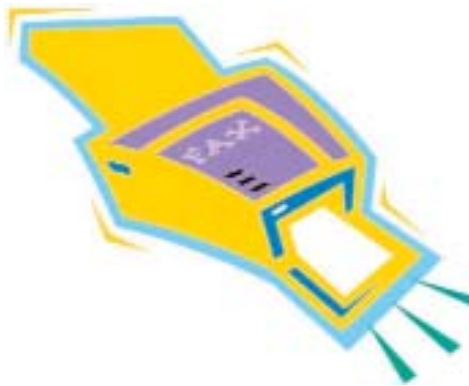
We met "Dewey" the library cat at Standish Sterling

Powerful Quote

"If you think in positive terms, you will achieve positive results."

--Norman Vincent Peale

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