



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

MARCH, 2006 * VOLUME 8 * NUMBER 8

Your Best Professional Development Experience is Just Down the Hall

Accepting the research-based finding that student achievement is most closely linked to teacher effectiveness is sometimes a huge step for us as educators. After all, this places the responsibility for student learning squarely on the shoulders of classroom teachers. It forces one to reject the notion that it is primarily the responsibility of students or their parents to make certain learning occurs.

Teachers who accept this responsibility, however are empowered by the knowledge that they are in control of learning in their classrooms. It is the notion that we (educators) have power over everything that matters to ensure success for all students.

So how does a teacher improve his/her craft of teaching? What makes a teacher effective? The answer may be right down the hallway from you. The greatest, most powerful, most practical, and most useful professional development is sharing with colleagues. Our colleagues are the ones who share students with us, share

the same district mandates and issues, and deal with the same opportunities and constraints we do.

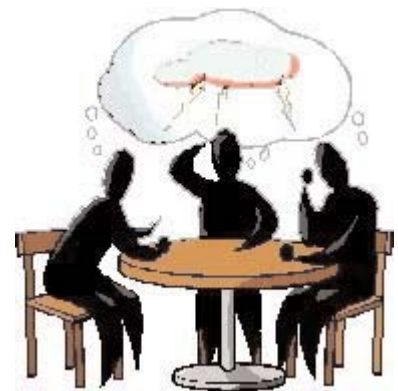
Why, then, do we so often "bring in the expert from 50 miles away" to conduct professional development? As I visit schools across the state, there are always several teachers in each building who are truly master teachers. These educators are highly skilled in their craft; they believe they impact student learning—and they do make a difference. These teachers in every subject area, and every corner of Michigan from remote rural areas to inner-city schools, have much to teach all of us.

How do we tap into this resource? First, we must accept responsibility for student learning. We must believe that we can help all students learn at high levels. With this belief system in place, we must be willing to learn from the best. This means observing a colleague's class and debriefing with him/her afterwards. It involves engaging in planning and reflective conversations

with colleagues. It means taking risks back in our own classrooms as we try new strategies and processes to help all students succeed.

Learning from our colleagues also includes inviting others into our classrooms to help us reflect on our own teaching. It is an opportunity to ask a fellow teacher to notice certain aspects of our lesson and to help us learn from the process.

Yes, there is a place for the "outside expert," but more often we already have the expertise in the building—let's find ways to tap into these incredible resources!





Leadership Lifeline

Using Data

One of the National Staff Development council's standards is data-driven decision making. This article describes several processes to make this a reality in your building.

Standardized achievement scores, until recently, were the predominant source of data about student achievement. Now, school principals and staff have at their disposal a variety of data to help them make decisions about school reform, professional development, and continuous improvement. The principal has a special role in helping school faculty use data to create meaningful information. **The principal analyzes with the faculty disaggregated data to determine school improvement/professional development goals.**

To accomplish this Desired Outcome, the principal **works with the whole faculty to analyze a variety of disaggregated student learning results to determine school improvement goals.** While a leadership committee may have the primary responsibility for examining student data to make school decisions, staff involvement leads to their ownership and commitment and increases their comfort in using data for instructional and curricular decisions. Staff "buy-in" is not something that can be accomplished once others have made key decisions. Ownership of improvement goals is something that is "grown, crafted, and invented" throughout the process. This process engages staff in turning data into useful information.

Disaggregated data is also critical to analysis. Disaggregated data provides a more

detailed inspection of results for sub-groups of students served by the school. This data also allows faculty to answer the question, "Is the school serving **all** students equally well?"

When faculty members are involved in data analysis, they have the needed background to help set goals and prioritize school improvement and professional development goals. Many strategies can help large groups set goals and identify priorities. The normal group process involves time for faculty to discuss and lobby for specific goals.

DATA-DRIVEN
Staff development that improves learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

The principal also **works with the whole faculty to analyze a variety of disaggregated student learning results to determine *student and adult learning needs*.** The faculty begins by identifying student needs; student needs then shape adult learning needs. For example, if mathematics achieve-

ment in statistics and probability is weak, the first step may be to examine existing curriculum to ensure it is aligned with the assessment. If the curriculum materials are sufficient, then a more detailed analysis of teacher practices and knowledge needs to be made.

Making data-driven decisions may mean that both the principal **and** faculty need to acquire new skills in analyzing data, using data to make instructional and curricular decisions, and facilitating large group decision making.

Taken from...**The Learning Principal**,
October 2005



Teacher Topics

Differentiated Instruction

Unlike so-called frontal or tell-and-test teaching methods, differentiated instruction is concerned not only with what and how teachers teach, but also with how students demonstrate what they have learned. Heavily influenced by Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, differentiation at any grade level creates opportunities for students to take charge of their learning by assimilating and then expressing their understanding in a variety of ways. Put simply, a teacher using differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom allows different students to construct and demonstrate their knowledge in different ways.

In a traditional classroom...

- Coverage of materials sets the pace for whole-class instruction
- Mastery of facts and skills shape context of learning.
- Only one form of assessment is used at the end of a unit.

In a differentiated classroom...

- Learning is the focus: relevant skills are assessed and taught thus meeting the needs of every learner as learning moves ahead.
- Student needs and readiness determine the rate of instructional progress.
- Multiple forms of ongoing assessment are used to customize instruction.

A teacher using differentiated instruction generally does not change the curriculum, but lesson plans call for the presentation and student feedback to be done in multiple formats. Each format is driven by the same curriculum. What truly distinguishes the differentiated classroom from the traditional classroom is the fact that wide-spread intellectual diversity is viewed, not so much as a problem, but rather as an opportunity to use the strengths of, and also to meet the individual needs of, each student.

An increasingly popular strategy for incorporating differentiated instruction into daily learning events employs a series of enriched learning stations or learning centers where students work simultaneously on a variety of challenging tasks.

Learning Centers Middle and high school students can benefit from the learning center approach. Unlike stations, which are limited to sequential, centers are more open-ended. They focus on developing critical thinking skills within larger subjects such as language arts, science, and social studies. In such a setting the strategies employed often range from independent study and small group work to project-based learning, portfolios, and literature circles.

* Science teachers looking to expand their students' appreciation of astronomy, for example, may choose to stock their learning center with activities to visually explore key concepts relating to gravity, light, and motion.* The learning center of a language arts class studying poetry would likely offer exercises on creating simile and practicing rhymes for students needing reinforcement in basic concepts. Opportunities to include those skills in actually writing their own poems for publication would meet the needs of more advanced students.

Learning centers are designed not only to help enlarge understanding but also to enrich by incorporating materials and tasks that appeal to a wide range of intelligence, interests, and needs. Promoting student efforts to construct knowledge by beginning at their own level of comprehension, learning centers offer hands-on activities designed to reward natural inquisitiveness with genuine understanding.

Taken from...**teacher today**, January, 2006



Student Station

Building Community

If you're like most people, you have a small circle of friends with whom you spend most of your time. And, if you're like most people, this circle of friends is made up of others who are a lot like you. This only makes sense; after all, you are likely to choose friends who are about your own age, who have the same interests and values you have, and who live close enough that you can spend a lot of time together.

Do you ever reach out beyond your circle of friends? For example, do you talk with kids older than you, or participate in activities with them? Do you mentor younger children? Do you spend time getting to know the elders in your community, or the person who cuts your hair, or your bus driver? What about people whose skin color is different from yours, or those who follow different religious beliefs?

Often, differences in age, culture, or social status keep us separated from other people. We may think, "Oh, what could I possibly have in common with that person?" Or, we may be afraid that we will say or do something that offends a person who seems different from us. In extreme cases, we may even grow to hate or fear groups of people who are "different." We often find it much more comfortable to stick with people we know.

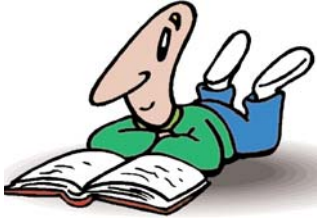
But, if you surround yourself only with people who are like you, what do you miss out on? What kind of wisdom might an older

person have that she could pass on to you? What interests or hobbies might you share with someone whose skin happens to be a different color from yours? What hopes and dreams do you have in common with people whom you normally wouldn't notice? If you look beneath the surface, you will find that most people share some interest, goal, dream, or experience with you.

Does this mean that you should turn your back on your friends and start hanging out only with people who are different from you? Not at all! Your circle of friends can be as big as you want it to be -- you can keep the friends you already have, and add to your circle. After all, no one can have too many friends!

So, try it! Talk with your bus driver, your barber, your grandparents, or the kid from the "other side of the tracks" who sits next to you in class. Find out what you have in common. You may be planting the seeds that will bloom into friendship.





Student Book Review

A Kick in the Head

Author: Paul Janeczko

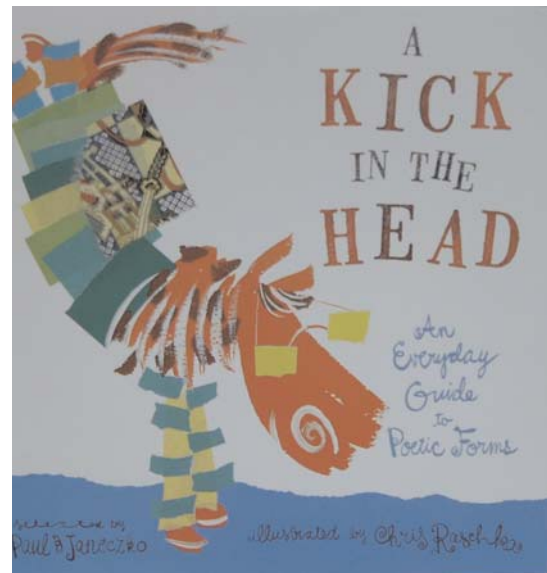
What's your opinion about poetry? Do you like it, love it, dream about it every night? Can you take it or leave it? Or do you think that reading and writing poetry is about as much fun as a kick in the head?

However you may feel about poetry, two books by Paul Janeczko and Chris Raschka will open your eyes to the beauty, the power, and the sheer fun of writing and reading poems. Both are written in picture-book form, providing examples of various forms of poetry paired with whimsical illustrations, with one-sentence descriptions of the forms.

A Kick in the Head includes twenty-nine different poems, ranging from simple and well-known forms such as couplets, triplets, and haiku to more difficult and lesser-known forms like the persona poem, the ballad, and the pantoum. The author has chosen each poem as a good representative of its form. Some of the poems are serious and sad; others are downright hilarious. Not only will you understand more about poetic forms after enjoying this book, but you will also see firsthand how poetry can spark a wide variety of emotions.

Another wonderful book by Janeczko

and Raschka is *A Poke in the I*. This book focuses on one particular type of poetry -- the concrete poem -- in which the shape of the letters and words on the page is every bit as important as the words themselves. In this book, you will find a poem in the shape of a light bulb, another that goes



back and forth over two pages like a tennis match, and another that looks like a melting popsicle!

These books are guaranteed to appeal to you, whether you can't stand poetry or you write it in your sleep! Take a look at one of these great books today!



Family Focus

Put Learning in the Air!

For the past several issues of FYI, our Family Focus article has centered on ways you, as parents, can encourage your kids to read. We'll continue that discussion here, with a description of some things you can do together as a family. The more you can make learning and reading a part of your daily life together, the more likely it is that your kids will get into the habit of picking up a book instead of the remote control.

There are many ways you can make learning an everyday thing for yourself and your kids. One important, and often overlooked, thing you can do is to make sure that your child has a wide range of experiences. Experiences provide a foundation for children to understand what they read. For



example, if a very young child has seen and touched a sheep, he will be more likely to learn and understand words such as sheep, wool, and baa. Or, if your middle-schooler has a chance to visit an aviation museum, she will have a better

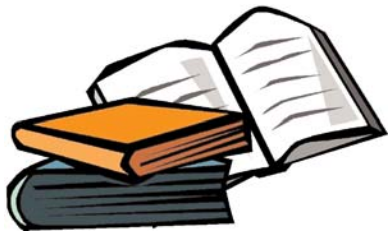
understanding of words and concepts such as fuselage and aerodynamics. If you live in a city, chances are there are museums, zoos, and exhibits within a bus ride of your home. If you live in a rural area, check with your public library to see what kinds of exhibits are available there. Some of these opportunities (going to the zoo, for example) may cost money, but there are many learning experiences which you can provide for your kids for free. Do a little digging, and see what interesting new ideas you can come up with!

Another simple thing you can do to encourage your kids to read is to relax your family's bedtime rules one night a week. Let your child know that he can stay up as late as he wants to... as long as he's reading in bed. (It's probably best to do this on a weekend night, when your child can sleep late the next morning.) Why not make this opportunity even more inviting by settling in with a good book, yourself?

You can also look for unusual places for your daily reading time with your child. Why not take your book outside some days, under a shady tree, in a sandbox, or to a nearby park? Or just spread a blanket on the living room floor and have an indoor reading picnic. You can even make creative use of all the time you and your kids spend standing in line, or stuck in traffic, or riding the bus -- carry a book with you, and pull it out and read a few pages with your kids while you wait! Challenge your kids to find new and unusual places to read, too -- perhaps you could even have a family contest to determine the most unusual places where you've ever read a book. You would likely find no end to your kids' creativity in coming up with places where they can read!

Whatever your strategies, the most important thing is that you put reading and learning "in the air" around your family. The more experiences kids have, the more they will understand what they read; and the more they read and understand, the more they will want to read!





Resource Review

Classroom Instruction that Works

Authors: Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock

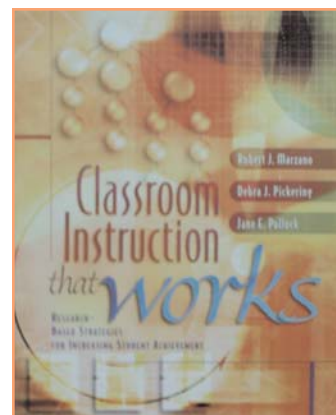
What works in education? How do we know? How can teachers find out? How can educational research find its way into the classroom? How can we apply it to help our individual students?

Questions like these arise in most schools, and busy educators often don't have time to find the answers. Authors Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock have examined decades of research findings to distill the results into nine broad teaching strategies that have been demonstrated to have positive effects on learning for students of all ages, across subject areas:

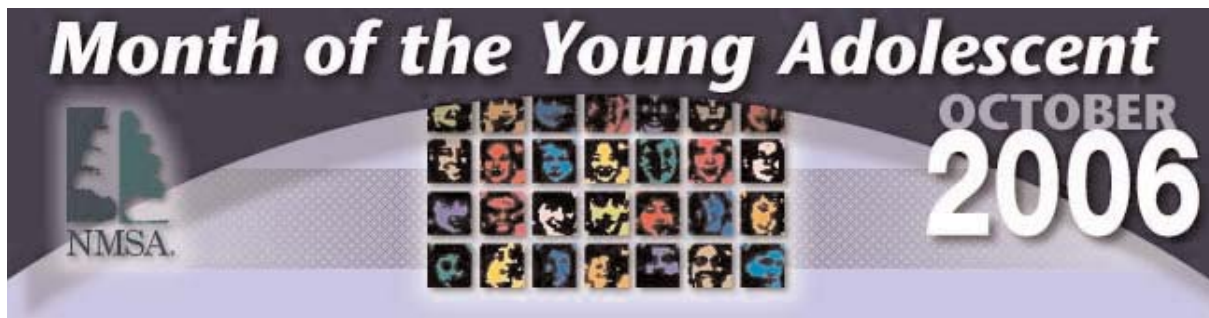
- Identifying similarities and differences
- Summarizing and note-taking
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- Homework and practice
- Nonlinguistic representation
- Cooperative learning
- Setting objectives and providing feed back
- Generating and testing hypotheses
- Questions, cues, and advance organizers.

This list is not new. But what is surprising is finding out what a big difference it makes, for example, when students learn how to take good notes, work in groups, and use graphic organizers. The authors provide statistical effect sizes and show how these translate into percentile gains for students, for each strategy. And each chapter presents extended classroom examples of teachers and students in action; models of successful instruction; and many frames, rubrics, organizers, and charts to help teachers plan and implement the strategies.

Classroom Instruction that Works examines the research and theory underlying these nine strategies, and also outlines each strategy clearly and concisely. A companion book, *Handbook for Classroom Instruction that Works*, is an excellent supplemental text, providing detailed descriptions and examples of the use of each strategy in K-12 classrooms. Both books are available at MSIM's resource library. Call (989) 774-7678, and ask to borrow resource numbers IS-48 and IS-84.



National Middle School Association *10th Anniversary* of



CALL FOR ARTWORK AND WRITING

October 2006 marks the 10th anniversary of Month of the Young Adolescent. Once again, we are asking 10- to 15-year-olds to join us in this month of celebrating young adolescents and all of the positive and unique ways they make a difference in their families, schools, communities, and in the world. This year the online publication, "Expressions from the Middle," will feature artwork and book reviews submitted by young adolescents. With a focus on literacy, we are also asking young adolescents to participate in a survey about their favorite literature. For details about the "Expressions from the Middle" contest and the literature survey, print the attached NMSA document *Call for Student Artwork and Writing* or go to the NMSA website - www.nmsa.org

The National Forum Schools to Watch Conference

June 22-24, 2006

Washington, DC

This is a great opportunity for schools.
The information brochure and registration form are attached.

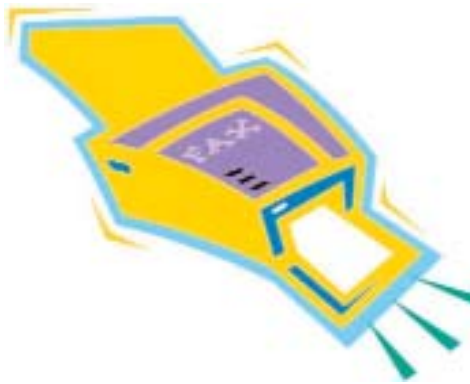
If you have trouble opening the STW information, contact Pattie DuVall.
Phone: 989-774-1198 email: duval1p@cmich.edu

Powerful Quote

Become a possibilitarian. No matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see possibilities -- always see them, for they're always there.

-Norman Vincent Peale

Contact us:



989-774-7684



www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu



989-774-7678



CMU - 678 Ronan
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859