



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

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## “Equity: It Also Applies to Teacher Learning”

NSDC’s Standards for Staff Development include many stretch goals for school systems, and one of the most challenging is “equity.” Contrary to what many believe, *equity* is not the same as *equality*. Equity is the recognition that people’s needs differ and it is necessary to respond to their needs differently. The needs of some are greater than those of others, and to meet these needs adequately, disproportionate responses are necessary. This is particularly true when needs arise from unjust circumstances or those over which people have no control.

Public school systems know more about students’ differing needs than any other sector of society. Students’ readiness to learn is shaped by differences in their family, community, and socioeconomic backgrounds. At each grade level, students’ abilities to master subject content differ greatly depending on the quality and results of their previous school experiences. Each day, teachers encounter tremendous physical, cognitive, and emotional differences among students that are stark reminders that some students’ needs are greater than others. During the past 50 years, state and federal legislation has mandated school systems to address these differences, and provided partial financial support for this purpose.

What, then, does equity imply for professional learning? At a minimum, it means school systems must provide educators the learning necessary to foster the success of students with the greatest needs. Many school systems do this now, but as is true of implementing other desirable educational practices, it is critical who participates and the consistency, intensity, and results of their participation.

For example, all school systems struggle with how to help “below basic” and “basic” students develop the confidence and skills to perform at the “proficient” level. Improving reading proficiency is fundamental to increasing student achievement, but not all teachers participate in high-quality learning experiences that prepare them to infuse reading instruction into their content areas. Some school systems choose

to engage language arts and social studies teachers, but not those from mathematics and science, in professional development to strengthen students’ reading. The result is that not all teachers are able to help students with significant literacy deficiencies.

To properly take equity into account, school systems should also consider the depth and frequency of the professional learning educators require to educate students with the greatest needs. A school system may hope one cultural diversity workshop will help teachers learn how “minority” students approach learning and how to successfully engage them. However, this complex topic does not lend itself to easy analysis and superficial discussion. For teachers to develop useful insights that alter their practices and benefit students, school systems will want to provide multiple learning venues that enable educators to probe issues of cultural diversity more deeply over time.

The greatest test for the equity dimension of professional development is whether it, in combination with other factors, improves the performance of educators and their students, and to what extent. Is there evidence that each year more teachers successfully use more powerful instructional strategies that benefit hard-to-educate students? Do increasing numbers of students move from “below basic” to “basic” each year, and from “basic” to “proficient”? A continuing challenge for the field of professional learning is to ask itself hard questions about student results. Honoring the equity component of NSDC’s standards will mean little unless students with the greatest needs benefit.

So, as middle schools strive for academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity, it is important to train teachers to meet the needs of ALL students.

Taken from: *The Learning System*, September 2006



# Leadership Lifeline

Do less, achieve more

Some things contribute a great deal to achieving leaders' goals. Other things make little difference. The ability to focus our efforts on the former category is essential in effectively and efficiently achieving the results leaders most desire. That, in turn, leads to a more balanced and less stressful style of work and life. A term given to this way of thinking is "the 80/20 principle" (also known as the "Pareto Principle").

The 80/20 Principle asserts that a minority of causes, inputs, or effort usually lead to a majority of the results, outputs, or rewards. Richard Koch states "Every person I have known who has taken the 80/20 Principle seriously has emerged with useful, and in some case life-changing, insights."

Koch's views can be summarized this way:

- "A few things are always much more important than most things"
- "80% of achievement is attained in 20% of the time taken. ...80% of happiness is experienced in 20% of life.  
...Remember that these are hypotheses to be tested against your experience. ....It doesn't matter what the exact percentages are and in any case it is almost impossible to measure them precisely."
- "The objective of 80/20 thinking is to generate action which will make sharp improvement in your life and that of others."
- "For the 80% of activities that give you only 20% of the results, the ideal is to eliminate them. You may need to do this before allocating more time to the high-value activities.

...There is normally great scope to do things differently within your existing circumstances.  
...Since there is little value in the activities you want to displace, people may not actually notice if you stop doing them."

- "There is not a shortage of time. In fact, we are positively awash with it. And for the most talented individuals, it is often tiny amounts of time that make all the difference. ...The 80/20 Principle says that we should act less. Action drives out thought. ...It is not the

shortage of time that should worry us, but the tendency for the majority of time to be spent in low-quality ways."

Here's a simple example that can make a large difference in the professional life of busy school leaders: Koch argues that "...80% of the value of a book can be found in 20% or fewer of its pages and absorbed in 20% of the time most people would take to read it through." While there are exceptions, of course, for particular kinds of

subjects and purposes, most professional reading could be done in relatively modest amounts of time with improved understanding of major ideas.

Taken from: *The Learning Principal*, March 2006

## Consider

- **Identify the "20%" activities that make the largest difference and spend more time in those activities.**
- **Identify the "80%" activities and act with urgency to reduce or eliminate them from your schedule.**



Have a safe and  
Happy Thanksgiving



# Teacher Topics

## Differentiation

### Why Differentiate?

Marian Diamond puts it simply:

- \* No two children are alike.
- \* No two children learn in an identical way.
- \* An enriched environment for one student is not necessarily enriched for another.
- \* In the classroom we should teach children to think for themselves.

### Ways to Differentiate

- 1. Differentiate the Content:** Students who demonstrate understanding can move right to an application activity while the teacher works with others. Two additional ways to differentiate content are acceleration and independent work.
- 2. Differentiate the Process:** Vary learning activities using Multiple Intelligences as a guide, thus touching different learning aptitudes during lessons and activities. Take alternate instructional paths by creating graphic organizers, presenting maps and diagrams, and using a variety of audio-visual technologies.
- 3. Differentiate the Product:** Tier expectations of work product according to ability: plan sophisticated products for more talented students or those with advanced skills, less complex for those who need encouragement. For example: a more talented student might be asked to write an opinion article, while a less talented one might make a list.

(see a Different Place at  
<http://adifferentplace.org/products.htm>  
for a listing of both kinds of products).

## **5 Steps to Differentiated Project Development**

### **1. Know your students.**

- \* What do they already know about the project or problem?
- \* What skills do they possess that can be utilized?
- \* What skills need to be taught?
- \* What connections can be made to their world that will build interest and motivation?

### **2. Think about possible teaching strategies.**

- \* Direct instruction.
- \* Inquiry-based instruction.
- \* Cooperative or team approaches.
- \* WebQuest or online research.

### **3. Provide necessary “how to” knowledge to students before starting.**

- \* Give instruction about team roles and processes.
- \* Provide guidance on Internet searching and Website evaluation.
- \* Clarify laboratory procedures.

### **4. Plan ways that the project can play into the strengths and needs of all of your students.**

- \* Consider the mixed abilities in your class:
  - \*What roles will ELL students, mainstreamed special education students, and gifted students play during various learning activities?
  - \*What specific talents do students have that can be utilized and showcased?
- \* Design activities that will allow students to explore, develop, and apply new knowledge.

### **5. Measure learning with multiple techniques.**

- \* Students may assemble portfolios.
- \* Devise rubrics to evaluate projects.
- \* Each student can make a story board.
- \* Teams might make presentations.
- \* The class could prepare concept maps.
- \* Groups can develop PowerPoint programs.



# 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 “reeZILlyens”). 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.

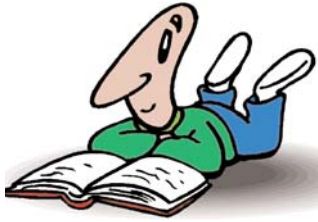
Would you like to read more books about people whose resilience has helped them to get through hard times? Try *The Miracle Worker*, by William Gibson, the true story of a girl named Helen Keller who was left blind, deaf, and mute by a childhood illness; or pick up *The Barn*, by Avi; or read Cynthia Voigt’s book *Homecoming*, in which four children who have been abandoned by their parents struggle to make their way home. All of these books are 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!

***Be sure to pick up  
a good book today!***



### November “Freebie”

The first three people to contact us at 989-774-1198 or [duval1p@cmich.edu](mailto:duval1p@cmich.edu) will receive *The Michigan Reading Association Writing Bookmarks*.



# Student Book Review

**Dateline: Troy**

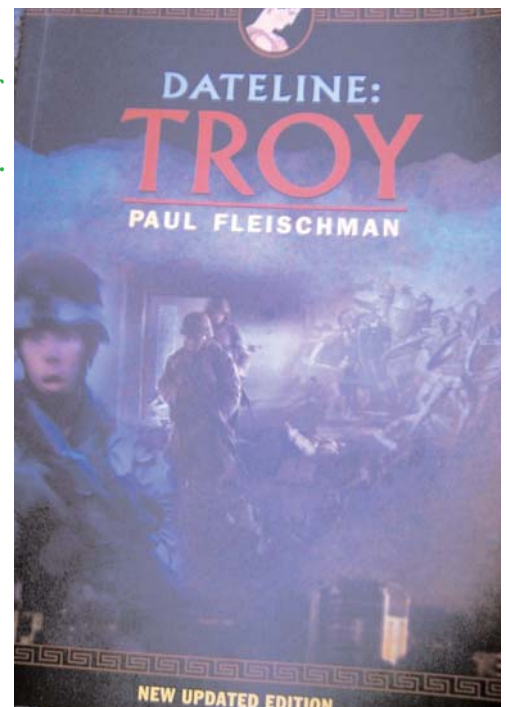
**Author: Paul Fleischman**

Do you know the ancient story of the Trojan War? It is a tale, three thousand years old, of a baby boy named Paris, fated to bring ruin to his nation; of two jealous goddesses, Hera and Athena, determined to bring him down; of the cunning Odysseus and the avaricious Ajax; of battle and trickery and mad love.

It starts when Paris, grown to adulthood, angers Hera and Athena by judging the goddess Aphrodite to be more beautiful than they are. As a reward, Aphrodite causes Helen, the queen of Sparta, to fall madly in love with him. Paris and Helen elope to Troy, carrying off many of the riches of Sparta with them, when Helen's husband, Menelaus, is out of the country. When Menelaus returns, he gathers his allies around him and sets sail for Troy to try to take his wife back.

The Greeks lay siege to Troy, and for eight years they battle with the Trojans. Neither side can gain the upper hand, and thousands of soldiers die on both sides. The Greeks miss their homes and families, and, weary from fighting, they long to return home. They begin squabbling among themselves, and eventually they turn on each other. The gods and goddesses intervene - some on the side of the Trojans, and some on the side of the Greeks. A huge battle is joined, and eventually it appears that the Trojans will be victorious; but Odysseus devises a brilliant plan. He has his soldiers build a gigantic, hollow wooden horse on wheels and offer it to the Trojans as a peace token. The Trojans roll the horse inside their city walls, unaware that a group of Greek soldiers is hiding inside the hollow belly. Late that night, when the Trojans have drunk themselves into a stupor celebrating their victory, the soldiers creep out of the hollow horse and open the gates to the Greek host. The city of Troy falls.

Does this sound like a fable to you? Does it sound boring? Crazy? Totally unconnected to your life and experiences? Well, pick up *Dateline: Troy*, and you'll see how much a three-thousand-year-old piece of history can be related to our lives today. The book juxtaposes the story of Troy (on the left-hand pages) with newspaper clippings from our own times (on the right-hand pages). You may be surprised at how much connection you see between the people and passions that drove the ancient Greeks and Trojans, and those that dominate our own place and time!





# Family Focus

## Positive Family Communication

Family communication styles have a major impact on kids' development. Kids who see their parents interacting and airing disagreements in a considerate, respectful manner are much more likely to develop strong personal identities than are kids whose parents regularly squabble, shout, or speak disrespectfully to each other.

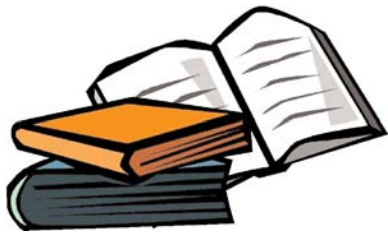
The way in which parents communicate with their children is also important. Over the past twenty-five years, there has been a great deal of research done on the relationship between parenting styles and adolescents' behaviors. Three common parenting styles have emerged:

- ❑ **Authoritarian** parents are strict to a fault, placing high emphasis on controlling their children and low emphasis on nurturing or showing warmth.
- ❑ **Permissive** parents show plenty of love but are also quite lax in setting and enforcing rules.
- ❑ **Authoritative** parents are both firm and loving. They establish and firmly enforce rules and standards for their children's behavior; they also show much warmth and encourage two-way communication between their kids and themselves.

Not surprisingly, research shows that the children of **authoritarian** parents tend to experience high levels of depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol use, and rebellious acting out. Children who have grown up in **permissive** families are more likely to experiment with drugs, alcohol, and sex; less likely to have high self-esteem; and less likely to have high engagement in school, motivation to succeed, and personal responsibility for their own achievement.

**Authoritative** parenting, on the other hand, results in a variety of positive outcomes for kids, particularly during adolescence. Young adolescents who have grown up with authoritative parents -- who nurture them, encourage two-way communication, hold high expectations for their behavior and achievement, set reasonable rules and enforce them consistently, and recognize the rights of both parents and children - are less likely than their peers to engage in risky behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs or having sex, and more likely to perform well in school and to have high levels of self-esteem and motivation.

Of course, no parent is perfect! Even the best parents might come across as too authoritarian or too permissive at times - but what sets "the best" apart from "the rest" is that they are continually monitoring their own interactions with their kids, always trying to stick to the "middle road" of authoritative parenting - being firm but loving, holding high expectations, and encouraging kids to explore and grow.



# Resource Review

## Results Now

Author: Mike Schmoker

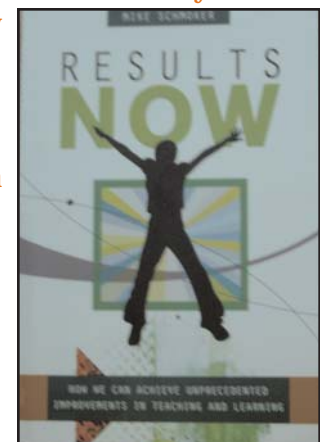
Schmoker, one of the rising stars in the field of educational leadership, presents a compelling argument for abandoning "business as usual" in education and implementing a set of specific reforms in curriculum, instruction, and leadership which will give all students the opportunity to learn and achieve at high levels.

Part I, "Reality and Illusion in Public Schools," presents what Schmoker calls "the brutal facts" about instruction and leadership in K-12 schools in the United States. Schmoker argues that there is a "buffer" - a protective barrier - around our public schools which effectively prevents careful, constructive scrutiny of instruction and of instructional leadership. This buffer prevents communities, school boards, and even building principals from really knowing what teachers teach, and how well they teach. He shows how the buffer engenders isolation, which in turn compromises supervision; and he demonstrates that there is a tremendous disparity between what teachers know and believe, and what they actually end up teaching in their classrooms. "Curricular chaos," Schmoker argues, may be the single shortfall in our educational system which inflicts the most damage on children and their educations.

After laying out this stark snapshot of American education, Schmoker presents a two-pronged agenda for change. In Part II, "Literacy Education: The Greatest Opportunity of All," he defines the concept of "Authentic Literacy" and demonstrates its connection with optimal intellectual development. Authentic Literacy, Schmoker argues, is the foundation for deep and sustained student learning, and is far removed from what is actually occurring in most of our classrooms. The implementation of Authentic Literacy instruction is one of the cornerstones of Schmoker's program for providing an excellent and equitable education to all students.

In addition to implementing strong and authentic literacy instruction and curriculum, Schmoker advocates the establishment of Professional Learning Communities in schools. Organizations which function as professional learning communities open themselves to a process of continuous questioning, reflection, and constructive scrutiny. Teachers and administrators work conscientiously to break down the buffer which keeps them isolated from each other, and they embrace opportunities to learn and grow as educators and to take responsibility for the learning of their students.

This powerful book is a must-read for administrators and teachers alike, as it makes a compelling case for changing "business as usual" in our schools and recreating them as powerful vehicles for providing children with effective and equitable educations. Call MSIM at (989) 774-7678 and ask to borrow resource number LSD-85 today!

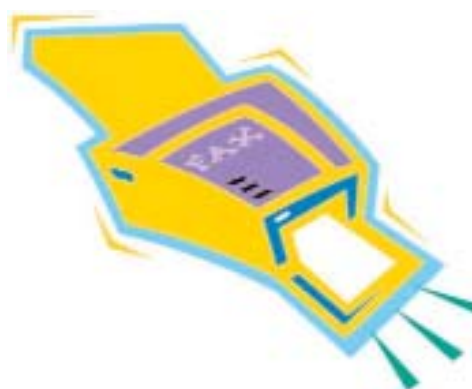


# Powerful Quote

“Kindness is the language  
which the deaf can hear  
and the blind can see.”

-- Mark Twain

Contact us:



989-774-7684



[www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu](http://www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu)



989-774-7678



CMU - 678 Ronan  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

## **CMU Middle Level Program Seeking Assistant Professor**

**Middle Level Education:** The Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development at Central Michigan University invites applications for a tenure-track appointment at the rank of Assistant Professor in Middle Level Education effective August, 2007. A doctorate in education, preferably with an emphasis in Middle Level education, is required for appointment to the rank of Assistant Professor (ABD will be considered). Successful candidates will have documented at least five years of successful PK-12 teaching experience, with preference given to someone with at least two of these years teaching grades 5-9. Preference will also be given to candidates with experience in teaming and in middle level literacy or language arts.

Successful candidates will demonstrate excellent spoken and written communication, the ability to effectively use technology to enhance their teaching, knowledge of the middle level concept, and active participation in state or national middle level professional organizations. A documented presentation record and other scholarly productivity is required. The position involves teaching and advising undergraduates in a middle level minor program that leads to an endorsement as well as teaching graduate students in a middle level endorsement or master's program.

Screening will begin November 15, 2006, and continue until the position is filled. Send a letter of application, vitae including e-mail address, unofficial transcripts of graduate course work, three letters of reference which address teaching effectiveness, a one-page statement of your understanding of the middle level concept, and evidence documenting research, effective use of technology, and teaching excellence to:

Teacher Education Search Committee  
Faculty Personnel Committee  
Middle Level Search  
Central Michigan University  
208 Ronan Hall  
Mount Pleasant, Michigan 48859

Review of Applications begins on November 15, 2006.

Serving 28,000 students, Central Michigan University is an innovative doctoral research university recognized for strong undergraduate education and a range of focused graduate programs and research.

Central Michigan University, an AA/EO institution, strongly and actively strives to increase diversity within its community (see: <http://www.cmich.edu/aaeo/>).

For additional information about Central Michigan University, visit the web site at <http://www.cmich.edu/> and for additional information about the department, visit <http://www.tepd.cmich.edu/>